



© 2019 by the author(s). This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), allowing third parties to copy and redistribute the material in any medium or format and to remix, transform, and build upon the material for any purpose, even commercially, provided the original work is properly cited and states its license.

**Citation:** Rossiter, P. 2019. Swimming-Glancing. *Cultural Studies Review*, 25:2, 307-310. <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v25i2.6935>

ISSN 1837-8692 | Published by UTS ePRESS | <https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/csrj>

## Swimming-Glancing

**Penelope Rossiter**

Western Sydney University

Corresponding author: Penelope Rossiter: [P.Rossiter@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:P.Rossiter@westernsydney.edu.au)

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.5130/csr.v25i2.6935>

**Article history:** Accepted 01/11/2019; Published 22/11/2019

The road to the local municipal pool winds down through the bush. As it comes into view, a quick glance tells you all you need to know; whether you'll have a lane to yourself and who else is there, distinctive in their bodies, their bathers, and their swimming style. Today, it is furnished with familiars: Mr Splashy, the duck-diver, the lane-walkers, the superfast woman, the breaststroke swim-chatters, the swimmer whose hand enters the water just the way your friend's does. All this is taken in so quickly as you wheel past the perimeter, watch for pedestrians, bush-wallabies and snakes, and change down through the gears. Another glance: what's the water doing? It is ruffled, but all reflections, alive and waiting, promising a feeling-to-come through swimming there.

As Edward S. Casey so deftly illuminates, attention to the character and scope of this smallest, most fleeting of bodily movements—the glance—takes us to the heart of our relationships with our 'place-worlds': 'with the glance we first move into the midst of things: which is to say, into being-with-one-another as well as with animals and plants and places of the circumambient world'.<sup>1</sup> What *are* outdoor municipal pools if not singularly distinctive places that actively solicit glancing encounters with the 'circumambient world', encounters that amplify affective attunement and that may effloresce as love? Such love is manifest in the campaigns to save pools from closure, to claim community ownership, and to story them, and it is nourished by the salutogenic effects of swimming outdoors, how pools work as community hubs and social infrastructure, and the press of their cultural and historical resonance.<sup>2</sup> However, if we immerse ourselves in the glances of swimming 'placelings'<sup>3</sup>—here, they are my own and those of others who swim at our local pool—we may glimpse the stirring of other modes of love.<sup>4</sup>

For Casey, the glance is more than a quick look; it 'loops back onto the subject who emitted it'.<sup>5</sup> It goes out and comes back in, swiftly but deeply, bringing back whole situations, connections between and to surfaces, and their beyond.<sup>6</sup> The glance is more than looking; it involves the body as a whole and the parts are entwined in the action of '*skimming a sensuous surface*'.<sup>7</sup> Each swimmer's body has a singular history, physiology, swimming style, degrees of

curiosity, orientation, or not, to the visual, and modes of sensory entanglement. In outdoor pools, bodies are skimmed by wind, the squark of a cockatoo, the passage of a cloud, the sun's angle, a kick that fleetingly reflects light, the movement of bubbles across the skin, the quick gasp of chlorine on the in-breath. There's a subtle sociality too in glancing-swimming that extends the reach of everyday social intercourse. As swimmers share the lanes, they have to, as Greg notices, 'silently accommodate one another; it's a negotiation that happens, almost always, in silence'. They must glance and adjust, glance and weave around, glance and shuffle to the side, glance and pause. We entrust ourselves to the glances of others, and more: 'By their merely glancing at me, others otherwise unknown to me offer a garland of recognition'.<sup>8</sup> Here, the garlands also may come from magpies, plovers, ducks and blue wrens.

We are not rooted in place. To use Tim Ingold's phrase: 'light, sound and feeling tear at our moorings'.<sup>9</sup> Some swimmers look for lanes and angles that maximise light, shadow, avoiding or finding the sun's heat, the glance over the edge to bush. Sam revels in 'that experience of moving through the water and moving through light. I tend to choose parts that are lit because I just love that sense of coming across a patch of light'. We are not left untouched by these encounters. Swimmers seek out or come across patches, arcs and rays of light, and they are lit with feeling. In the breathing, moving through water, things rise and fall away. As people swim through love or grief, loneliness or desire, they do not just release endorphins; they are held by the water and pushed out to the world as they draw back in—breath, glance, breath-glance, breath, glance, and the solace of others making their proximal way.

As bodies glance, they notice, and they open themselves to surprise. They become present out in the 'weather-world'<sup>10</sup> and underwater too. For Geoff, 'it's what's going on under the water, you know. You notice a hair, a stray hair, or you notice a hair clip. Or you notice leaves, and the shapes of leaves and how *big* some of them are. I don't mean which tree they come off'. He is transported to an elsewhere in self, and world, and always with the holding water. When we swim at a familiar pool, it may seem we return to re-experience the familiar but nothing stays the same; each place-world is 'unique upon each experience of it'<sup>11</sup> and the glance has a special part to play in this: 'Surprise is the emotional response to the discovery of the unexpected, and it is often the result of glancing'.<sup>12</sup> As I swim I catch sight of my favourite gum tree, and I discover it in a flutter of involvement with the day's breeze, a magpie family, a peculiar light. Glancing, I am lifted up into their encounters of light, leaves, feathers and beaks, rustle and sway. In the comfort of swimming the familiar—I am *here*, again—but enlivened by moments of surprise glanced in the surrounds, and inside too, the place-world settles in my body.

Outdoor municipal pools may look like sites, or 'infrastructure', but they are the richest of place-worlds. The ecological intimacy they offer lifts glancing-swimmers into the world, and they return with the world anew. As they are tangled up in the movement of clouds, weather and birds, hearken to the water moving past their ears, catch a shout, glimpse the movements of other bodies, flit their eyes over wet concrete, or the honey-eater on the bottle brush, they swim 'outside the box'. And they love it.

## Works Cited

Casey, E.S., 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time', in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds), *Senses of Place*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1996.

Casey, E.S., *The World at a Glance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007.

Casey, E. S., 'The World at a Glance' in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (eds), *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 2000.

Holliday, A., Toland, I., and Tabet, M. (eds), *The Pool: Architecture, Culture and Identity in Australia*, Australian Institute of Architects, Red Hill, ACT, 2016.

Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011.

Middlestadt, S.E., Anderson, A., and Ramos, W.D., 'Beliefs About Using an Outdoor Pool: Understanding Perceptions of Place in the Context of a Recreational Environment to Improve Health', *Health and Place*, vol. 34, 2015, pp. 1-8. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.healthplace.2015.03.007>

Rossiter, P., 'The Municipal Pool in Australia: Emotional Geographies and Affective Intensities', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society* (forthcoming), Vol. 3, 2019, pp. 285-306

Rossiter, P., *Waterscapes of Emotion: Lawson Olympic Pool. A Study of Swimming, Community and Experiences of Place at a Local, Seasonal Outdoor Pool*, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney, 2015.

Taylor, A., 'Swimming Pools Under Threat as Report Reveals Their \$2.8b Worth in Health Benefits', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 2017. <https://www.smh.com.au/national/nsw/swimming-pools-under-threat-as-report-reveals-their-28b-worth-in-health-benefits-20171217-ho62tc.html>

---

1. Edward S. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 2007, p. 275. Further elaboration of the 'place-world' in relation to the glance can be found in Chapter 3 of the same work: 'Being/Becoming Oriented by the Glance'.

2. See, for example: Penelope Rossiter, 'The Municipal Pool in Australia: Emotional Geographies and Affective Intensities', *Emotions: History, Culture, Society*, Vol. 3, 2019, pp. 285-306; Andrew Taylor, 'Swimming Pools Under Threat as Report Reveals Their \$2.8b Worth in Health Benefits', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 December 2017; Amelia Holliday, Isabelle Toland and Michelle Tabet (eds), *The Pool: Architecture, Culture and Identity in Australia*, Australian Institute of Architects, Red Hill, ACT, 2016; Susan E. Middlestadt, Austin Anderson, William D. Ramos, 'Beliefs About Using an Outdoor Pool: Understanding Perceptions of Place in the Context of a Recreational Environment to Improve Health', *Health and Place*, vol. 34, 2015, pp. 1-8.

3. This term, 'placeling' comes from Edward S. Casey, 'How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time', in Steven Feld and Keith H. Basso (eds), *Senses of Place*, University of Washington Press, Seattle, 1996, pp. 13-52. Of course, for the full context, the whole article should be read, but the following two sentences nicely capture his thrust, and the relevance to my own argument about people, place and municipal pools: 'Human beings—along with other entities on earth—are ineluctably place-bound. More even than earthlings, we are placelings, and our very perceptual apparatus, our sensing body, reflects the kinds of places we inhabit.' (p. 19).

4. This article draws on research conducted in 2014-15 with regular swimmers at Lawson Olympic Pool in the Blue Mountains, New South Wales, a place where I too have swum for more than 30 years. The research was conducted after approval from the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Sydney (now Western Sydney University), and the Manager of Leisure Centers for the Blue Mountains City Council. In addition to scholarly articles, it is published in report form: Penelope Rossiter, *Waterscapes of Emotion: Lawson Olympic Pool. A Study of Swimming, Community and Experiences of Place at a Local, Seasonal Outdoor Pool*, School of Humanities and Communication Arts, University of Western Sydney, 2015.

5. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 281.

6. The glance takes us to the surfaces—of things, places—but surfaces are not separate from that of which they are a surface. To be taken to surfaces through glances is to be taken 'into the heart of the place we are in'. (Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 69).

7. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 437

8. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 42

- 
9. Tim Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge, London and New York, 2011, p. 134
  10. The elaboration of the 'weather-world' is particularly the focus in chapters 9 and 10 of Ingold. There, the elemental components of being are most compellingly written. A taste: 'to inhabit the open is to dwell within a weather-world in which every being is destined to combine wind, rain, sunshine and earth in the continuation of its own existence.' (p. 115)
  11. Casey, *The World at a Glance*, p. 80
  12. Edward S. Casey, 'The World at a Glance' in Fred Evans and Leonard Lawlor (eds), *Chiasms: Merleau-Ponty's Notion of Flesh*, State University of New York Press, Albany, New York, 2000, pp. 147-164 (p. 156).