

Echo-Coherence

Moving on from Dwelling

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In this essay I want to suggest that a nomadic poetics, as opposed to one associated with Martin Heidegger's concept of 'dwelling', might urge writers and readers reconfigure some of their relationships to Australian environments. 'To become dwellers in the land,' says Kirkpatrick Sale, 'to come to know the earth, fully and honestly, the crucial and perhaps all-encompassing task is to understand the place, the immediate, specific place, where we live'.¹ The nomadology of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, however, would critique the primacy of any single home or dwelling place and instead acknowledge the entire earth as the ground for possible movements. Following on from Deleuze and Guattari, I want to ask whether knowing an 'immediate, specific place' is necessarily the most ecologically sustainable form of habitation, given that ecosystems flourish by virtue of their myriad interconnections with *other* places. Sale's comment also presents political problems in a colonised landscape like the Australian one, where an insistence on the value of a non-Indigenous individual's connection to his or her dwelling place might ignore the claims of traditional custodians. I am not proposing an enormous

societal phase-shift, in which we would become hunting and gathering nomads of the twenty-first century. Rather, I will argue that a nomadic poetics of Australian places, or a light-footed travel across them, with an ever-present readiness to move on should certain situations demand our departure, can offer some promising alternatives for the ways in which we relate to, write about and manage contested and climactically variable locales.

'The life of the nomad is the intermezzo' write Deleuze and Guattari. The nomad is always moving from one place to another so that each of his or her dwellings becomes part of an entire trajectory.² It is important that a nomadic poetics concerns not only our relationship with the pastoral or with those spaces in which the vast majority of citizens in Western countries no longer live. Cities, too, need to embrace nomadic thinking. If sea levels continue to rise, thousands of inhabitants of Manhattan, for example, will need to leave their homes to search for others, like so many in New Orleans were forced to do after Hurricane Katrina. For the billions of city-dwellers in Latin America, Asia and Africa, for whom migration to and between cities in search of work is a basic fact of existence, life is already spent in the realm of the interstitial. Across a time span of, perhaps, one hundred years, the homes of these people will indeed constitute trajectories across large stretches of terrain. As a way of writing and describing such a condition, nomadic thinking translates to a poetics that is also more light-footed, which resists the temptation to erect concrete definitions and demarcations, and nimbly responds to whatever fluctuations might occur along the way.

Regular dictionary definitions of 'dwelling' and 'dwell' provide useful introductions to Heidegger's conception of the term. A 'dwelling' is 'a building or place of shelter to live in', while the verb 'dwell' means 'to live or stay as a permanent resident' or to 'reside'. It also means 'to live or continue in a given condition or state' or 'to linger over, emphasize, or ponder in thought, speech, or writing'.³ For Heidegger, these qualities merge into a particular kind of sensitivity to the more-than-purely-human needs of the earth. To be attuned to the earth is to live in a way quite alien to the lifestyles of many contemporary Western people; it is to respect the difference, or what Heidegger calls the *self-concealing*, of entities, rather than attempting to coerce all matter into forms useful for human beings. It is the task of the poem to bring to light the self-concealing natures of things. By dwelling

poetically, therefore, we are, with the help of poetry, to become more sensitive to, and careful of, the presence of the world's things. *Ich bin*—or, 'I am'—is equivalent, writes Heidegger, to *ich baun*, which is, literally, 'I dwell'. The way in which you are and I am,' he says, 'the manner in which we humans *are* on the earth, is *Baun*, dwelling.'⁴ Importantly, however, *baun*, to dwell, also signifies 'to remain, to stay in a place',⁵ which should remind us of the intransient relationship between the individual subject and the domain in which he or she dwells. This is further highlighted by Heidegger's linkage of dwelling to the Gothic concept of *wunian*, which refers to peace—whether to be brought to it or to remain in it. Dwelling, then, involves a peaceful remaining—a form of quiet stasis, in other words.

For Heidegger, to be at peace means to be free, and to be *really* free means to spare. Sparing 'takes place when we leave something beforehand in its own nature, when we return it specifically to its own being'. A fundamental characteristic of dwelling is this 'sparing and preserving' of things.⁶ Furthermore, dwelling is the end to which *building* is a means. It is by virtue of such building practices, which demarcate with the mineral resources of the land the place of our continued presence upon it, that we establish ourselves as dwellers. Yet 'building' refers not only to the erection of edifices but also to the building, or cultivation, of agriculture. Thus, *baun* also refers to a cherishing and protecting, and preserving and caring for, the earth—which, for Heidegger, means 'to till the soil, to cultivate the vine'.⁷ Poetry is so important in this context because in its language Heidegger sees a house of being. It is through poetic language that unconcealment takes place; by disclosing the self-concealing of entities in language, therefore, the poet *lets* them be within the poem's protective enclosure. In this way, poetry constructs dwelling places, because of which Heidegger assigns a special, sacred role to the poet. The composition of poetry is a joyous activity, for which the Serene appears to the poet. The Serene 'keeps everything in a state of homeliness' and 'allots each thing to that place of existence where by its nature it belongs, so that it may stand there in the brightness of the Serene, like a still light'.⁸

It is not that things remain static within the Serene; it is, rather, that these things remain *where they belong*. The domicile, in other words, becomes an enclosure; home becomes property. When poems act as dwelling places for the Serene, curious things happen to their poetics, and to our readings of them. In a

reading directly inspired by Heidegger's later essays on poetry, Jonathan Bate notes, for example, that the things of the world in Les Murray's poetry are, as in the *Serene*, 'robustly active'.⁹ What he does not analyse is the complicated, colonial politics of positing Murray as 'an aboriginal kind of creator or recreator', or, in other words, as the builder of a home.¹⁰ We can look more closely at the matter by turning to the poet himself. In 'Evening Alone at Bunyah'¹¹ Murray has returned to his country home to escape from the chaos of the urban world. The narrative, then, is of the return to a particular *place* to which in some sense Murray's speaker feels he inevitably belongs. Having returned, the speaker is able to see, quite clearly, everything before him. This act of seeing grants him something of a right of ownership, but the seeing can only take place after a very powerful mode of dwelling has been established—one that is both peaceful and positioned from a particular, heightened vantage point. The speaker is at home alone on his farm, where he *belongs*, on a cool and apparently *serene* night, with the valley relaxing after the heat of the day.

To establish a dwelling, first a foundation must be constructed. In Murray's poem, the foundation consists of bricks of memory. 'Home again from the cities of the world', he establishes his connection to the locale by describing a long list of memories associated with the farm, before proceeding to outline in stunning detail some of its features. Such a tremendous accretion of information seems to lock the place, quite firmly, *in its place*. The crucial move in 'Bunyah' is what Bate would call a quietening of the eye, or a reduction in emphasis on the speaker's act of perception.¹² Yet the speaker's presence is not in any way diminished as a consequence; instead, his being firmly anchored to the dwelling place, now the speaker can flow *out* into the surrounding location. The subject's *mind*—in which memories are housed—and vision—with which features are perceived—achieve unquestionable primacy. Murray connects his consciousness to the ecosystem in order to proclaim:

This country is my mind. I lift my face
and count my hills, and linger over each one:
Deer's, steep, bare-topped, where eagles nest below
the summit in scrub oaks, and where I take
my city friends to tempt them with my past.

...

I think of doors and rooms beneath the ground,
deep rabbit rooms, thin candlelight of days...

In the context of the movement of a poem, coming home 'from the cities of the world' is like zooming in, from the chaos of the macrosphere, to the clearer outlines of the microsphere. It is *this place*, exactly *here*, which Murray isolates and claims as his own. Perhaps because of their own social and ecological contexts, European eco-critics like Bate rarely deal with the deeper implications of Heideggerian dwelling. By insisting on the stasis of one's home while all else around one's home is involved in processes of constant change, we are grounding ourselves in the linguistic confines of one particular European community: we are reaching back to the Old High German of *Bauen*, we are staying in place.¹³ In this way, we are insisting on a phenomenological relationship with the earth that is decidedly Eurocentric: we are saying that our right as human beings to feel at home, to feel 'close' to the earth and to build homes upon it, is the absolute right. The right of the earth to breathe, and the rights of other people to resist the geodetic confines of property lines, are all to be considered after the fact. Les Murray is not the only Australian writer who needs to be critically re-evaluated in this light, either.

In *Reinhabiting Reality*, Freya Mathews forgoes her usually thorough ecological philosophy to indulge in similarly Eurocentric notions of 'home' and 'belonging'. In her chapter on 'Becoming Native' she describes, in rigorous detail, how 'engaging with the given' will enable us to find more meaning in, and therefore come closer to, each of those various environments—urban or not—in which human beings live. In her argument for a re-engagement with all those components—old, new, alive and dead—that combine to form our experience of place, we find a further revision of Heideggerian dwelling. According to Mathews, you are to 'find a residence that you can occupy indefinitely' and '[b]e devoted to your house. Let it know that it is yours for life, til death do you part'.¹⁴ This involves a process of itemisation that is strikingly similar to that in which Murray engages in his poem, and results in a similar state of subjective primacy. Having succeeded in engaging with the givenness of those things—human and non-human, alive and inanimate—that occupy your house, you might then take note of some 'further considerations'. Here Mathews admits that as:

a white Australian, it is more than evident to me that I cannot become native to, and custodian for, my homeplace ... until my nonindigenous countrymen and women acknowledge the truth of our history here, since this is a major part of the truth of our land.

To become 'fully native' thus requires, she says, that Australian settlers acknowledge the whole colonial history of the nation, 'opening ourselves to all the regret and preparedness to compensate that such acknowledgement entrains'. It is also important, furthermore, to remember that we cannot 'assume the role of comelately natives and custodians unless and until the original natives and custodians accept our presence here, and invite us to join them'. These are important points, and Mathews is to be acclaimed for stating that no such invitation can be made until 'we declare the wrong we have done' to Aboriginal people.¹⁵ However, if we are already installed in these residences that we have decided to occupy until death, to which we now, it seems, inevitably belong, how might we approach a situation in which the Aboriginal owners, whose lands we have taken to establish our residences, *do not* issue us this most important of invitations? How can we be really, genuinely open to what Mathews terms the givenness of reality, and to the 'preparedness to compensate', if we are then unable to *move off* those lands that Aboriginal people want vacated? Why, the question becomes, do we want to become 'fully native' at all?

Of course, such a question returns us to Heidegger's oft-discussed problematic relationship to German Nationalist movements of the nineteen-forties and fifties. From a basic ecological perspective, however, practical expressions of Heideggerian dwelling raise further, less-understood problems. Sparing and building in the light of the Serene fails to acknowledge the ways in which Western agricultural practices have evolved by manipulating wild plants for human ends and, in Louise Westling's words, by 'the tilling of the soil which disrupts the normal diversity of microorganisms and patterns of water retention and plant diversity'.¹⁶ Indeed, the relationship between dwelling and agricultural practice is only the most literal manifestation of what can constitute a vast matrix of poetic and philosophical understandings about landscape. Examples like those from Murray and Mathews show how even larger ecological cycles—composed of both mental *and* earthly terrains—can be manipulated to construct a solitary individual's dwelling place,

thereby emphasising the self-reflexive capacities of the subject above all other transformations and processes.

Indeed, many have questioned the utility of continuing with epistemologies based on the concept of the discrete subject—phenomenology, for example—when our *combined* mass is causing the planet such harm.¹⁷ As Michel Serres points out, humans do not just dwell as individuals, but they weigh on the earth in combined fashion.¹⁸ For Serres, the immediate, pressing issues resulting from a combined population mass have overridden the importance of local and individual conceptions of the human. Thinking about ‘the individual human’ is complicated ecologically by the consequences of sheer physical quantity: while we might still think of ourselves as individual beings, and may even attempt to dwell in Heideggerian fashion, our primary communities—our cities—are not aware of their own Being and therefore are *unable* to dwell.¹⁹ Throughout human history, an increase in human population density has invariably coincided with a decrease in the biodiversity of the surrounding ecosystems, with animals and plants forced out of urban areas or replaced by planted monocultures.²⁰ Global networks of cities invite us to contemplate a vast array of scenarios in which dwelling is extremely rare, both because the individual doesn’t and the city can’t. When the Heideggerian subject dwells he or she is concerned about being responsive to the events in his or her locale, but *ich baun* does not account for the *earth’s* response to the aggregate effects of six billion humans feeding from intensive agricultural production.

This leads us to a posthumously published paper by the late Val Plumwood about what she calls ‘shadow places’ and the politics of dwelling. For Plumwood, the very concept of a singular homeplace or origin is problematised by the dissociation and dematerialisation that permeate the global economy and, consequently, Western culture. This culture, she writes, ‘creates a split between the singular, elevated, conscious “dwelling” place, and the multiple disregarded places of economic and ecological support’. Dwelling compounds this situation ‘by encouraging us to direct our honouring of place towards an “official” singular idealised place consciously identified with self, while disregarding the many unrecognised, shadow places that provide our material and ecological support, most of which, in a global market, are likely to elude our knowledge and responsibility’. Plumwood concludes that this is not an ecological form of consciousness. Positions

which are ostensibly place-based, like bioregionalism, evade rather than resolve this problem of the split by focusing on singular, self-sufficient communities, thus ‘substituting a simplistic ideal of atomic places for recognition of the multiple, complex network of places that supports our daily lives’. Communities, she writes, should always be imagined *in relation* to one another. A proper ecological consciousness has to look at *both* the attractive places and those shadow places which are otherwise neglected. In her typically fiery vernacular, Plumwood demands that such thought ‘has to be much more than a literary rhapsody about nice places, or about nice times (epiphanies) in nice places’.²¹

Plumwood’s analysis is so important because it asks that we reconsider the power relations inherent in all place-based talk. For example, how is one place deemed to be better than another? How do global processes *make* one place better than another? Why, then, are some places cherished more than others? For Plumwood, the influence of Heidegger is sending ecological discussions in the wrong direction, for he places an excessive focus on a single, detached dwelling place that obscures the global connectedness of ecological issues. The Heideggerian singularity of focus also supports a concept of the home as property of the self, all of which is set apart from and above other places, in terms of care and priority. Centric place ideals of military empire and colonial privilege, best expressed for Plumwood in the image of the moated castle, rest on the subordination and instrumentalisation of other places. This One True Dwelling Place can easily become a national-cultural home, a special place elevated above all others, whose purification demands the eviction of alien elements. Clearly, such a discourse can legitimate projects of perfecting and purifying the home at the expense of other, lesser homes—homes, perhaps, of ‘less civilised’ indigenous others who do not ‘dwell’ in acceptable fashions, ‘whose ties to the land do not take the form of cultivated labour, and whose places can be deemed degradable under the guise of improving civilisation’.²² What Plumwood is arriving at here is a form of thinking that eats at this locus of place- and subject-centred power, and shifts constantly between various places in recognition of the manner in which they are all networked.

More than on any other continent, to dwell or to remain in place in Australia is generally *not* conducive to promoting the flourishing of any kind of life. Thousands of houses on the edges of our major coastal centres face serious threats

from rising sea levels, and little can be done to ensure that their inhabitants can keep their properties. The sustained use of intensive agriculture throughout much of inland New South Wales and south Western Australia has left vast tracts of land destroyed by high levels of salinity. With the exception of some rich, fertile patches of volcanic soil along the country's east coast, the lack of glacial or volcanic activity in the rest of the continent means, according to Tim Flannery (over a decade ago), that 'Australia has by far the poorest soil of any continent. Virtually all of our soils ... were made long ago [and] are now being rapidly used up and cannot be replaced. Many of them are skeletal and extremely badly leached'. 'Australian soils contain approximately half the level of nitrates and phosphates ... to equivalent soils found anywhere else'.²³

Yet this is not to say that the quality of the land was always so poor. On the contrary, sophisticated, precolonial land practices had cultivated an enormous storage of potential energy. Eric Rolls writes that before European invasion, the continent's soil:

had a mulch of thousands of years. The surface was so loose you could rake it through the fingers. No wheel had marked it, no leather heel, no cloven hoof—every mammal, humans included, had walked on padded feet. Digging sticks had prodded it, but no steel shovel had ever turned a full sod. Our big animals did not make trails.²⁴

Instead of engaging in a concentrated dwelling (and tilling and shovelling and grazing), the first Australian inhabitants—human and non-human alike—were decidedly more ambulatory, travelling more frequently across far larger habitats:

Hopping kangaroos usually move in scattered company, not in damaging single file like sheep and cattle. The plentiful wombats each maintained several burrows, so there were no well-used runs radiating from one centre as from a rabbit warren ... No other land had been treated so gently.²⁵

As Plumwood, Flannery and Rolls show us, the practical manifestation of a Heideggerian poetics of dwelling, of steadfastly and resolutely forming deep roots in whatever is in one's immediate vicinity, is clearly at odds with the exploitation, fragility and uncertainty of Australian climates—an uncertainty which is rapidly becoming the global norm.

We might find no better summation of the way in which Australian land use was radically altered after colonisation, and the way in which this change is linked to a starkly different mode of habitation, than in the history of the nation's capital city, Canberra.²⁶ The region's grassy plains and forested hills, which were so attractive to early pastoralists, were the handiwork of several Aboriginal tribes; what colonisers' saw as amenable pastoral country was in no sense a 'wild' one, but the result of Indigenous agricultural methods. The colonial settlement of Kamberri and the subsequent development of Canberra was a permanent settling and, later, urbanisation of places that had been cherished by Aboriginal people as points for meetings and ceremonial gatherings. This is to say it was on grounds that for millennia had witnessed an endless proliferation of arrivals and departures, of temporary gatherings, of human voices *and* silences, that the invaders simply settled. Symbolically, if nothing else, there is an insistence on the stasis of dwelling at the heart of the administrative and political capital of the Australian nation.

There have been many critical responses in Australian letters to this problem, which have often resulted in arguments for more nomadic modes of being and thinking. George Seddon finds in the innovative farming practices of Sidney Kidman (1857–1935) the beginnings of a new kind of colonial relationship with the Australian terrain. Though highly critical of Kidman's long, damaging files of sheep and cattle, Seddon makes an example of Kidman's nomadic land management practices. Unlike stock management in the manner of a rabbit warren, where stock are confined within a small area and limited to movement within that area, Kidman was able to move his animals across huge distances to take advantage of the best feeds, while allowing other areas to rest and recover. With access to so much land (130,000 square miles at the time of his death—far larger than any government sponsored sub-division) he had both the means and the acumen to move his stock in a nomadic fashion. While his knowledge of nomadism was certainly lacking, and the ownership of so much property certainly problematic, he nevertheless understood that country was meant to be *left*, and then to be *returned to* once allowed to recover. Perhaps, proposes Seddon, we all should have followed in Kidman's steps, reserving the arid and subarid parts of the continent for nomadic use, allowing our herds of hoofed animals to roam over the landscape according to the seasons.

Instead 'we imposed leasehold boundaries that critically limited mobility and often locked the leaseholder into a cycle of destruction'.²⁷

The challenge to go yet further—to take the nomadic movement of bodies in space and translate it into a kind of poetics—is taken up by Pierre Joris. Central to his 'nomad poetics' is the form of the rhizome, which is derived from Deleuze and Guattari. Poetry in the form of a rhizome is not a collage, or a collection of disparate fragments, but it charts a journey *through* 'a material flux of language matter'. It begins with 'a temporary articulation, essentially mobile, constituted of movements and their ephemeral stases', then follows 'this flux of ruptures and articulations, of rhythm, moving in & out of semantic and non-semantic spaces, moving around & through the features accreting as poem'.²⁸ It resists, therefore, the desire to stop. Short breaks are taken, but the world remains in a constant flux. In his latest book, *blue grass*, Peter Minter produced one of the most striking examples of a nomadic poetics in Australian poetry. The following is an extract from 'is it is':²⁹

The earth prolongs mutation,
 rumbles for our listening to plants
as if it is just animal, humus, bone
 whistle that we speak with, or just love
 & die then usurped for dwelling
here. I will listen to you

& the world's prolific nose, refuse indifference
 as the winds' press & topic
proliferates indifferently,
 costs parables of fallen trunks.
 Cumuli hoist and the sky leans
fast, traces over countries

Loded deep with marrow, crescent spines
 & ruins made fecund.
I'll follow too, as we free and offer
 blue cosmos caught on winter's stakes
 walk way along the sky's arc,
echo & cohere.

There is much—too much—to discuss with relation to a poem like this one, but what we might note immediately is the dramatic confluence of a wide variety of ‘language matter’: forms of perception, evocations of sounds, smells and sights. The act of sampling or recycling, important throughout the entire book, is present here: in the manner of a rhizome spreading out through the soil, *blue grass* draws on numerous other poetic ecologies for energy. Important, too, is the manner in which none of these perceptive modes or ‘matters’ is given particular primacy: there is no peaceful correlation of sense into a single, ‘correct’ vision. The poem itself is also exemplary of the ways in which poetry, should it be willing to cross traditional boundaries of grammar, can acknowledge the historical genealogy of place without dwelling upon it. Here, fragments collide and coalesce in order to speak as palimpsest; the land is nothing if not steeped in historical layers. Then there is the crucial issue of locale, in which the above points are implicated. The heavy textures of the language, its mineral-like density, firmly anchor the poem to the earth yet there remains a question of where, exactly, we are *upon* this earth.

The collective relationships implied by the discussion of listening, following, and echoing are part of what is most certainly a *nomadic* poetic: we move together, and there is no final destination. Each image in ‘is it is’ is glimpsed as part of a larger process of communal song. Indeed, as the book’s title suggests, this poem is most certainly musical. As in any song, the *voices* are important in *blue grass*, for they are not housed in domiciles but are, on the contrary, interacting closely with myriad materials, all widely dispersed; *we* walk ‘along the sky’s arc’ with a deceptively simple thought that has the potential to provoke infinite bifurcations: *echo* and *cohere*. The voice returning from its interaction with the rock face—some of it dissolved in the journey; some of it returning as the ‘-co’—is part of a dialogical process in which *co* + *here* form a *coherence*. Locality, in other words, is defined by the velocities of energies which travel between it and the other-localities to which it is connected. This is *echological*. We are not rooted in a location, relentlessly sucking up groundwater; we are, rather, speakers of anonymous matter, always communicating the transformation of energies across multiple subjectivities. For Deleuze and Guattari, meaning is *only* the product of ongoing expression; meaning, therefore, *is* attunement to this process of translation and transformation.³⁰ An *echological* poetic is not ‘an attempt to transform into language an experience of

dwelling upon the earth', as Bate says of the ecopoem, but it is *a transformation into language*.³¹

We can get a more rigorous sense of the kind of poetics involved in 'is it is', and made manifest by Sidney Kidman, by looking at the concept of *mētis*, as elaborated in by James C. Scott. Scott observes that thin, formulaic simplifications imposed through the agency of state power, such as the leasehold boundaries critiqued by Seddon, invariably lead to both natural and social failures. On the other hand, 'mētis represents a wide array of practical skills and acquired intelligence in responding to a constantly changing natural and human environment'.³² Just as 'is it is' samples other elements in order to construct a form, the practitioner of mētis 'will typically represent a recombination (*bricolage*, to use Lévi-Strauss's term) of existing elements'.³³ The utilisation of practical, earthly elements will produce a variety of complex, adaptive techniques for dealing with the problems in the environment at hand. Mētis is invariably communal, too, because it consists of a body of constantly evolving knowledge that no one individual could ever amass alone.³⁴ Again, like 'is it is', this accumulative process of knowledge acquisition is never intended to reach a final destination of truth or complete realisation; mētis is anything but static, and will continue developing long after any individual subject has passed away.

The practice and experience reflected in mētis is almost always local, but it never insists on a particular *idea* of the local. The knowledge is always expanding through practical experimentation.³⁵ This is indeed the case with the vast majority of Indigenous knowledges, which rely 'on an accumulation of many partly redundant signals',³⁶ and are known for their striking ability to incorporate new flora, fauna and technologies into an already large and complex world-view. The ability of mētis to resist confinement to any one place or time is a function of its diversity; its resilience is directly related to the material diversity present in the world in which it develops. This is also the case in natural systems, where a decrease in diversity renders them 'more vulnerable and nonsustainable', and in human institutions, where Scott contrasts 'the fragility of rigid, single purpose, centralized institutions to the adaptability of more flexible, multipurpose, decentralized social forms'. As long as the task environment remains stable, predictable and energy-rich, dwelling upon it within a fixed boundary may prove extremely efficient. In most economies,

in human affairs, and in a rapidly warming global climate, this is seldom the case, and 'such routines are likely to be counterproductive once the environment changes appreciably'.³⁷

A fundamental component of Heideggerian dwelling is the saving of the earth. To save the earth 'is more than to exploit it or even wear it out. Saving the earth does not master the earth and does not subjugate it'.³⁸ Dwelling, therefore, requires us to save the earth; to dwell means to take care of the soil; to take care of the soil means to till the soil. We cannot till the soil, however, because tilling would spoil the soil and thereby spoil the earth. How do we deal with such circular reasoning? Assuming that we cannot, is such a complicated and contradictory term as 'dwelling' still useful? A critique such as the one provided by Plumwood might lead us to consider a kind of nomadic ontology based on the concept of *mētis*, in which concrete categories and property lines are dissolved into an understanding of how energy and knowledge flows *between* places. For Deleuze, this is what all thought should do. 'Heidegger was mistaken about people, earth, blood', he wrote, since those who think are in fact never 'landed' anywhere.³⁹ Rigorous, critical thinking never arrives at a conclusion; it slips between gaps and produces new trajectories for further consideration. As a poetics, therefore, the nomadic writer need no longer insist that inert meanings are waiting to be found residing, ultimately, within the walls of language; rather, the *transformation* from non-linguistic matter to linguistic matter becomes of primary importance in his or her search for a closer, more sensitive relationship between words and the ever-changing terrain of which they speak.

'The days of anything static,' writes Joris, 'are over. The past century has shown that anything not involved in continuous transformation hardens and dies.'⁴⁰ In the present atmosphere of a global climate crisis resulting from a gross over-production and consumption of myriad materials, dwelling anywhere for too long is of course enormously problematic. We need to be thinking in ways that respond with speed and agility to the rapidly changing and highly dangerous situations in which we as a species increasingly find ourselves. Of course, acting with *too much* speed is equally problematic, but it is another issue that needs revisiting. In this global context, however, Australian responses to instability, to drought, to floods, to a basically grumpy and unsympathetic environment become ever more relevant.

Australian Aboriginal cultures are the only ones in the world to have survived from the Ice Age to the present day, and they have done so on the world's most variable of continents. To survive more than a few hundred years, Heideggerian dwelling has *never* been possible in Australia. Quite clearly, if our work as poets and theorists is to maintain relevance—if, in Heidegger's terms, our language still houses something, then we need to be concertedly preparing to vacate our time-worn places of domicile, and begin to look and learn on the move, catching glimpses, always moving onwards. And for much the same reasons, there's no use moving alone: Australia is one of the last few places on earth where that's realistically possible. It is far more useful to be thinking in terms of the dynamics of populations, of how, exactly, we are going to care for the impending billions of displaced, injured and distraught refugees of war and famine, be they human or non-human. If we accept that poems have a function beyond the moment of their writing—indeed, if we think poems *should* have some sort of wider function beyond this moment—then these are issues that need to be translated into a poetics of *echo*coherence: writing that senses, understands and moves with the constant transformations going on around us.

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¹ In Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, Picador, London, 2001, p. 232.

² Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi, Continuum, London and New York, 2004, p. 419.

³ <www.dictionary.com>.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' in Martin Heidegger, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, ed. Albert Hofstadter, Harper Colophon, New York, 1971, p. 147.

⁵ Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 146.

⁶ Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 149.

- ⁷ Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 147.
- ⁸ Martin Heidegger, 'Remembrance of the Poet' in Martin Heidegger, *Existence and Being*, ed. Werner Brock, Henry Regnery, Chicago, 1949, pp. 247–9.
- ⁹ Bate, p. 239.
- ¹⁰ Bate, p. 241.
- ¹¹ Les Murray, *Collected Poems*, Minerva, London, 1992, pp. 13–17.
- ¹² Bate, p. 146.
- ¹³ Louise Westling, 'Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty: Eco-poetics and the Problem of Humanism' in Fiona Becket and Terry Gifford (eds), *Culture, Creativity and Environment: New Environmentalist Criticism*, Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2007, p. 239.
- ¹⁴ Freya Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 2005, pp. 50–1.
- ¹⁵ Mathews, p. 74.
- ¹⁶ Westling, p. 239.
- ¹⁷ Or, by the same token, we might also question the utility of nationalistic discourses when global air, sea and capital currents ensure that contemporary environmental crises render these barriers quite meaningless.
- ¹⁸ In Verena Andermatt Conley, *Ecopolitics: The Environment in Poststructuralist Thought*, Routledge, London, 1997, p. 74.
- ¹⁹ Conley, p. 66.
- ²⁰ See, for example, the period of 1000 to 1700 AD in Europe, analysed in Manuel De Landa, *A Thousand Years of Nonlinear History*, Zone Books, New York, 2003, pp. 108–9.
- ²¹ Val Plumwood, 'Shadow Places and the Politics of Dwelling', *Australian Humanities Review*, March 2008, <<http://www.australianhumanitiesreview.org/archive/Issue-March-2008/plumwood.html>>.
- ²² Plumwood.
- ²³ Tim Flannery, *The Future Eaters: An Ecological History of the Australasian Lands and People*, Reed New Holland, Sydney, p. 78.
- ²⁴ Eric Rolls, 'The Nature of Australia' in Tom Griffiths and Libby Robin (eds), *Ecology and Empire: Environmental History of Settler Societies*, University of Edinburgh Press, Edinburgh, 1997, p. 38.
- ²⁵ Rolls, pp. 38–9.
- ²⁶ For a more detailed study of Canberra's eco-poetics, see Kate Rigby, 'Eco-poetics of the Limestone Plains' in C.A. Cranston and Robert Zeller (eds), *The Littoral Zone: Australian Contexts and Their Writers*, eds., Rodopi, Amsterdam and New York, 2007, pp. 153–75.
- ²⁷ George Seddon, 'Farewell to Arcady: Or Getting Off the Sheep's Back', *Thesis Eleven*, no. 74, 2003, pp. 36–7.
- ²⁸ Pierre Joris, *A Nomad Poetics*, Wesleyan University Press, Middletown, 2003, pp. 5–6.
- ²⁹ Peter Minter, *blue grass*, Salt, Cambridge 2006, pp. 35–9.

³⁰ Brian Massumi, *A User's Guide to Capitalism and Schizophrenia: Deviations from Deleuze and Guattari*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1996, p. 15.

³¹ Bate, p. 201.

³² James C. Scott, *Seeing like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition have Failed*, Yale University Press, New Haven & London, 1998, p. 313.

³³ Scott, p. 324.

³⁴ Scott, p. 324.

³⁵ Scott, p. 323.

³⁶ Scott, p. 312.

³⁷ Scott, pp. 353–4.

³⁸ Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', p. 150.

³⁹ John Rajchman, *The Deleuze Connections*, MIT Press, Cambridge & London, 2000, p. 160.

⁴⁰ Joris, p. 25.