



## LAYER THREE: The Regional Spatial Turn

*The land itself, vast and differentiated, defies the notion of a national geography. If applied at all it must be applied lightly, and it must grow out of the concrete detail of local geographies.*

Barry Lopez<sup>1</sup>

### *Regionally Relational, Relationally Regional*

The spatial turn is now a well-established phenomenon. Conceivably, Michel Foucault expresses this development most concisely but by no means exclusively:

The present epoch will perhaps be above all the epoch of space. We are in the epoch of simultaneity: we are in the epoch of juxtaposition, the epoch of the near and far, of the side-by-side, of the dispersed. We are at a moment, I believe, when our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skein.<sup>2</sup>

The whole question of a 'relational regionalism' is one in which a broad range of discourses and embodied thoughts/practices overlap, intersect, and collide in sometimes highly specified, and sometimes deeply ambiguous scalar coexistences, and clearly is part of this spatial turn. Through the crisscrossing forces of globalisation and a shifting conception of the embodied, the abstract and the technical infrastructure in the production and consumption of knowledge, any region is now relational at least to the extent that it is connected to the variable scales of a geo-politically articulated world order. To reiterate, these scales could be posited as the nano- and the bio-world, the psyche, domestic arrangements (home), workplace, locality/region, nation, supra-region, globe, solar system or universe, even the

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<sup>1</sup> Barry Lopez, 'The American Geographies', in *About This Life: Journeys on the Threshold of Memory* (Harvill Press: London, 1998), p.137.

<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', trans. Jay Miskowiec, in *Diacritics*, vol. 16, #1, 1986, p.22. Other equally influential but differing accounts of the 'spatial turn' are Fredric Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism', in *New Left Review*, #146, 1984, pp.53-92; and David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Social Change* (Basil Blackwell: Oxford, 1989).



cosmos ... all of which are highly variable in the material and abstract interconnections linking the questions of space and place. A *relational* communication infrastructure is a term that could equally be applied to electracy in that it contains and plays out a diverse range of message-making modalities: image, gesture, light, sound, voice, colour and text, for instance; all energised by a variety of technical forms: TV, radio, WWW, tomography, iPods, gaming, even security cameras being just some examples.

The particular comment that first triggered a niggling doubt about the dominant dogma that nationalism and literacy construct in our thinking and subsequently in our being and becoming in the world was a brief quote from Gregory Ulmer himself. In *Teletheory* (an early working out of electracy published before the Internet took hold), he suggests electronic knowledge (its methods and practices) might have a symbiotic foundation with ‘the emergence of a regionalized epistemology.’<sup>3</sup> While this specific connection between electracy and regionalism is not explicitly developed in *Teletheory*, in later works Ulmer does dwell on the Florida region where he lives and works and on his hometown of Miles City, Montana. It was this almost passing remark that crystallised my own interest in the relationship between electronic communication and regionalism. Concurrently, there is a voluminous resurgence of interest in regionalism the world over.

In Russia, Great Britain, Spain, in parts of Africa, Canada, and the Middle East, there are cultural and political struggles for regional and/or ethnic and/or local autonomy. While it might be easy to label the emblematic Basque people of Spain as terrorists, it is just as easy to view their struggle against the Spanish state as part of a broader ‘regional imaginary’, an attempt to break free from centralising forms of power whose authorising prowess is generally located elsewhere.<sup>4</sup> This regional imaginary is partly both a utopian vision for a better world, and partly an effort to counter the more negative contemporary impacts of globalisation, some of which include the intensifying divide between metropolitan and local/regional space, imbalances between the rich and poor (here considered both politico-economic and epistemological imbalances); and linked with these phenomena, divides among the first, second, third and fourth worlds, along with various religious antipathies, most notably between Christianity and Islam, and Islam and Judaism. As such, the regionalisation of global, even national geo-political space is part of a ‘Geography of Utopia’,<sup>5</sup> and the mark of a possible geo-political

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<sup>3</sup> Gregory Ulmer, *Teletheory*, p.82.

<sup>4</sup> I’ve lifted this suggestive term out of its context in Christopher L. Connery’s, ‘The Oceanic Feeling and the Regional Imaginary’, in Rob Wilson & Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 1996), pp.284-311.

<sup>5</sup> An overview of the utopian impulse in geography is outlined in Philip W. Porter & Fred E. Lukermann, ‘The Geography of Utopia’, in David Lowenthal & Martyn J. Bowden (eds.), *Geographies of the Mind: Essays in Historical Geosophy* (Oxford University Press: New York, 1975), pp.197-223.



kindred spirit between the two (regionalism and globalism, that is). This imagined paradise, however, is not merely an idealised, unattainable vision of a perfect future, but an epistemological/political idea that is now being differentially moulded into actuality in various places around the globe. With the advent of globalisation, there is no doubt that regionalism, as idea and practice, is a thoroughgoing force in geo-political terms, a fact that is also recently reinforced by the emergence of the 'new regionalism' movement.<sup>6</sup>

Clearly, if regionalism is also a spatial practice, this is a claim that will need some interrogation. It's Henri Lefebvre's *The Production of Space* that is the standard reference point in any attempt at synthesising both a material and a more abstract social analysis of any spatial practice. *The Production of Space* is devoted to articulating 'the triad of the perceived, the conceived, and the lived' in relation to space.<sup>7</sup> Mark Purcell distils Lefebvre's explanatory complexity of this 'triad' (and his occasional definitional drift) into the following simple terms:

Lefebvre conceives of space as having three aspects, which I will call material space, conceptual space, and lived space.

*Material space* refers to concrete spatial relationships in the material world. It exists relatively objectively.

*Conceptual space* refers to ideas about space. It is mental or imagined space, and is relatively subjective. *Lived space* is the space that people actually experience every day. It is a fusion of objective material space and subjective conceptual space. Our everyday experience consists of a constant interplay between material and conceptual space.<sup>8</sup>

Contrary to outlines of a cyber- or virtual democracy freeing us from the limitations of space,<sup>9</sup> a regionally focussed spatial analysis (as brought to fruition in *Chora-Logic*) is simultaneously devoted to a 'trialectical examination' that integrates this constant oscillation between 'material space, conceptual space, and lived space' (under the influence of Lefebvre's triad, 'trialectics' is Edward W. Soja's reworking of what might be considered an empirically focussed, literate-centric dialectical method), *and* an almost impossibly speculative, imaginative rendition (something that sits more easily in an electrated methodology). It is this multiple (and multiplying) set of interactions that defines the relationship among a citizen-subject's material actuality in a particular place and the ways they might

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<sup>6</sup> An overview of this movement is in Stephen M. Wheeler, 'The New Regionalism: Key Characteristics of an Emerging Movement', in *Journal of the American Planning Association*, vol. 68, #3, 2002, pp.267-278. As Wheeler points out, 'The term *new regionalism* is not itself new' (p.267). Also, the region is itself an ancient spatial form.

<sup>7</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Blackwell: Oxford, 1991), p.39.

<sup>8</sup> Mark Purcell, 'Neighborhood Activism Among Homeowners as a Politics of Space', in *Professional Geographer*, vol. 53, #2, 2001, p.188. [Italics in the original].

<sup>9</sup> Mark Poster investigates this point in 'Cyber Democracy: The Internet and the Public Sphere', in *The Information Subject* (G+B Arts International: Amsterdam, 2001), pp.95-115.



*think* and *feel* about it in everyday life, with *everyday life* considered the appellation closest to articulating a life lived in the space of the region. Indeed, *Thirdspace* is a direct application of Lefebvre's methods, Soja saying of this influence that,

Lefebvre opens the way to a *trialectics of spatiality*, always insisting that each mode of thinking about space, each "field" of human spatiality – the physical, the mental, the social – be seen as simultaneously real and imagined, concrete and abstract, material and metaphorical. No one mode of spatial thinking is inherently privileged or intrinsically "better" than the others as long as each remains open to the re-combinations and simultaneities of the "real-and-imagined."<sup>10</sup>

This cross-pollinating triad of methods and practices in relation to spatial analysis (as pioneered by Lefebvre's metaphilosophy in the *Production of Space*) is also partly put into play by the enormous variety of electronic communications technologies (along with their assortment of modalities and contents) and is one of a multiplex of relationships that help articulate an evolutionary definition of the electrated method. (These previous sentences could also be scrambled into various subject/object orders in an effort to weaken any kind of deterministic thinking that may underpin the particular sequencing within them – the ability to rearrange the order of meaning at will, and the call to in/action it might engender, is itself a significant aspect of both electronic and spatial logic). In Soja's account of Lefebvre's method, it is also instructive that he circularises each of the triadic components rather than making a horizontal or vertical axis of out them, the latter a schematic articulation more appropriate to a dialectical approach.<sup>11</sup>

These triple-helixed associations, as they are amplified in the relationship between electracy and a geo-politically focussed global/regional polis, are increasingly part of the deep structure of the post/modern world. As two key politico-economic thinkers of the "New Regionalism" – Michael Storper and Allen J. Scott – write: 'The post-Bretton Woods financial services industries of the world have emerged, through changes in their transactional structures, on the basis of *both* global networks and reinforced regional communities.'<sup>12</sup> Globalisation and regionalisation then are an intersecting array of spatio-temporal and thus political arrangements, and the knowledge of which is critical to understanding the evolution of an electrated epistemology.

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<sup>10</sup> Edward W. Soja gives an outline of 'The Trialectics of Spatiality' in *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Blackwell: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1996), pp.53-82, the citation is on pp.64-65. [Italics in the original].

<sup>11</sup> In *Thirdspace* (pp.54-60), Soja also explicitly acknowledges the Jorge Luis Borges story, 'The Aleph', in which the central character makes his way into the blackened cellar of a condemned building to see the Aleph for himself. When finally glimpsed, the Aleph is 'a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance'; the narrator further intoning that, 'In that single gigantic instant I saw millions of acts both delightful and awful; not one of them amazed me more than the fact that all of them occupied the same point in space, without overlapping or transparency.' See, Jorge Luis Borges, 'The Aleph' [1945], in *The Aleph and Other Stories 1933-1969*, trans. & editing Norman Thomas di Giovanni (E. P. Dutton: New York, 1978), p.26.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Storper & Allen J. Scott, 'The Wealth of Regions', in *Futures*, vol. 27, # 5, 1995, p.508. [Italics in the original].



Many of these connections (some of which are thought of as ‘new’) are masks for age-old concerns. One significant enculturating feature of electronic communication is its intensely inter-textual nature: Jackie Chan copycats Gene Kelly’s dancing from *Singing in the Rain*, *The Simpsons* replicates just about anything stored in the matrix, even the Coen Brothers’ *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* ‘metamorphs’ Homer’s ancient Greek travel/love epic *The Odyssey*, a narrative that ‘recounts the voyages of Ulysses on his way home from the Trojan War,’ into the New-Deal Depression era of the American south.<sup>13</sup> And when *Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?* climaxes with the significant aquatic symbol of the flood (a virtualisation that was in reality instigated by the Tennessee Valley Authority’s hydro-electricity scheme during the Depression), at least a simulacrum of the real is foregrounded. Travel can be both real and virtual, and if either variation in the telling of these ‘tales leave one dissatisfied’ (p.9), the diverse forms of electracy have synthesised almost all travelogues imaginable into the globalised electronic archive, a databank so immense that it now has a virtual geography of its own while still being largely influenced by Western located culture and commerce. This is a William Gibson like way of ‘knowing’ regions other than the one we happen to be in. The news and nature documentaries are significant here in our knowledge of other places and spaces, but even *Dr Who*, *Star Trek*, and the *Star Wars* franchise fill in the spatial ‘void’ beyond the stratosphere. Electronic knowledge can be thought of as both intra- and inter-regional on a cosmological scale as much, or maybe more so, than it can be conceived of as national, international or even global, not to mention its capacity for finely tuned microanalytical, even sub-atomic forms of thought and representation.

As Claval implies, travel is at the very heart of Western knowledge and interest in regions along with the concomitant search for home, a claim that is further amplified in Pico Iyer’s extraordinary work of travel-writing, *The Global Soul*.<sup>14</sup> Clearly, because travel and a sense of home(-page) share a profound intimacy/anxiety, a small part of the plan of *Chora-Logic* will incorporate at least some reference to this vast travel-writing archive. It may even transpire that this inclusion could act as a conscience of the work, a means of questioning its own ‘heuretics’, its own ‘logic of invention’, in the manner of a foreigner who comes to a strange land and diplomatically (or otherwise) offers their host an insight into their own blindness.

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<sup>13</sup> Paul Claval, *An Introduction to Regional Geography*, trans. Ian Thompson (Blackwell: Oxford, 1998), p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Pico Iyer, *The Global Soul: Jet Lag, Shopping Malls and the Search for Home* (Bloomsbury: London, 2000).



## Etymological B/ordering

Etymology is a discipline that bequeaths us an understanding of the historical and sometimes even the spatial development of words. In Raymond Williams' *Keywords* there is a useful etymological analysis of the word *region*, whose arrival in English in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century from the Latin word '*regionem* - direction, boundary, district' and '*regere* - to direct or to rule', identifies an important binocular framing of the concept that remains pertinent to this day: 'There is an evident tension within the word, as between a distinct area and a definite part. Each sense has survived, but it is the latter which carries an important history. Everything depends, in the latter sense, on the term of relation: a part of what?'<sup>15</sup> The etymological inheritance of the term *region* as a 'distinct area' though remains significant given that sovereignty-producing borders are still a relatively fixed phenomenon, not only for legal, but also for migratory, ownership and control reasons. For Foucault, the '*Region* is a fiscal, administrative, military notion.'<sup>16</sup> As Williams implies though, a region, both in the evolutionary form of its meaning and in practice, has a long history of *relationality* about it: it can be both 'a distinct area and a definite part', a point that doesn't discount its fiscal, administrative or military meaning but enhances them all. Marie-Claude Smouts provides a lingering etymological back-beat to this relational rendering: 'It is a characteristic of the region to have neither a definition nor an outline. The empirical criteria which allow the socio-economic entity to be recognised as sufficiently homogeneous and distinct, are vague and mixed.'<sup>17</sup> This is an idea also underscored by Neil Smith's comment that,

Much as it is internally constructed, the social economy of the region is also fashioned in the swirl of national and international economic processes, events and developments; and in so far as regions specialize in specific types and conditions of production, making commodities or selling services for a wider market, regional borders are highly porous and changeable.<sup>18</sup>

As a category form then (be it a political, economic, social, cultural, or psychological differentiation), the region is neither a precursor, nor does it inherit in any absolutist way, the baggage of sovereignty and territoriality that has so characterised literate/national attachments to space. Brian Massumi puts a cybernetic spin on this ambiguous b/ordering of regional space:

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<sup>15</sup> Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (Flamingo/Fontana: London, 1983), p.264.

<sup>16</sup> Michel Foucault, 'Questions on Geography', in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (Harvester Press: Brighton, Sussex, 1980), p.68. [Italics in the original].

<sup>17</sup> Marie-Claude Smouts, 'The Region as the New Imagined Community?', trans. Uttam Bharthare & Claire O'Neal, in Patrick Le Galès & Christian Lequesne (eds.), *Regions in Europe* (Routledge: London, 1998), p.30.

<sup>18</sup> Neil Smith, 'Homeless/Global: Scaling Places', in Jon Bird, Barry Curtis, Tim Putnam, et al., (eds.), *Mapping the Futures: Local Cultures, Global Change* (Routledge: London, 1993), p.109.





A germinal or “implicit” form cannot be understood as a shape or structure. It is more a bundle of potential functions localized, as a differentiated region, within a larger field of potential. In each region a shape or structure begins to form, but no sooner dissolves as its region shifts in relation to the others with which it is in tension. There is a kind of bubbling of structuration in a turbulent soup of regions of swirling potential. The regions are separated from each other by dynamic thresholds rather than by boundaries.<sup>19</sup>

This ambiguousness vis-à-vis a region’s dominion and/or legal/constitutional, or even military status, is both a positive and a negative given that the sometimes bloody history of demarcation associated with bordering and sovereignty in the nation-state has become so ingrained as to be naturalised, and up until recently largely unquestioned.

Contrary to prognostications of a borderless world, they remain everywhere about us in all manner of circumstances. The etymology, and the theory and practical politics of regionalism present us directly with the issue of how to deal, firstly, with fluid borders, and eventually with the long-term im/possibility? of a global polis as a permeable entity. A regionalised polis then goes hand-in-hand with the global circulation of capital, a process that can be electronically diffused across any border in microseconds, while simultaneously there is also the contradictory fettering of various people’s migratory movement around that same global space.<sup>20</sup> Of course, thinking of political structure in this relational way is a major transformation of our understanding of what defines a polis. The quest to be pre-emptively, simultaneously, and retrospectively definitive *and* relational, then, could be a signifying epistemological and political protocol of the regional impulse and maybe even the electrated imagination.

## *The Bio-Region*

This emphasis on the ambiguity of borders is a clue to another important aspect of regionalism, and that is what Paul Clavel calls ‘The Ecological Foundations of Regionalism’, a focus that is ‘an overall study of the flows of energy, matter, living things, people and

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<sup>19</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 2002), p.34.

<sup>20</sup> Saskia Sassen examines this tension in ‘Immigration Tests the New Order’. In *Losing Control? Sovereignty in an Age of Globalization* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1996), pp.63-105.



information' in any given region.<sup>21</sup> In a more direct electronic informational sense it is Manuel Castells who has articulated this germinating relationship between regionalism and, partly, electronic communication, as 'The Greening of the Self: The Environmental Movement'.<sup>22</sup> An 'electronic ecology' would then be framed around how this kind of electrated informational grid intersects with the actual ecological network of any particular region.<sup>23</sup> Considering electracy through an ecological point of view (a concept akin to a networked or conductive frame of reference) could be a possible adjunctive means via which the regional impulse (considered as a more highly circumscribed means of spatial limitation) act as counterpoints to one another. In this way, '... the philosophical dream of an infinity of meaning'<sup>24</sup> (an idea that is represented by the monumental capacities of globally accessible and mostly electronically codified data) is contrasted (or enacted and embodied) in and by this more highly circumscribed space of the region. Bioregionalism, as an immanent socio-political-cultural structure and a movement, is clearly a way of delimiting the immensity of the global scale, of ordering the cosmos's chaotically rigorous energy according to definable but malleable local/regional limits. It could be referred to as a kind of bio-bordering.

The bioregional distinction is a significant influence in this organic, bottom-up conception of the region. The bioregional imperative is essentially about placing the body in its most immediate ecological context; *place*, as opposed to the more theoretically amorphous term *space*, is the discipline's keyword. As Michael Vincent McGinnis notes though this is not to ignore the equally quilted connection to a broader range of knowledges, be they social or cultural, economic or political:

Bioregionalism is a grass-roots doctrine of social and community-based activism that has evolved wholly outside of mainstream government, industry and academic institutions. Bioregionalism is defined as a body of knowledge that has evolved to inform a process of transformative social change at two levels – as a conservation and sustainable strategy, and as a political movement which calls for devolution of power to ecologically and culturally defined bioregions.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Paul Clavel, *An Introduction to Regional Geography*, pp.71-94.

<sup>22</sup> Manuel Castells, *The Power of Identity* (Blackwell: Oxford, 1997), especially 'The Greening of the Self: The Environmental Movement', pp.110-133. Castells' ideas on the 'network society' are also acknowledged as influential here.

<sup>23</sup> Sean Cubitt discusses the notion of an 'electronic ecology' in, *Videography: Video Media as Art and Culture* (St. Martin's Press: New York, 1993), pp.190-209. Also, for an account of the interaction between 'ecological holism, medium theory, and international relations', see Ronald J. Deibert, *Parchment, Printing and Hypermedia: Communication in World Order Transformation* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1997), pp.37-44.

<sup>24</sup> Friedrich Kittler, 'Gramophone, Film, Typewriter', in *October*, #41, 1987, p.114.

<sup>25</sup> Michael Vincent McGinnis, 'A Rehearsal to Bioregionalism', in Michael Vincent McGinnis (ed.), *Bioregionalism* (Routledge: London & New York, 1999), p.4.





Perhaps the antagonism that many bio-regionalists feel towards the scientific paradigm (a detail McGinnis also identifies) comes out of what might be some of the contradictions and blanket-claims made here. Using a classical spatio-analytical, and the already mentioned boundary-making distinction – *inside/outside* – the possibility that any domain, be it human, natural, political or otherwise, is outside ‘mainstream government, industry and academic institutions’ is probably unsupportable. The concept of infinite space notwithstanding, the broad global gestalt within which the bioregional ethic operates leaves almost no space for an *outside* (although this is not the same as saying that globalisation or even literacy are unified one-dimensional socio-economic and epistemological forces). McGinnis’s claims also stand in stark contradistinction to what might be bioregionalism’s most profound enunciation, and that is that the body stands first and foremost, in direct and indirect ways, within its immediately interconnected and ecologically defined habitat. The broader implication, echoed here by McGinnis, is that nature somehow not only stands outside of culture (or language) but that it is superior to it. Equally, Mark Dery’s comment that, ‘For humans after the Fall, symbol-manipulating animals that we are, nature – in the sense of an absolute authority, the Transcendental Signified that anchors all of culture’s free-floating signifiers – has always been an epistemic mirage, seen through the haze of language’ is not quite accurate either.<sup>26</sup> The production of knowledge in the *contextualised* environment of the locality or region remains a fully sensate and experiential epistemology fusing the sight, sound, smell, touch and language of a given place in idiosyncratic ways. Despite these worries there is a chance for a bioregionalist ethic to develop that is less doctrinaire, more open to how its frames not only its object of analysis, but also the political and epistemological ambiguity that arises from eco- and/or network-centric fields of relations. This is clearly happening.<sup>27</sup> Viewed in this eco- and network-centric way bioregionalism as a means of both spatial and epistemological identification for the body may make an increasingly substantial contribution to our ideas about political structure and communicative protocols.

## Built Place

If natural spaces are representationally constituted in nouns like oceans, forests, plains, grasslands, steppes, deserts, rivers, tidal interstices etc. (and each categorisation here relies on the others for its existence and delimitation) then built space seemingly

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<sup>26</sup> Mark Dery, ‘Wild Nature, Wired Nature: The Unabomber Meets the Digerati’, in *The Pyrotechnic Insanitarium: American Culture on the Brink* (Grove Press: New York, 1999), p.244.

<sup>27</sup> A recent addition to the debate on bio-regionalism is Robert L. Thayer, *LifePlace: Bioregional Thought and Practice* (University of California Press: Berkeley & Los Angeles, 2003). In the Australian context, one of the few explicitly bio-regional studies is J. M. Powell’s, *The Emergence of Bioregionalism in the Murray-Darling Basin* (Murray-Darling Basin Commission: Canberra, 1993).



constitutes its human sedentary equivalent. For Deleuze and Guattari (in chapter 12 of *A Thousand Plateaus*: ‘1227: Treatise on Nomadology – The War Machine’) these natural spaces help instigate a nomadic (nomos) movement across localities and regions. From a nomadology perspective, these smooth spaces unsettle a scientific, numerical (logos), sometimes even aesthetic demarcation (poiesis) and order. If they are marked at all, it is by heterogeneous and differential forces, deliberated through constantly oscillating intensities. *A Thousand Plateaus* is careful though not to elevate these smooth nomadic spaces over the more sedentary spaces of culture and power (pp.372-373). Nonetheless, ‘In their insistence on becoming and movement, however, the authors of *A Thousand Plateaus* overlook the placial potential of *settled dwelling* – of ... “built places.”’<sup>28</sup> One need only think of that other beginning of settled dwelling – the Tower of Babel – to recognise that Deleuze and Guattari’s observations on nomadic, smooth space also have some application (albeit differently) to sedentary space. Sedentary, settled dwelling may have a crust of easy legibility and order but it also formats an invisible multivalent and a sometimes-violent potential.

When Captain Cook planted the British flag in the sand at Botany Bay in 1770, and declared the ground it spiked as Crown Land and now the property of an English sovereign, it was also a moment when white Australia’s current fascination with real estate, or the property market, was born. In the wake of this spike came the intense anxiety over Native Title that surfaced in late 20<sup>th</sup> century Australia when claims of Indigenous land grabs would repossess suburban backyards. While easily dismissed as hyperbole, a rhetorical gesture intended to arouse this very anxiety, its emergence is nonetheless an indication of the potential for political and psychic *unsettling* at the heart of the ownership and control of built place, or ‘settled dwelling’ in the Australian context. And here it would be wise to include not just the gridded, architectural quality of home-building and home-making, but also to the home as the *site* of the family romance, another source of *unsettling* as much as a calming down. As well, and spreading out from the boundaries of the home, are the built spaces of fences, bridges, roads, railways, airport terminals (along with their interconnecting pathways), which of course brings us back to communications infrastructure which has so often followed alongside the development of transportation links. These and other elements represent this conglomerate of built space, possibly the major transformation of natural space that humanity has brought about. But for *Chora-Logic* and for electracy it is the more personal aspect of built space – the home and its connections into the globalised electrosphere – that will constitute its main concern in this area. For a sedentary, striated space to settle into an unchallenged existence though requires a repression of the highest order, primarily because of the home’s proximity to everyday life. In settled space, repressions are more difficult to abstract away, they are lived with on a daily basis, which also helps to explain the extra

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<sup>28</sup> Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History* (University of California Press: Berkeley, 1997), p.309. [Italics in the original].



intensity brought to their sometimes-unsettling quality. Inversely, in this global electrosphere, home cannot merely be a place where one dwells within, we take it with us when we travel *and* it comes back to us from afar, a point reflected in Pico Iyer's comment that 'Australians have so flexible a sense of home, perhaps, that they can make themselves at home anywhere.'<sup>29</sup> While our sense of home may well be 'the territorial core' of our being, when other arrangements of space and knowledge shift it must inevitably do so as well.<sup>30</sup> In these shifts, the built place of the home can no longer be considered exclusively under the illusion of a sanctuary, which has been one of the key factors in its attraction.

These developments are important to a sense of local and regional implacement, both to the feeling of autonomy involved in home occupation/ownership (remembering Eric Leed's comment that, 'By the sixteenth century, literacy had become one of the definitive signs – along with the possession of property and a permanent residence – of an independent social status'),<sup>31</sup> as well as materialising how globalising and regionalising forces are shifting the ground of home, work-place practices and citizenship allegiances. Just as important though for built space is the emergence of critical regionalism as a branch of architectonics, considered here as a theory of architecture.

Critical regionalism emerged out of the collective thinking of Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, and as these authors themselves acknowledge, was itself deeply influenced by the work of Lewis Mumford during the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century when he was arguing against the authority of the international style in architecture, a style epitomised by the Bauhaus movement.<sup>32</sup> It is in Kenneth Frampton's essay, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance' that deliberately takes this question of critical regionalism and makes it a part of the postmodern project.<sup>33</sup> In many ways the ideas critical regionalism espouses can themselves be a microcosm of a concomitantly emerging global/regional polis. With public examples of built-form the power of the

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<sup>29</sup> Pico Iyer, 'Australia 1988: Five Thousand Miles from Anywhere,' in *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* (Jonathon Cape: London, 1993), p.185.

<sup>30</sup> J. Douglas Porteous, 'Home: The Territorial Core', in *Geographical Review*, vol. LXVI, 1976, pp.383-390.

<sup>31</sup> Eric Leed, "'Voice" and "Print": Master Symbols in the History of Communication', in Kathleen Woodward (ed.), *The Myths of Information: Technology and Postindustrial Culture* (Coda Press: Madison, Wisconsin, 1980), p.53.

<sup>32</sup> Liane Lefaivre & Alexander Tzonis discuss the active post-war repression of regionalism by the proponents of the international style and Mumford's influence on the their own development of critical regionalism in, 'The Suppression and Rethinking of Regionalism and Tropicalism After 1945', in Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre & Bruno Stagno (eds.), *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization* (Wiley-Academy: Chichester, West Sussex, 2001), pp.14-58. See also Liane Lefaivre & Alexander Tzonis, *Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World* (Prestel: New York, 2003).

<sup>33</sup> Kenneth Frampton, 'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance', in Hal Foster (ed.), *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Post-Modern Culture* (Bay Press: Port Townsend, 1983), pp.16-30. Australia's most well known critical regionalist influenced architect is Glenn Murcutt, whose work ethic – 'touch-this-earth-lightly' – is itself inspired by Indigenous thinking; see Philip Drew, *Leaves of Iron: Glenn Murcutt, Pioneer of an Australian Architectural Form* (The Law Book Co.: Sydney, 1985), p.54.



centre is on display by virtue of a building's enormous size and frequently high-cultural aesthetic power. This is a fact restated again and again from the ancient world's agora to Australia's own political bunker — its Houses of Parliament in Canberra. While Frampton discusses a range of aspects dealing with the universal/implaced axis across his six points, it is numbers five and six that deserve attention for a chora-logical analysis. Under the fifth sub-heading 'Culture Versus Nature: Topography, Context, Climate, Light and Tectonic Form' is where he writes that,

Here again one touches in concrete terms this fundamental opposition between universal civilization and autochthonous culture. The bulldozing of an irregular topography into a flat site is clearly a technocratic gesture which aspires to a condition of absolute *placelessness*, whereas the terracing of the same site to receive the stepped form of a building is an engagement in the act of "cultivating" the site. (p.26, italics in the original).

The 'totally flat datum' that the universalising tendency sometimes presupposes is, within the critical regionalist perspective, a false assumption. The 'cultivation' of a site for the design of a building illustrates the point that built space emerges out of an interaction between parallel phenomena as they combine in a particular set of timespace co-ordinates, phenomena that could include (but are not limited to) geomorphic data like soil and rock formations, inclination and declension; climate considerations in the form of wind patterns, temperature variations, rainfall patterns, available light and dark, humidity and the like; the context in relation to the cardinal points of north, south, east, west, and their intermediary positions; architectural considerations in the form of available building materials; along with the social, psychological and cultural requirements of the prospective in-dwellers. This is not so much a question of where to place the air conditioning system but the actuality of the way the building itself is placed on its site, or indeed if that site should be built on at all. A critical regionalist inflected building practice, then, is autochthonous to the degree that a full consideration of this range of interactions is taken into consideration in the development of its design plan. And given this autochthonous quality of the critical regionalist project, it also suggests that the architectural design plan might itself be a better model for designing electrated-centred projects of the chora-logical kind rather than writing or even the script, the latter a point that will come up again in 'The Chora Meta-Physique'.

The proliferation of 'McMansions' across many Australian suburbs during the 1990s (generally, oversized domestic buildings designed in the abstract with little or no recourse to the above mentioned elements, on bulldozed sites, with powerful air-conditioning systems, and no verandas or roof eaves to speak of) demonstrates the continuing influence of a universal, centralising dogmatism in the realm of built place. As summer temperatures start to climb into the 40°C range these air-conditioners might all start to hum in unison,



which in turn raises the susceptibility of the supporting infrastructure to collapse under the weight of an overbearing electrical load. The McMansion is a clear example of a built form that is envisioned more so in a drafting room, a space where the architect is remote-sensing the locational specificities. In this envisioning (driven more by a direct line-of-sight idiom dominant in 'flat datum' and economic considerations rather than architectural ones), the tactile is subordinated, which is the subject of Frampton's sixth point:

It is symptomatic of the priority given to sight that we find it necessary to remind ourselves that the tactile is an important dimension in the perception of built form. One has in mind a whole range of complementary sensory perceptions which are registered by the labile body: the intensity of light, darkness, heat and cold; the feeling of humidity; the aroma of material; the almost palpable presence of masonry as the body senses its own confinement; the momentum of an induced gait and the relative inertia of the body as it traverses the floor; the echoing resonance of our own footfall. (p.28).

The point here is clear: in its wider recognition of and foregrounding of the body's sensate capacities in both natural and built space (while recognising that the visible continues to be an important arena of active cognitive registration), the critical regionalist approach to built form spreads its meaning-making capacity across a broader range of sense modalities. Paradoxically, this synaesthetic, syncretic approach to bodily meaning-making in a regional milieu *concentrates* the site-centred locus of the production of knowledge, while simultaneously, the electrified epistemology that increasingly underpins it expands both the body's and the region's knowledge-making possibilities into a global gestalt, sometimes even a cosmological one. It is a paradoxical transformation that makes us look anew at social and cultural givens, even objective and empirical understandings, especially as they are articulated in national frames of reference. Domestic built space then, is a kind of micro-version of the multi-function polis where work, pleasure, family, rest, public display and privacy intermingle. So in both this reduction and expansion in the constitution of domestic home life, one that increasingly represents the *location* of the production of knowledge, built place embodies a concentration of energy that forces us to re-imagine border-making, order, and the dynamic interplay of nomadic movement and sedentary return, a point echoed in Nicolas Rothwell's comment that 'every exile has in it a homecoming.'<sup>34</sup> Albeit, this is a knowledge-making context with an expanded range of modalities incorporated and expressed through a wide range of corporeal intensities not just cognitive ones.

Much of the ambiguous discontent manifested in McMansion-style domiciles across many Western countries could be traced to the fact that their occupants have had little or no say in the way those domiciles have been designed and/or constructed. In Heidegger's

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<sup>34</sup> Nicolas Rothwell, *Wings of the Kite-Hawk: A Journey into the Heart of Australia* (Piddar: Sydney, 2003), p.80.





terms, they have not thought deeply enough about *dwelling* in that building, although with the advent of a media room the question of whether a building securely borders both dwelling and thinking is open to interrogation.<sup>35</sup> As anxieties over border-making at all scales intensifies (particularly in the transgression of these scales) the complexities and sureties of natural and built space take ever greater hold of the imagination, sometimes through the advance of a 'high level of critical self-consciousness', a process Frampton describes as a 'double mediation' of world culture and local conditions (p.21). Nearly all commentators warn of a nostalgic, romantic or a sentimental regionalism, the sum total of which is aimed at totally privileging the local/regional and utilised as a means of excluding the global or universal, sometimes even the national. Critical regionalism is itself a mediating factor between these dispositions, working its methods and practices into the local *and* the global, rejecting and/or accepting elements of either domain, as the specific context, in its multiplicity, demands it.

If the politico-economic dimension of the global electrosphere has tended to undermine the process of border-making across a range of scales, we can see in domestic forms of built place, the intense residue of both their continuing importance and an increased dependency on this electrosphere, especially those domiciles whose media rooms, with their telephone lines, computers, television sets, games consuls, and music stereos connecting them to it. Indeed, the thought emerges (once again keeping in mind Eric Leed's remark on the literate-configured sense of autonomy that is further enhanced by a separate physical address and residence) that the intense importance attached to a domestically orientated, built place by globally/regionally orientated citizen-subjects will figure as possibly the most viable means via which that sense of autonomy will transfer to an electrate epistemology. On the other hand, there is in Heidegger's essay, 'Building Dwelling Thinking' (devoid of those segregating pauses of literate technology — the comma), an interactive fusion between and through its tripartite components, suggesting that the foundry work of thought so essential to epistemology would not proceed as thoroughly as it does without 'dwelling' peacefully in 'building'. An electrate epistemology (thanks in part to the crucial pragmatic necessity of housing its technology) will only further intensify the importance of built place, and in particular the media room as a reinvented version of the factory and/or the office or work-room, or even of the bedroom.<sup>36</sup>

Regardless of these concerns over natural spaces and built place, the nationalist tradition remains a powerful influence, even in somewhat of a regionally modified form, for example in Murray Bail's fairy-tale like novel, *Eucalyptus*. Holland, the story's central character, over the course of his beautiful young daughter's growth into womanhood, plants every known member of the eucalypt

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Heidegger, 'Building Dwelling Thinking', in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, trans. Albert Hofstadter (Harper & Row: New York, 1971), pp.145-161.

<sup>36</sup> Bilwet Adilkno give a biting critique of this move to domestic work and play in 'Electronic Loneliness', in *Mediamatic* vol. 8, #2/3, 1995, pp.1-4.





species. He does this in a specific space, ‘... west of Sydney, over the ranges and into the sun – about four hours in a Japanese car.’<sup>37</sup> When his daughter turns nineteen, Holland proclaims that she will marry the man who can name every single species of eucalypt planted on his property. The gum tree is the pre-eminent symbol of nationalism in white Australia, a proposition Bail implies when the narrator muses that, ‘Every country has its own landscape which deposits itself in layers on the consciousness of its citizens, thereby cancelling the exclusive claims made by all other national landscapes’ (p.23). *Eucalyptus* might easily be rewritten to say that an actually experienced regional landscape deposits itself in memory to the exclusion of all other regions and nations.

Forcing every gum tree into the one space though, and rewarding us with the exquisite prize of beauty for the wholesale naming of the species grown in one region of the nation, all for the purpose of elevating the national character (or even of satirising its megalomaniacal ambitions), doesn’t even accord with the eucalypt itself. While ‘the plasticity of the [eucalypt] genus is extraordinary,’ even as a prototypical exemplar of the Australian nationalist ethos, with over 600 members in the species, the genus is highly variable in its ability to grow in specific ecologically defined spaces.<sup>38</sup> Like humans, eucalypts are indigenous to some regions and not to others, but a great many of both do travel well: Asia, Africa, Europe, and North and South America, the mountains and the Poles. Global-limit ‘real-virtuality’ and local/regional implaced specificity must make us inevitably question this connection to national space as the most profound vector of psychic and political affiliation.<sup>39</sup>

### *An Australia of the Regions*

In the Australian context this increasing concern with regionalism reached a climax in the political domain during the years of the Hawke-Keating government (1983-1996). While on the one hand, then Treasurer Paul Keating was pushing for closer ties with the Asian bloc in his attempts to get Australia accepted as a member of the ASEAN supra-regional trade and security organisation, at home the *Working Nation* policy document was articulating a way of rejuvenating the flagging fortunes of Australia’s own internally

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<sup>37</sup> Murray Bail, *Eucalyptus* (Text Publishing: Melbourne, 1998), p.4.

<sup>38</sup> Stephen J. Pyne, *Burning Bush: A Fire History of Australia* (Henry Holt: New York, 1991), p.17. While this work deals with one of the most powerful of the elements – fire – a substantial section is devoted to the long-term evolution of the eucalypt species; the two are clearly connected via the highly combustible nature of eucalyptus leaves.

<sup>39</sup> Mitsuhiko Yoshimoto, ‘Real Virtuality’, in Rob Wilson & Wimal Dissanayake (eds.), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary* (Duke University Press: Durham & London, 1996), pp.107-118.



constructed regions.<sup>40</sup> Previous to *Working Nation*, in 1993, the Government commissioned the Bill Kelty-led Taskforce on Regional Development report, *Developing Australia: A Regional Perspective*, as a means of addressing these regional problems.<sup>41</sup> Deeming the *Developing Australia* solutions too expensive the Government turned to multinational management consultants McKinsey and Company's report, *Lead Local Compete Global: Unlocking the Growth Potential of Australia's Regions*, the gist of which ended up as policy in the *Working Nation* document.<sup>42</sup> (Significantly, an important component of the *Working Nation* document was devoted to a multimedia led revival of the regions). Of most interest for *Chora-Logic*, though, is the disjunction between these two reports: the organically regionalist, bottom-up quality of *Developing Australia* and the more centralising top-down, neo-liberal quality of *Lead Local Compete Global*, that is, regionalisation from above. Understanding the relationship between these two terms – regionalism and regionalisation – is crucial to understanding the regional spatial turn.

These policies/reports (and there have been a great many of these government inspired documents focussing on the regional question in one form or another over the years) indicate one very clear fact: regionalism is a hotly contested political/economic/cultural issue in this country as it is elsewhere. Sometimes the terminology is changed to the 'bush', or the 'outback', for instance, but the term 'region' has now become a regular feature of political rhetoric in Australia despite the fact that most of the population live in metropolitan areas.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, it remains fairly certain that given the extent of regional discontent (the rise of Pauline Hanson's One-Nation movement is a good marker here) the discussion in Andrew Beer's essay, 'Regional Policy and Development in Australia: Running Out Of Solutions?' is no longer a question but a statement of fact.<sup>44</sup> If the Beer-line is accurate, the only regional development going on in this context is a bureaucratic industry reporting on regionalism, a development that comes at the expense of any significant epistemological, political or environmental change initiated in or by the regions themselves or at a national level. This might be because

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- <sup>40</sup> A moving personal account of this regional distress on farmers and small towns, as occasioned by bank foreclosures in the West Wyalong/Ungarie locality of the Riverina region (whereabouts my own parents were raised), is Robert Milliken (text) & Lorrie Graham (photographs), 'This Was Our Life: The Crash of Wool and Wheat', in *On The Edge: The Changing World of Australia's Farmers* (Simon & Schuster: Sydney, 1992), pp.20-43.
- <sup>41</sup> Taskforce on Regional Development, *Developing Australia: A Regional Perspective*, vols. 1,2,3 (Commonwealth of Australia: Canberra, 1993).
- <sup>42</sup> McKinsey and Company, *Lead Local Compete Global: Unlocking the Growth Potential of Australia's Regions* (McKinsey & Company, Sydney; in conjunction with the Office of Regional Development, Department of Housing and Regional Development: Canberra, 1994).
- <sup>43</sup> Given these shifting boundaries: "What is a region?" is a highly significant and perennial question linking back to the term's etymology and its border-making ambiguity. See, for instance, Malcolm Campbell, 'What is a Region?', in Local History Co-ordination Project (eds.), *Locating Australia's Past: A Practical Guide to Writing Local History* (New South Wales University Press: Sydney, 1988), pp.41-49.
- <sup>44</sup> Andrew Beer, 'Regional Policy and Development in Australia: Running Out Of Solutions?', in Bill Pritchard & Phil McManus (eds.), *Land of Discontent: The Dynamics of Change in Rural and Regional Australia* (University of New South Wales Press: Sydney, 2000), pp.169-194. A more extended analysis of the potential catastrophe facing Australia's regions is in Ian Gray & Geoffrey Lawrence, *A Future for Regional Australia: Escaping Global Misfortune* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 2001).



the *Working Nation* document (and its influences), was primarily the result of a centralising operation (regionalisation) coming at the expense of an organic, bottom-up one (regionalism), or even the development of a sense of psychic attachment to a region (regionality, an idea looked at more closely further down the track). Given this trialectical dilemma, *Chora-Logic* will focus on what is almost a subterranean chorography of Australia; that is, an Australia viewed through a regional/local, or even a global prism, more so than a national/historical one.<sup>45</sup>

As already suggested, the spread of the modern form of nationalism (from around the time of the invention of the Gutenberg press and the Treaty of Westphalia onwards) was intimately related to the rise of mass literacy. It is a literate culture that goes hand-in-hand with the nationalist impulse and has been a significant contributor to its historical development. The Henry Lawson/Banjo Patterson/Bulletin literary milieu of the 1890s is a notable example of the close relationship between literacy and nationalism in the Australian context, as is the development of both a public and private education system. Here, in the context of an Australian nationalism as it is defined by its literate sensibility, it is also worth making reference to Xavier Herbert's magnum opus, *Poor Fellow My Country*. A monumentally sprawling yarn, *Poor Fellow My Country* is set in Northern Australia and details the results of the takeover of Aboriginal inhabited Gondwanaland by Europeans. The massive word-count of the novel, bound up in nearly 1500 densely packed pages, might just as easily be re-condensed into a electronically succinct sound-bite which Herbert himself supplies as the novel's epigraph: "To my poor destructed country."<sup>46</sup> *Poor Fellow My Country* then is a possible socio-politicised narrative equivalent to Ian Gray and Geoffrey Lawrence's already mentioned and more sociologically arraigned account of regional Australia's 'global misfortune', a work that, in part, examines the overly 'productivist' mentality governing European contact with the landscape and the ensuing environmental degradation.<sup>47</sup> There should also be no exit from this collection of nationalist critics without also mentioning the oeuvre of Australia's only Nobel Laureate for literature – Patrick White – who over the course of a range of novels (*Voss*, *The Tree of Man*, *The Vivisector*, *The Twyborn Affair* come to mind) outlines what he sees as Australia, and Australians', psychological failures in coming to terms with this country. The centralisation of power and knowledge in national institutions and structures has been to the detriment of its regions, an

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<sup>45</sup> It's the historian Geoffrey Bolton who insists that 'the regional histories of greatest importance are those that illustrate and amplify our understanding of the major themes and questions of Australian history'. The subtext here is obvious: Bolton's conception of historiography is as a nationally focussed discipline. See, 'Regional History in Australia', in John A. Moses (ed.), *Historical Disciplines and Culture in Australasia: An Assessment* (University of Queensland Press: Brisbane, 1979), p.219.

<sup>46</sup> Xavier Herbert, *Poor Fellow My Country* (Book Club Associates: Sydney, 1975).

<sup>47</sup> Ian Gray & Geoffrey Lawrence, 'Beyond Productivism and Environmental Degradation?' in *A Future for Regional Australia*, pp.137-157. While the discussion on sustainability here is laudable, without a debate on the role of the voracious quality of capitalism's yearning for surplus value in reproducing the politico-economic conditions of this 'productivism' and 'environmental degradation' in the regions (and elsewhere) it remains incomplete.



idea implicit in all these aforementioned narratives. However, in these specifically national debates, examples like these are of a different level of interest than what might be called a 'chorographic literature'. In Australia, as elsewhere, there is a vast body of literate work already completed with a regional and/or a local focus,<sup>48</sup> as well as an increasing volume of work in ecological studies that is bio-regionally focussed even if not marked as such. It is a body of work that might just allow for a modicum of hope in an otherwise despairing view of European settlement in Australia.

One standout example of this chorographical praxis is Eric Rolls' *A Million Wild Acres*, a work that is an encyclopaedic rendering of the Pilliga Scrub region in north-western New South Wales. Free-ranging over the environment, politics, social and cultural life, history and geography, European colonisation and Aboriginal issues, *A Million Wild Acres* is a pure-bastard mix of the ineffable and the concrete, of the Pilliga region as the dynamic epicentre of human existence.<sup>49</sup> Also, in a more 'open work' point of view, there is Laurie Duggan's *The Ash Range*, a chorographical study of the Gippsland region of eastern Victoria, a work that employs a poetic metre and sensibility in its synthesis of a wide variety of historical artefacts like photographs, government reports, settlers' reminiscences, Aboriginal custom and folklore arising out of that region.<sup>50</sup>

Possibly one of the most inventive of the 'regional' studies in the Australian context is *Reading the Country*, an imaginative collaboration between Broome Aboriginal oral story-teller/writer (Paddy Roe), an artist (Krim Benterak), and an intellectual (Stephen Muecke).<sup>51</sup> Centred on the region around Broome on the north-west coast of Australia, *Reading the Country* is an influential work that gives pragmatic meaning to the idea of the book as an interface. Broome itself is such an *inter-place*: to spend time there is to realise it is as much a state of mind as a town, or a region. *Reading the Country*'s synthesis of picture, story, and intellectual reflection is itself, as Muecke says, an example of Levi-Strauss's idea of bricolage: a process of using a wide range of available re/source materials in order to produce one's existence, both imaginative and real. Included in this diversity are elements of Roebuck Plains' meteorology, geology,

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<sup>48</sup> In Australian literature itself there has been an ongoing debate on 'regionalism' and 'regional writing'. For example: a cross section of significant Australian writers, among them Frank Moorehouse, Thomas Shapcott, Elizabeth Jolley and Tom Hungerford, discuss the issue in, 'Time, Place and People: Regionalism in Contemporary Australia', in *Westerly*, vol. 23, #4, 1978, pp.60-79. See also, Susan McKernan, 'Crossing the Border: Regional Writing in Australia', in *Meanjin*, vol. 45, #4, 1986, pp.547-560. Novelist Brian Castro's, 'Heterotopias: Writing and Location', in *Australian Literary Studies*, vol. 17, #2, 1995, pp.178-182, gives a global, postmodern twist to this debate.

<sup>49</sup> Eric Rolls, *A Million Wild Acres: 200 Years of Man and an Australian Forest* (Thomas Nelson: Melbourne, 1981). [I'm indebted to Peter Jeffery for this reading].

<sup>50</sup> Laurie Duggan, *The Ash Range* (Picador: Sydney, 1987). The poetic method employed here is also another reminder of the ongoing importance of an oral epistemology, within both literate and electronic forms.

<sup>51</sup> Krim Benterak, Stephen Muecke & Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press: Fremantle, 1984).



linguistics, history, and anthropology, and as a multi-authored literate/visual work with oral inflections, a smorgasbord of discourse pre-empting an emerging understanding of electracy-in-place. Indeed, one assessment of *Reading the Country* could be that it is a 'literate' prototype for what might constitute an electronic regional history, or better, a Broome/Roebuck Plains psychogeography, while at the same time being a material thinking through of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's ideas on nomadology.

If *Reading the Country* represents a theoretically and artistically ambitious angle on regionalism, there are also a great many local/regional histories written mainly by well-connected and embedded enthusiasts. A specific example of the latter is Frances Eaton's *The Golden Grain and the Silver Fleece: A History of Quairading from 1859-1930*.<sup>52</sup> And while some of these local/regional histories may be panned for their unchallenging simplicity, it is this very characteristic that gives them their remarkable chora-logical quality. I was fortunate to have some long discussions with local historian Frances Eaton because the Quairading Shire, in the wheat-belt of Western Australia, was the focus of my own attempt at a chorographical exposé in an electronic format: *Sky's Witness*, a 50 minute video documentary that traces an outline of the Quairading region through the musings of a group of both former and then current residents, and who along with visitors to this wheat-belt town, climb aboard a specially decked-out train making its nostalgic way back to the district for 'Back to Quairading' celebrations.<sup>53</sup> Taken together, this large corpus of chorographical work, and my own spatial and epistemological partialities, establishes a regionalised conception of Australia from which these thoughts of both regionalism and electracy have sprung.

From the American context, perhaps the most sustained in terms of the wisdom in its diversity of detail is William Least Heat-Moon's, *PrairyErth (A Deep Map)*.<sup>54</sup> Significantly, *PrairyErth* breaks up the Chase County region of the American Mid-Western state of Kansas into a grid containing twelve localised cells: Saffordville, Gladstone, Thrall-Northwest, Fox Creek, Bazaar, Matfield Green, Hymer, Elmdale, Homestead, Elk, Cedar Point, Wonsevu.<sup>55</sup> Along the way, *PrairyErth* serves up generous amounts of philosophical musings on what is an almost infinite array of topics: 'For me, writing is not a search for explanations but a ramble in quest of what informs a place, a

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<sup>52</sup> Frances Eaton, *The Golden Grain and the Silver Fleece: A History of Quairading from 1859-1930* (Privately Published: Quairading, 1979).

<sup>53</sup> Terrence Maybury (writer, director, producer), *Sky's Witness*, videotape, colour/black & white, 50 minutes (Neon Emu Productions in association with the Australian Film Commission, Sydney; and the Film and Television Institute of W.A., Fremantle, 1989). I date my own conscious interest in the symbiosis of regionalism and electracy from this production.

<sup>54</sup> William Least Heat-Moon, *PrairyErth (A Deep Map)* (André Deutsch: London, 1991).

<sup>55</sup> There is a tendril here to Bernard Tschumi's comment that, 'Grids always provide the common point among uncommon commonalties.' See his 'Introduction' in Jeffrey Kipnis & Thomas Leiser (eds.), *Chora L Works: Jacques Derrida and Peter Eisenman* (The Monacelli Press: New York, 1997), p.125. Maps, and the raster grids of television monitors, are other obvious examples that connect spatial delimitation with electronic communication.





hunt for equivalents' (p.440). *PrairyErth's* meditation on Chase County is sometimes so thorough, so engagingly detailed, it appears as if it's a cosmological account rather than merely a work of 'non-fiction', a designation with a clear Platonic echo (and a theme that will be examined more closely in 'The Chora Meta-Physique'). While there are a great many other regional accounts from the global context (Europe, particularly, is awash with discussion and action on regionalism), it is sometimes necessary to put a brake on the relational propensity of knowledge-making merely because space/time co-ordinates intervene, a *deadline* looms. For *Chora-Logic* then, one level of spatial limitation is principally national; it will primarily deal with the region in its Australian context, a limitation which itself will need further condensation.

No discussion of the possible connection between electracy and the region in the broader national and global context could even contemplate beginning or ending without at least a brief mention of the Zapatista rebellion in Mexico. Centred on the Chiapas region, one of the 'poorest', 'southernmost state[s]' of Mexico, a region characterised by the presence of 'oil and tropical hardwoods'; a serious imbalance between a small ruling elite and a large, poor peasant rural based population; and a 'lack of electricity, of health care, of schools and sometimes food'; the Zapatistas, under the leadership of Subcommander Marcos, are renowned the world over for what might be called one of the first Internet-augmented revolutions.<sup>56</sup> The adroit use of the Internet by the Zapatistas and their global supporters helped ensure that this local conflict with the Mexican state has, even today, become a crucial example of the electronically articulated region's emergence into the global domain. Mastering the art of the sound-bite, Subcommander Marcos puts a succinct edge to the Zapatista struggle: 'We seek a world in which there is room for many worlds.'<sup>57</sup>

### *The Riverina Region*

There is here, in this more circumscribed context of Australian chorographical literature, a work that is particularly pertinent to my own chora-logical project. Australian historian Bill Gammage's local study, *Narrandera Shire*, is a significant milestone in this idea of

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<sup>56</sup> Oliver Froehling, 'Internauts and Guerrilleros: The Zapatista Rebellion in Chiapas, Mexico and its Extension into Cyberspace', in Mike Crang, Phil Crang & Jon May (eds.), *Virtual Geographies: Bodies, Space and Relations* (Routledge: London & New York, 1999), p.164. The discussion on the Zapatista Rebellion is extensive and wide-ranging but the official Zapatista website <<http://www.ezln.org.mx>> is a good beginning. [Accessed 20/12/2006].

<sup>57</sup> Subcommander Marcos cited at the beginning of Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (University of Minnesota Press: Minneapolis, 2000).





‘An Australia of Regions’.<sup>58</sup> Bill Gammage ‘grew up in Wagga Wagga, east of Narrandera, but his father and grandfather were Narrandera citizens.’<sup>59</sup> Centred on the eastern Riverina locality of Narrandera Shire, both a town and a district roughly equidistant between Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney on the Murrumbidgee River in southern New South Wales, *Narrandera Shire* tells its story with an opening outline of the locality’s physiography – its soils, climate, vegetation; and of the indigenous Wiradjuri people, who ‘believed in a creation unified by *Baiame*, literally the Maker, the builder of the universe, all powerful, all knowing, eternal’ and a Genesis-like figure embodied as spirit in ‘trees, rocks, fire or water’ (p.12).

In a sense *Narrandera Shire* is also a cosmic tragedy writ local and regional, meaning that it concludes its narrative (in ‘Sydney and the Bush’, pp.214-230) with a gentle retelling of the accumulated catalogue of catastrophes wrought by the European invasion of what was formerly Wiradjuri land in the Narrandera area: the militant Airds Irish sensibility of the early pioneers that slowly gave way to the centralising forces of Empire, and later, to the merchants and politicians of the colonial and subsequently federated capitals; of the civilizing impulse itself; of the introduction of diseases like TB, smallpox and alcoholism; the Wiradjuri war of the early 1840s; clear felling of the forests and scrub; soil erosion, salinity and acidity; the introduction of domesticated animals like sheep, cattle, goats and horses, and wild ones like rabbits and foxes; and of grasses like prairie grass and corrugated sida; as well as weeds like skeleton weed and Paterson’s Curse; and finally, the forced cessation of fire-stick farming practices of the Wiradjuri. All these ‘pioneering’ transformations are differentially familiar enough across large swathes of the Australian continent and no doubt have an analogue in other post-colonial societies. Where *Narrandera Shire* becomes specifically chora-logical is in its detailed depiction of one of Narrandera’s pioneering squatting families: the Jenkins’ brothers: Thomas the ‘adopted’ one (29/1/1812-22/12/1882), John ‘the adventurer’ (6/1/1816-16/10/1899), and ‘Frank the anchor’ (14/1/1820-1/8/1902); all of whom were the children of transported English convict John Jenkins and his wife Charlotte Elizabeth Jenkins, nee Surman (pp.38-39).

Local legend has it that Frank and John ‘bought’ Buckingbong station, prime riverfront country a few miles upstream from the current Narrandera township, from its previous occupier Robert Best ‘for two cows and two calves’ (p.38). Best had given up, driven out by the Narrungdera clan of the Wiradjuri during the short period of their military ascendancy in the late 1830s, early 1840s. The

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<sup>58</sup> This is the title of the opening chapter in Andrew Beer, Alaric Maude & Bill Pritchard’s, *Developing Australia’s Regions* (University of New South Wales Press: Sydney, 2003), pp.1-13.

<sup>59</sup> Bill Gammage, *Narrandera Shire* (Bill Gammage/Narrandera Shire Council: Narrandera, 1986). The quote is from the book’s dust-jacket.



Jenkins brothers triumphed over these and other odds and eventually controlled more than 90,000 acres of prime Riverina country at the peak of their power as squatters in the 1860s/70s. [As I write (mid 2005), the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) is broadcasting a 'reality' television program called *Outback House* which transports a group of 21<sup>st</sup> century people back to the 1860s to live in a simulacrum of the conditions of a typical squatter's run from this era]. The Jenkins clan are chora-logical in the direct sense that they form one outpost of my own genealogical web: Thomas Jenkins and wife Theresa Jane Dunstan (1820-6/7/1895) are my maternal great-great-grandparents. With this inheritance, dispossession, continuing habitation, and the very question of the mastery of space itself is personalised, a discovery where history itself is *geneticised*, made almost *psychic-molecular* in its object-orientation. It is not just an item of historical or geographical debate, or even of autonomous scientific or philosophical reflection; it also seems a sound question on which to base the selection of the Riverina region as a case study in *Chora-Logic*, a point I will examine further down the track.

This genealogically implaced aspect of chora-logic is clearly important but in the Narrandera/Jenkins' brothers micro-narrative there is also an attendant macroscopic level to this enquiry. Almost all of the development of the Narrandera locality (and by inference the Riverina region), from the widely held dreams of an inland sea that propelled the early European explorer Charles Sturt and his party up the Murrumbidgee River in 1829/30, through the feverish competition between Sydney and Melbourne over expansion of the road and rail network and vehement debate over border disputes in the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>60</sup> as well as subsequent aviation connections, and right through to Telstra's recent country expansion of broadband Internet access in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, all have been controlled from the metropolitan centre. The tragic irony of the Narrandera locale (and many other similarly disposed regions and localities across Australia and the globe) is that the idealistic pursuit of freedom, independence and wealth via squatting on un-alienated British Crown land, or its equivalent in other colonised spaces, was subservient to a political, technological and epistemological actuality that Gammage says 'emphasized district dependence on outsiders.'<sup>61</sup> Power, machines and knowledge (in wholesale intensities) have *travelled* to and *settled* in the Riverina from an itinerary of far away metropolises with some of these 'Riverina Rovers' including clergymen and teachers not just explorers, swaggies, bullock drivers, governors and governesses, cooks and bushrangers; even Victorian era novelist Anthony Trollope wrote a chapter on the Riverina after a trip to the area in the 1870s to visit his son as did Mark Twain

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<sup>60</sup> Bill Gammage says of this inter-capital argy-bargy, 'The most parochial places I know in Australia are Sydney and Melbourne – their opinion of the country and of each other is clear evidence of that!' See 'Local and Regional, National and International', in *Australian Studies*, #9, 1988, p.18.

<sup>61</sup> Bill Gammage, *Narrandera Shire*, p.219. Certainly, *Narrandera Shire* doesn't deal with any of the more recent roll-out of telephony/computing infrastructure, or other centralising control mechanisms since its publication but this extension on my part arises out the blanket coverage given to this theme in the concluding chapter: 'Sydney and the Bush', pp.214-230.



during a global speaking tour to pay off bad debts.<sup>62</sup> A bigger contrast to the localising practices of the Wiradjuri could hardly be imagined as the tracks running between the agora and the regions swelled with record numbers of European settlers, especially with the advent of the Robertson Land Acts of the 1860s intent on opening up large tracts of squatter-controlled country to free selectors, many through the Soldier Settlement schemes that subsequently rewarded returning war veterans with ‘a place of their own in the land of the free.’<sup>63</sup> Equally, these convicts, free immigrants, ‘pommies’, ‘dagos’, ‘wogs’, ‘reffos’, ‘huns’, ‘gooks’ and ‘slanty-eyes’ – boat and/or plane-people all – were fleeing a host of tyrannies perpetrated in Europe and elsewhere during the high-water mark of the globe’s nation-building phase.

In modern Western polities these agorae are now largely metro-centrally located phenomena and are a space constituted by parliaments, central banking and financial institutions, cultural associations, bureaucracies, media companies, indeed head offices of all kinds, and represent the universalising and centralising tendencies of both a socio-economic system (global capitalism) and an epistemological framework (literacy) in pursuit of global ambitions and rewards. This is also a reminder that the agora is a marketplace of ideas, a place of both *meta*- and *physical* exchange, a point brought fruitfully to life by Gregory Paul Caicco in his depiction of Socrates prowling the ancient agora, incessantly and disruptively challenging other Athenians in philosophical debate on important local matters.<sup>64</sup> But the kind of universalism often represented by the monolithic depiction of spaces and epistemologies in the cities is one that, as Paul Carter notes, ‘... rather than representing a state of Oneness or Being, the agora was the expression of a double movement, outwards and inwards. It was a moment of poise in a history of *becoming*. Its illusion of oneness was the outcome of a widened knowledge of the world’s multiplicity.’<sup>65</sup> But this is a knowledge muted by increasing distances between subjects and objects, between culture and nature in a wide range of multiple (and multiplying) spaces, and it is this sense of increasing distance between power and its object that intensifies the psychic and socio-political shelf life of the control complex.

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<sup>62</sup> David G. Dufty, ‘Riverina Rovers’, *Riverina Source Materials #6* (Institute of Riverina Studies, Wagga Wagga Teachers College: Wagga Wagga, 1969), n.p. Also, the original chapter is ‘The Riverina’, in Anthony Trollope, *Australia and New Zealand* [1873] (Dawsons of Pall Mall: London, 1968), pp.327-348. Mark Twain was inspired to visit Wagga Wagga because of the Tichborne Claimant affair, a 19<sup>th</sup> century global media event in which a rotund Wagga Wagga butcher Tom Castro attempted to impersonate the effete British aristocrat Sir Roger Tichborne, a process that led to one of the most notorious cause celebre’s in British legal history. See *Following the Equator* (AMS Press: New York, 1971), pp.156-160.

<sup>63</sup> An extended examination of this ‘rural settlement’ is in M. Williams, ‘More and Smaller is Better: Australian Rural Settlement 1788-1914’, in J. M. Powell & M. Williams (eds.), *Australian Space Australian Time: Geographical Perspectives* (Oxford University Press: Melbourne, 1975), pp.61-103.

<sup>64</sup> Gregory Paul Caicco, ‘Socrates in the Agora’, in Alberto Pérez-Gómez & Stephen Parcell (eds.), *Chora 2: Intervals in the Philosophy of Architecture* (McGill-Queen’s University Press: Montreal, 1996), pp.2-16.

<sup>65</sup> Paul Carter, *Repressed Spaces: The Poetics of Agoraphobia* (Reaktion Books: London, 2002), p.131. [Italics added].



This is the kind of metro-centric knowledge that, as Georg Simmel tells us, was characterised ‘by the preponderance of what one may call the “objective spirit” over the “subjective spirit.”’ This “objective” spirit was one contrived in city spaces, a differentiation that ‘transformed the struggle with nature for livelihood into an inter-human struggle for gain, which here is not granted by nature but by other men.’<sup>66</sup> Sometimes narrowly focussed, scientifically inscribed, metropolitan based forms of knowledge have raised the stakes in Distance Education: knowledge of actual conditions on the ground, in a particular place, conditions largely denied or ignored, or metered out from the space of the control-tower (but conditions omnipresent in all localities and regions), remains a key arbitrator of power in larger global cities like Sydney, and to a lesser degree in the more minor capitals of Australia’s federation. The metro-centric view is usually turned *outward* onto the global sphere, and before that it was to the markets of the British Empire (at least in the Australian context). While the tracks between the metropolises and the regions are awash with pilgrims in all directions, power (in most of its guises) has stayed resolutely metro-centric, a dichotomy that is further consolidated with the advance of the ‘global city’. This imbalance has authorised and legitimated a sense of bucolic idiocy and brutality, a view that pervades a great many discussions of all things rural, regional, and local,<sup>67</sup> while also consolidating an ‘inevitability’, ‘a real reality’, to the inter-subjective and inter-communal competitiveness that both cognitively and empirically characterises capitalism and sometimes literacy as a set of systemic arrangements.

Wrapped in this imbalance, though, there is also an inward gaze, one turned in on the metropolis itself and a form of solipsistic objectification that helps propagate an address to the regions in the form of some well crafted lip-service and just enough pork-barrelling largess to keep the regional citizens under its political control coming to the voting booths. The all-consuming concentrations of power in a range of singular metropolitan locations around the globe, now a 24/7 operation, has, in part, been drained out of local and regional contexts, as much as it has been drained into a metropolis’ own most immediate local and/or regional context. (Once again [mid 2005] there are arguments between the Federal and State Government levels over a re-distribution of power upwards in the industrial relations arena). Certainly it’s possible to reverse the situation and consider the cities as regions as Frank Stilwell does in *Changing Track*, who then goes on to analyse former Labor Senator Chris Hurford’s plan: *Regional States of Australia: A Proposal*, a plan that tentatively puts a federated regionalism on the agenda of Australian political discussions.<sup>68</sup> Once again, in straightforward politico-structural terms,

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<sup>66</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. & editing Kurt H. Wolff (The Free Press: New York, 1950), pp.421 & 420.

<sup>67</sup> On this theme of bucolic idiocy I’ve been influenced by the *On Our Selection* franchise of early Australian movies, *Deliverance*, and Lorna Kaino’s essay, ‘Woop Woop(s) and Woolly Film-making: Rural Representations of Culture in Contemporary Australian Feature Film’, in *Rural Society*, vol.10, #3, 2000, pp.319-327.

<sup>68</sup> Frank Stilwell, *Changing Track: A New Political Economic Direction for Australia* (Pluto Press: Sydney, 2000), pp.260-261.



there is this tension between centre and periphery, one exacerbated in Australia where the third level of local government has no constitutional power-base, and as such is a level almost totally beholden to State and Federal government money in the form of tax handouts or grants, usually with strings attached.<sup>69</sup>

*Changing Track* is also a reminder that agitation between various regions and the centre has a long and sometimes forgotten echo in Australian history: the Riverina, New England, Northern Queensland, the Northern Rivers, the Western Australian goldfields, even Western Australia itself have sometimes had recurring episodes of regional statism, producing strident demands for a re-evaluation of the current Federal/State dominated structures of centralised political power.<sup>70</sup> Currently, these ideas/demands are not a wholly mainstream activity but calls for a structural transformation of the Australian polity are circulating at a lower registrar of intensity.<sup>71</sup> The spatial concentration of these various metropolitan powers, as they are ranged against their more powerless regional others, is also part of how Zigmunt Bauman characterises the current relationship between the powerful and powerless under the auspices of globalisation:

The creation of wealth is on the way to finally emancipating itself from its perennial – constraining and vexing – connections with making things, processing materials, creating jobs and managing people. The old rich needed the poor to make and keep them rich. That dependency at all times mitigated the conflict of interest and prompted some effort, however tenuous, to care. The new rich do not need the poor any more.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ian Gray confirms this widely agreed upon fact, writing that, 'Although they receive federal funding, our 900 local councils have no recognition in the federal Constitution'. See, 'What is Regionalism?', in Wayne Hudson & A. J. Brown (eds.), *Restructuring Australia: Regionalism, Republicanism and Reform of the Nation-State* (The Federation Press: Sydney, 2004), p.19. In the same volume legal scholar Cheryl Saunders examines the constitutional difficulties of changing the existing political structure to a regional one: 'The Constitutional Framework for a Regional Australia?', pp.63-77.

<sup>70</sup> There is an extensive retinue of work on the 'New States' movement. For another starting point see: Andrew Beer, Alaric Maude & Bill Pritchard, *Developing Australia's Regions*, p.43. Other examples include U. R. Ellis, *New Australian States* (Endeavour Press: Sydney, 1933); Leighton Frappell, *Lords of the Saltbush Plain: Frontier Squatters and the Pastoral Independence Movement 1856-1866* (Australian Scholarly Publishing: Melbourne, 2003), an examination of Riverina squatters' agitation for an independent state during this period of serious uncertainty over land tenure.

<sup>71</sup> Of particular interest here is Geoffrey Blainey's discussion in, 'Why Every Major Region Should be its Own Region', in Wayne Hudson & A. J. Brown (eds.), *Restructuring Australia*, pp.26-37. For earlier accounts see Chilla Bulbeck, 'Regionalism', in James Walter (ed.), *Australian Studies: A Survey* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1989), pp.70-83; and Geoffrey Bolton's already mentioned, 'Regional History in Australia'. Related Internet sites include New States for Australia: <<http://www.newstates.com.au/index.html>>, and the Abolish the States Collective: <<http://www.asc.org.au/>>, [both accessed 25/2/2007].

<sup>72</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Globalization: The Human Consequences* (Columbia University Press: New York, 1998), p.72. This greed within reason may not be so new: in a reading of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Slavoj Žižek says that 'the inherent structural dynamic of civil society necessarily gives rise to a class excluded from its benefits', and that the existence of this class is 'a kind of 'non-Reason inherent in Reason itself' – in short, *its symptom*.' See, 'Cyberspace, Or, The Unbearable Closure of Being', in *The Plague of Fantasies* (Verso: London, 1997), p.127. [Italics in the original].





If the metro-proles think they really don't need to finance the loco-proles living in the regions, or in some way address this imbalance, then the question becomes one of spatial triage: an overt display of epistemological and political power where those with the means cross off the list the most disadvantaged and/or ecologically devastated of the regions, handing them back to nature or to some kind of lawlessness, an arena where chora-logic might even flourish. Most likely this will only happen after every last object of value is extracted from a region, a process that is a reminder of the spatially crippled sense described in Robert Pogue Harrison's account of the deforestation and desertification that has accompanied the progress of civilisation through its various stages of empire. Sublimely, Harrison notes of the centrepiece of this destruction that,

The forests were obstacles – to conquest, hegemony, homogenization. They were, in a word, asylums of cultural independence. By virtue of their buffers, they enabled communities to develop indigenously; hence they served to localise the spirit of place. This is confirmed by the fact that in their woodlands lived spirits and deities, fauns and nymphs, local to *this* place and no other.<sup>73</sup>

If the insatiability of human desire is symbiotically circumscribed by locality, in part by its complex kinship and legal networks and by the physical and spiritual resources available to its citizen-subjects and its communities, in the long-term decimation of the globe's forests (and in other forms of environmental and psychic/physical destruction) there has also been a pulverisation of, or at least severe damage done to, regional and local forms of indigenous governmentality, and of their sense- and place-making capacities. This is a result, in part, of the 'primitive savage', 'terra nullius', 'bucolic idiocy', and 'no exploitation of the land' type of arguments typical in, variously, pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial contexts. Barry Lopez's view from America on the result of this long-term destruction is worth noting in detail for its relevance to an Australian sense of regionality:

The more superficial a society's knowledge of the real dimensions of the land it occupies becomes, the more vulnerable the land is to exploitation, to manipulation for short-term gain. The land, virtually powerless before political and commercial entities, finds itself finally with no defenders. It finds itself bereft of intimates with indispensable, concrete knowledge. (Oddly, or perhaps not oddly, while American society continues to value local knowledge as a quaint part of its heritage, it continues to cut such people off from any real political power. This is as true for small farmers and illiterate cowboys as it is for American Indians, native Hawaiians, and Eskimos.)<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (University of Chicago Press: Chicago & London, 1992), p.51. [Italics in the original].

<sup>74</sup> Barry Lopez, 'The American Geographies', p.138.





One of the fears that plagues both localism/regionalism and electracy, and sucks the power out of both, is the configuration of these entities as almost primordial, and sometimes as brutal regimes of power-mongering, along with the ‘simplicity’ of their representational and attachment practices: ‘uncivilised’ multi-sensate epistemological practices like speaking and chanting, ceremony and primitive/rock art that were carried on extensively before Greco-Roman-mandated rationalities brought these sensate proclivities into progressively more literate order and subjection. To some, this discussion of regionalism and electronic communication is merely a re-run of this more brutal hand-to-mouth existence, one encased in the orally fixated myths of pre-history, and all of them supposedly nursing deep seated hatreds involving internecine battles of unending longevity and intensity. This is a myth that played itself out in real-time during the Rwandan slaughter in Africa where the Tutsis used the radio as an effective medium in encouraging their own to hack large numbers of Hutus to death with machetes. The Balkans war also fits into this category and when used as a verb – to ‘balkanize’, is a word that means ‘to divide (a region or territory) into small, often hostile, units.’<sup>75</sup> The tripartite ethnic make up of Iraq – Sunni, Kurd and Shiite – is another example in this context of the West’s inability to fully recognise these ongoing sub-national differentiations. In comparing ‘Balkanism’ with ‘Orientalism’, Slavoj Zizek goes directly to heart of this dilemma: he sees ‘the Balkans as the timeless space onto which the West projects its phantasmatic content.’<sup>76</sup> This projection neatly ‘absolves’ contemplating and owning our own political brutality and epistemological simplicity. All politics, all forms of knowledge have a distinctly local character (whether primitive, neutral, or enlightened) regardless of a city, country or overseas location. Finally, it’s time to instigate a little metro-triage of my own: *Chora-Logic* will have to leave out any analysis of metropolitan regions, mostly because I have not spent the necessary time in big cities to understand the ways in which their chora-logic (the means of their *being*, *space* and *becoming*) might be adequately expressed. A chora-logical examination of a metropolitan region will require a producer more imm(v)ersed in globalised city life than me.

## The North Rivers Region

For both Paul Carter and *Chora-Logic* though, “The democratic space of the agora turns out to be twinned with the wilderness.”<sup>77</sup> The tracks between metro-centric and loco-centric spaces of the rural variety are at least two-way and while the traffic is mostly moving

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<sup>75</sup> Petar Ramadanovic, ‘Language and Crime in Yugoslavia: Milarod Pavic’s Dictionary of the Khazars’, in David Jordan (ed.), *Regionalism Reconsidered: New Approaches to the Field* (Garland Publishing: New York & London, 1994), p.185. Australia’s *Macquarie Dictionary* also uses a similar definition for ‘balkanise’.

<sup>76</sup> Slavoj Zizek, ‘Multiculturalism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Multinational Capitalism’, in *New Left Review*, #223, 1997, p.38.

<sup>77</sup> Paul Carter, *Repressed Spaces*, p.9.



in the direction of the cities, once again there is a comparatively small though increasing volume of traffic coming out in the opposite direction. In Australia this phenomenon is known as the *Sea Change* experience, named after a highly popular television program of the same name which depicts the madly frazzled, city-based, marriage/family-breaking-down world of ‘stressed out corporate lawyer’ Laura Gibson, a fictional creation who comes to rest ‘peacefully’ as a country magistrate in the small, laid-back seaside village of Pearl Bay. This scenario is a rough narrative analogue of one of the series’ principle creative personnel: Deb Cox, who moved the location of her professional career from one of Australia’s predominant audio-visual production hubs – Melbourne – to live in seaside town of Byron Bay on the Northern Rivers of New South Wales.<sup>78</sup> Along with the Bundjalung people, and vestiges of the early European settlers (who sometimes claim to be the ‘real locals’),<sup>79</sup> as well as the alternative lifestylers who come to the area with the Woodstock-inspired Aquarius Festival in the early 1970s, the Northern Rivers is now awash with highly educated and experienced ‘sea and tree changers’ who also happen to have advanced levels of electracy sensibility tacitly coded into their CVs. These people are a regionally specific and representative sample of the cultural industries workforce whose residence in special places away from the metropolises is crucial to the debate presented in Richard Florida’s highly influential *The Rise of the Creative Class*.<sup>80</sup> And while this work makes no direct mention of electracy, the cultural work in which this ‘creative class’ is enmeshed refers clearly to electracy skills and knowledge across computing, design, technology, music, as well as theory, and more generally, a variety of arts practices. It is in this conflation of cultural, artistic and intellectual work of the creative industries with the space of the region that is the most obvious explanatory focus of *Chora-Logic* when targeting the Northern Rivers as a regional grounding point. The Northern Rivers also happens to be where I am currently domiciled, in the locality of [Mr] Bean Creek, one of the upper tributaries of the Clarence River catchment, two hours drive inland from Byron Bay.<sup>81</sup> It is from and within this local/regional context that *Chora-Logic* was produced.

A specifically important and implaced development in respect of this matrix of creative industries, new regionalism (of which the Northern Rivers is a representative example) and electracy is the Screenworks initiative. Screenworks is a Byron Bay based organisation (partly funded with Federal government money through the Regional Assistance Program) devoted to assisting the

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<sup>78</sup> Richard Conrad, ‘Byron Retains the Plot but Loses the Location’, in *Northern Star*, Saturday, June 13, 1998, p.5. A more extended examination of the ‘sea change’ phenomenon is in Ian Burnley & Peter Murphy, *Sea Change: Movement from Metropolitan to Arcadian Australia* (University of New South Wales Press: Sydney, 2004). Also, in contrast to ‘Sea Changers’, ‘Tree Changers’ refers to those who move to country rather than coastal locations.

<sup>79</sup> On this contested point of what constitutes a ‘real’ Northern Rivers local see Rob Garbutt, ‘Local Order’, in *M/C: A Journal of Media and Culture*, vol. 7, #6, 2005, available at the journal’s website: <<http://journal.media-culture.org.au/0501/08-garbutt.php>>. [Accessed 22/2/2005].

<sup>80</sup> Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (Basic Books: New York, 2002). In particular, see ‘The Power of Place’, pp.215-234 and ‘The Geography of Creativity’, pp.235-248.

<sup>81</sup> A river’s catchment is sometimes a means via which an ecological footprint is used to define a region. See John Tillman Lyle, *Design for Human Ecosystems: Landscape, Land Use, and Natural Resources* (Island Press: Washington D.C., 1999), pp.67-75.



development of an audio-visual production industry in the region. One example of a venture Screenworks has assisted is The Indigo Project. Modelled on the Scandinavian DOGME Movement, The Indigo Project aims to develop a digitally focussed, low-budget feature film industry in the Northern Rivers.<sup>82</sup> It also supports creative and industry initiatives in documentary, short drama, screenwriting and new media. In the Northern Rivers there is also a highly active visual arts and music industry profile.<sup>83</sup> At the politico-economic hub of this regional activity is the Northern Rivers Regional Development Organisation (NORED0). NORED0 is the body charged with reinvigorating the economic and cultural life of the Northern Rivers and was also responsible for commissioning Cathy Henkel's (2000) report: *Imagining the Future: Strategies for the Development of the Creative Industries in the Northern Rivers Region of NSW*.<sup>84</sup> It's the publication of this report which officially kick-starts this emphasis on the creative industries in the Northern Rivers, a space where culture can do business in and out of the region. So while the Riverina might be thought of as representing both a colonial and a nationally orientated region, the Northern Rivers area is currently one that increasingly represents this more global orientation on cultural/artistic work focussed in large part through an electrated sensibility. As these two case study selections suggest, they integrate a contrasting methodological capability into *Chora-Logic's* analysis.

It is now time to gather up into a couple of summarising paragraphs a more detailed discussion of these interrelated questions of the region, of the selection of the Riverina and the Northern Rivers as case studies, and the case study method itself, a discussion that will both pre-empt and eventually lead to the more in-depth detailing of the methodology employed in *Chora-Logic* (itself the subject of 'The Chora Meta-Physique'). While the case study method is used across a wide range of disciplines, it is most pertinently considered a *situated* method of analysis, an analysis that can, according to Robert K. Yin, be an 'holistic' or an 'embedded' one.<sup>85</sup> While the holistic case study deals more so with the selected case study as an entire entity, the embedded investigation *selects* various 'units of analysis' within that same case study. While Yin, citing historical work by Jennifer Platt, who herself 'traces the practice of doing case studies back to the conduct of life histories, the work of the Chicago school of sociology, and casework in social work' (p.12), may place too much stress (for *Chora-Logic's* concerns anyway) on the empirically predetermined quality of the case study, it is the method's 'real-life context', or its 'contextual conditions' (p.13) that make it pertinent to this particular study. The embedded and contextualised character

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<sup>82</sup> For a fuller overview of both the Screenworks initiative and The Indigo Project see the website <[www.screenworks.com.au](http://www.screenworks.com.au)>. [Accessed 13/2/04].

<sup>83</sup> An overview of the music scene on the Northern Rivers is in Chris Gibson & Daniel Robinson, 'Creative Networks in Regional Australia', in *Media International Australia*, #112, 2004, pp.83-100.

<sup>84</sup> NORED0 is another good example of how the business, finance and government sectors have taken up the *regionalisation* issue. See its website: <[www.investnorthernrivers.com.au](http://www.investnorthernrivers.com.au)>, which bills the Northern Rivers as "Australia's Premier Lifestyle and Learning Region" and from which can be downloaded a copy of the Henkel report. [Accessed 18/2/04].

<sup>85</sup> Robert K. Yin, *Case Study Research: Design and Methods* (Sage: Thousand Oaks, California, 2003), pp.42-45.



of selecting both the Riverina and the Northern Rivers as case studies (I was born in the Riverina and now live in the Northern Rivers) then has a contradictory flavour in relation to the method's claimed empiricism. On the one hand, the two regions (and my life within them) are empirical geographic facts even if their borders are not clearly delineated. On the other hand, in selecting these two regions I have made myself a central character in both the research method and its theorisation and narrativisation. This is quite deliberately a specific choice given that one's own 'real-life context' as a person, thinker, researcher, as an artist and a writer, is an important aspect of the overall chora method. Because I am myself implaced, virtually and in reality, within the case studies I've selected, the analysis in *Chora-Logic* will of necessity be partial and subjective, utterly qualitative rather than empirically rigid; that is, the selection of the 'units of analysis' within the selected case studies will be idiosyncratically guided by what '*I happen to unearth*' in the specific spacetime allocated to the production of *Chora-Logic*.<sup>86</sup>

Furthermore, Yin's conflation of the case study method with the region as a potentially limiting empirical fact will not suffice in this study largely because, 'They [regions] are problematic heuristic devices for the study of global geographic and cultural processes. Regions are best viewed as initial contexts for themes that generate variable geographies, rather than as fixed geographies marked by pre-given themes. These themes are equally "real," equally coherent, but are results of our interests and not their causes.'<sup>87</sup> Keeping in mind Appadurai's point of generating a flexible epistemology in considering the region as a heuristic device, alternatively then, by positing the Riverina and the Northern Rivers as 'case studies', *Chora-Logic* cannot limit itself to the specific 'units of analysis' that are contained *within* these historical/geographical entities. Rather, the heuristic quality of these regional selections (that is, the specific idiosyncratically collected data that emerges out of the research into the two case studies) serve as 'lines of flight', as variable means of arrival, connection and departure to a larger ongoing dialogue with and among other regions across the globe. In effect, the specific use of the Northern Rivers and the Riverina as 'case studies' in 'Rough Grid: Electrate Regionality' is designed as a possible adjunctive contribution to what Allen J. Scott calls 'The Global Mosaic of Regional Economies.'<sup>88</sup> 'Rough Grid' is a small contribution to this larger discussion constituted by this idea of a 'global mosaic of regions', and not just their politico-economic profile or the metro-centric bias that sometimes accompanies dialogue on the global/regional nexus. It is a form of case study technique that could be termed 'inter-

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<sup>86</sup> The full text of the latter quote is from Gregory Ulmer: 'In teletheory, the two styles of cognition—analysis and pattern—are not mutually exclusive, but in alliance. Thus, mystory emphasizes precisely what *I happen to unearth*', in *Teletheory*, p.83. [Italics in the original].

<sup>87</sup> Arjun Appadurai, 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', in *Public Culture*, vol. 12, #1, 2000, p.7.

<sup>88</sup> 'Lines of flight' is an ongoing theme in Gilles Deleuze & Félix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. Brian Massumi (University of Minneapolis Press: Minneapolis & London, 1987). Allen J. Scott discusses this question of 'The Global Mosaic of Regional Economies', in *Regions and the World Economy: The Coming Shape of Global Production, Competition and Political Order* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1998), pp.47-73. Cultural production figures as a significant component of this politico-economic analysis framed by a global understanding of regions.



regionalism’ or ‘global regionalism’, a method of understanding that promotes the idea that regions the world over constitute membership of a consultative network whereby the exchange of specific and general knowledge about regions, regionalism, regionalisation and regionality is generated. By invoking the case study technique in this way, while utterly implaced in person and method, the aim is to encourage an ‘exploratory’ outlook (*Case Study Research*, pp.5-6), rather than a definitive conclusion to the core proposition of *Chora-Logic*, and, to reiterate, that there is an amorphous but emerging relationship between electracy as a globally mobile, spatialised epistemology, and the psychic disposition of regionality, the latter a designation that points to the propensity of citizen-subjects to *think and feel regionally* in and through the ambit of a glocalised political economy and culture. The ambition is not so much to prove the hypothesis but, more modestly, to put it on the agenda as the beginning point to a crucial discussion about how citizen-subjects now make decisions regarding their affiliation to place and space and the type of knowledge they use to do so. As far as I can tell this speculative proposition has not even reached the rhetorical starting gate. As a document then, *Chora-Logic* is aimed at initiating discussion rather than concluding it.

### *The Ethical Affectivity of Regional Implacement*

This perennial conundrum entraining knowledge-making to spatial affiliation nevertheless always has an ethical poignancy about it. This is a theme worthily refracted through Robin Ferrell’s deeply moving essay reflecting on her own childhood memory of living in Pinjarra (a small town in the Peel Inlet region south of Perth in Western Australia) during 1970.<sup>89</sup> The essay examines the profound sense of shame she finds in this heritage. This shame arises out of the ambush and massacre of a group of some seventy local Aborigines (mainly women and children Ferrell thinks) by the powers that be in the colony of Western Australia: Governor Stirling, Thomas Peel and a Captain Meares, among others in 1834 (p.27). It’s thought the massacre was an act of retaliation after the murder in nearby Perth of two white settlers by the Aborigines. Ferrell follows this interpretation of the “Battle of Pinjarra” by re-contextualising another post-colonial intrusion into Pinjarra by the giant American resource multinational, Alcoa, who set up shop there after the locality was discovered to be sitting on a globally significant bauxite deposit. As Ferrell puts it: ‘With hindsight, we might attribute the attack to the violence of colonisation, which despite its pious dressing as an attempt to extend the gift of civilisation to the savages, was, in fact, an act of conquest’ (p.27). Pinjarra’s shame then is an *affect* of this savagery on the part of the colonial officials and is still palpable nearly 170

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<sup>89</sup> Robyn Ferrell, ‘Pinjarra 1970: *Shame and the Country Town*’, in *Cultural Studies Review*, vol.9, #1, 2003, pp.23-34.





years on from the “Battle of Pinjarra”, as the massacre has come to be named and known. Ferrell’s experience is a subject-study in understanding this *affect* in relation to the history and memory of both massacre-and-mining in the town: ‘For affect is synesthetic, implying a participation of the senses in each other: the measure of a living thing’s potential interactions is its ability to transform the effects of one sensory mode into those of another.’<sup>90</sup> From reading *Parables for the Virtual*, *affect* is at its most potent intensity in that split-second gap between perception and cognition, a gap still wide enough to soak up a great bulk of sensory information at the body’s disposal, and a bulk that simply bypasses the limited speed of the brain and the imagination’s ability to cohere it into consciousness, in short to codify it.

‘Pinjarra 1970’ brings to light some of this restless *affective* energy of the body either in its interminably differential state of becoming, in its mentally intense cognitive synthesis of a life lived on the run, and in its ‘unbecoming’, the one surety of the future.<sup>91</sup> ‘Pinjarra 1970’ also brings to light a shame that resides in almost every *body* in this country. *Affect* might be emotion, it might the hair standing on end, a surging attraction or repulsion; these are only suggestions, for there is no clear definitional status for the term *affect*, something that further intensifies its *affective* quality. Massumi again makes this affective quality a little clearer saying: ‘... the skin is faster than the word,’<sup>92</sup> an idea traceable to the porously haptic traits Didier Anzieu gives to the ‘skin ego.’<sup>93</sup> This Pinjarra narrative is a specific example of the idea that the literate imagination of the measured and narrowly coherent iteration now plays second fiddle to the dominance of an *affectively* and an overriding *synaesthetic interactivity* of an electrosphere with global ambitions and limitations. Added to these epistemological transformations is the literate imagination’s centrality to the demolition of local and/or regional constituencies that governed indigenous politico-structural arrangements pre- and sometimes post-contact.<sup>94</sup> When Ferrell walked down the main street to her school in Pinjarra in 1970 she didn’t read, or was taught about the massacre there; unwittingly, the *affective* knowledge of it crept in through her skin accumulating a sense of shame durable across a lifetime. There is a similar sense of shame in

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<sup>90</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p.35.

<sup>91</sup> I take this idea of ‘unbecoming’ from Eric Michaels as he recounts his slow death from AIDS in diary form in, *Unbecoming: An AIDS Diary* (EmPress Publishing: Sydney, 1990).

<sup>92</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, p.25.

<sup>93</sup> Didier Anzieu, *The Skin Ego*, trans. Chris Turner (Yale University Press: New Haven & London, 1989).

<sup>94</sup> Robert M. Cover gives an outline of how legal forms of literacy *authorise* the violence of the state, and of those people: police, judges, lawyers, prison officers and support staff, whose actions ground this violence in actual behaviours. See, ‘Violence and the Word’, in *The Yale Law Journal*, vol. 95, #8, 1986, pp.1601-1629. Another variation on this theme of legal literacy is Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society* (Cambridge University Press: Cambridge, 1986); especially ‘The Letter of the Law’, pp.127-170.





Narrandera where a massacre at the nearby Murrumbidgee River's Murdering Island in the early 1840s (one that remains officially unnamed) continues to haunt its localising capacities.

A possible model for transforming this shame into an almost utopian realisation of regionalism in Australia is the incorporation of the knowledge we have of pre-contact Aboriginal geo-political structures. The map accompanying *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* pictures this indigenously invented 'regional imaginary'. This regionalised geo-political structure is broken down along tribal/geographic lines and developed over the long period Australian Aborigines have engaged the country in habitation. In the area in which I live, the Bundjalung people occupy a region just a little south of Brisbane in the north, to somewhere near Grafton in the south, with the Great Dividing Range as a western border, and the Pacific Ocean as the eastern limit.<sup>95</sup> In any understanding of politico-structural change in the Australian context, the politico-structural cosmology of Indigenous forms of governance is an important element of its prehistory, not just Westminster style parliamentary democracy and/or the American constitution.

## Regionality

It would be getting off-track though to blindly equate the more nationally fixed forms of Western, or European forms of territorial demarcation or autonomy with those of tribal societies. W. E. H. Stanner has written that 'Aboriginal Territorial Organisation' ranged over various spatial categories ('estate, range, domain and regime'), the demarcation of which was variably influenced by ecological imperatives (the availability of water, flora and fauna, drought etc.), totemic affiliations, sacred-ceremonial connections, complex kinship and political networks both within and with surrounding local groups, amongst other elements. This is not to suggest a free-range nomadic territorial arrangement in this pre-contact Australian context but,

The known facts of inter-group relations simply do not sort with the idea of precise, rigid boundaries jealously upheld in all circumstances. And the idea that a region was cut up, as it were without remainder, into exclusive but contiguous descent-group estates, could not have sufficed for the dynamic aboriginal life we know to have existed.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> David Horton (General Editor), *The Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia* (Aboriginal Studies Press, Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies: Canberra, 1994). This question of tribal boundaries is examined in greater detail in Norman B. Tindale, *Aboriginal Tribes of Australia: Their Terrain, Environmental Controls, Distribution, Limits, and Proper Names* (University of Los Angeles Press: Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1974).

<sup>96</sup> W. E. H. Stanner, 'Aboriginal Territorial Organization: Estate, Range, Domain and Regime', in *Oceania*, vol. 36, #1, 1966, pp.11-12.



By invoking this territorial flux in an oral epistemological and tribal socio-political context there is an explicit point to be made, one that brings us again to this current global milieu. In Paul Carter's intervention into the Northern Rivers region as part of the 'References' project, he says that 'Indigenous people fighting for their survival may have a point when they insist that their identity is regionally grounded.'<sup>97</sup> Carter's scepticism about the prospects for a regional identity (it can easily be turned into a 'marketing strategy') is somewhat misplaced though. Every human context (tribal, familial, military, social-democratic, rural, connurban, suburban, even loving relationships etc.) has a role in identity formation, a dis/accumulation that is ongoing even in the face of monumental sophistry, public relations campaigns, and even ideological rigidity. The term we can apply to this process of identity formation in regional contexts is *regionality*, a designation that differentiates this process from the earlier more politically/administratively focussed concepts of *regionalism* and *regionalisation*.

Terry Smith calls into question (from both an art-philosophical, and an art-making point of view) the preponderance of these 'political/administrative' categories of *regionalism* and *regionalisation* when he says,

The main problem in this context is that regionalism as a political/administrative category is driving what is most usefully a geographic, at most, cultural category. 'Regionality' is a better term for what is positive and self-constructive, rather than contested and dependent, in this equation. Human communities generate geographies of delimitation and exchange which do not match political/administrative zones of convenience.<sup>98</sup>

All of the previously mentioned elements of the region (as the site of a trialectical means of spatial engagement, political demarcation, its everyday lived-world ambience, its etymology, its built and ecological groundedness, the social and political ostracising of the region as a primitive category, and its relational qualities, for instance) hark back to this oral/tribal context, and in turn, all of which re-emerge in the current upsurge of interest in the region with the advent of globalisation. The current resurgence of interest in the power dynamics of region(ality) all over the world harks back to this tribally articulated, politically anthropologised context, with the latter a point fruitfully reworked by Jose Gil in *Metamorphoses of the Body*. In light of this understanding of regionality, it is now time return to Gil's conception of 'infralanguage', or more accurately in this context, the infra-electrate complex.

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<sup>97</sup> Paul Carter, 'Virtually a Paradise: Grounding the Region', in *Periphery*, #19, May, 1994, p.7.

<sup>98</sup> Terry Smith, 'Between Regionality and Regionalism: Middle Ground or Limboland?', in *Periphery*, #40/41, Spring/Summer, 1999/2000, p.7. Smith also discusses the relationship between 'Regionality and Aboriginal Art', pp.6-7.



In this liminal zone *in-between* literacy and electracy, and a planetary polis poised *in-between* the *inter-national* and the *inter-regional* and the global, where electracy (as an object of enquiry) has little in the way of a communally agreed upon taxonomic or definitional status, where the correspondence between an object or idea and its representation remains more open than closed, where a more collective notion of production unsettles the concept of a lone author whose copyrightable artefacts are more easily commodified and privatised, where even the very idea that electronic knowledge could be a legitimate epistemology is sometimes ridiculed and satirised, and where the global zeitgeist is wrapped in fear and insecurity, here at the point of these oscillating interstitial junctures is where an infra-electrate understanding flourishes. Herein, the relations between signs and their electronic signifiers are better able to float free of their socially and/or epistemologically agreed upon meanings, where experimentation with the whole process of meaning-making comes about in part because of the synaesthetic motility of our sense-making capacities that are now, more than ever, less circumscribed by stringent links to authority and tradition while at the same time acknowledging that these links are not forsaken. As with nearly all forms of meaning-making, electracy is both an intra- and an inter-signifying practice. In periods of socio-political and epistemological upheaval though, intra-signifying practices (that is, the cross-pollination and synaesthetic intermingling within the range of a body's sensory modalities, a process that occurs before an inter-signifying practice brings to cognitive fruition a material or signified product of knowledge) provides a psychic space, even an outlet for these additional chaotic intensities attendant to potentially globalising forms of electronic power and knowledge. This is also an electronically articulated interstitial zone that is compounded by some forms of literate knowledge that are either wilfully or blindly obdurate in their meaning-making practices.<sup>99</sup> Briefly, without intensifying social, political, economic, cultural and environmental upheavals, an infra-electrate complex would not be able to gather the force being argued for it herein.

Here too *Chora-Logic* is also at a crossroads, or rather an X-point. The current global re-awakening to the region and regionality (that is, the qualities of identification imbued in a body by virtue of local/regional situatedness and expressed and practised across a gamut of psychological, ethical, moral, cultural, politico-economic and social relations) is connected to this question of infra-electracy attendant to electrate knowledge and thus also to this almost primal conception of regional space. This is no longer a tribal primitivism of the traditional anthropological kind though. The one element that held the citizen-subject in the thrall of the nation-state was the Keynesian imperative that if a person fell by the wayside this state's benevolent component would kick in till such a time that they could get back on their feet. In an economically and culturally formulated neo-liberal global context, articulated along World Bank and

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<sup>99</sup> This 'decay in public language' is characterised in Don Watson's, *Death Sentence: The Decay of Public Language* (Random House: Sydney, 2003).



International Monetary Fund guidelines, the nation-state has retreated from this position as the citizen-saviour of last resort. In short, the nationally focussed welfare state is in decline. As a result a citizen-subject is now, theoretically at least, more free in one respect: the retreat of the nation state from the active welfare of its poorer citizens and the structural advantaging of its richer ones allows for a greater variety of allegiances to prosper. Certainly, a tribal and the current global context are very different, but it is here in this juxtaposition that the *balkanising* region is trivialised as yet another version of an abject primitivism. This kind of rhetorical strategy, naturally enough, has the effect of undermining or eradicating a developing sense of regionality, further defined here as a deep psychical attachment to the region of one's birth, and/or the region through which one is travelling, and/or the specific region of one's residence or sedentary existence. Regardless of the balkanising or tribalising venom aimed at all things regional, *regionality* is one such increasingly important option in the political allegiance stakes. The more organically, bottom-up focused space of the region, one less constricted by legal, political, and social obligations of a national type and more relationally orientated towards a global rather than an international understanding, emerges as exactly the right context for an infra- conception of electracy to materialise. For both *Chora-Logic* and chora-logic, then, the juxtaposition of an ethic of regionality and an infra-conception of electracy are the necessary pre-requisites to understanding how a reassessment of a literate based method might proceed with chora as a key to its methodological program. This is most certainly not to preclude other ways of understanding the region or electracy because it must be reiterated again and again that both categories are open to multiple interpretations and understandings, neither are singularly self-contained objects of analysis. This just happens to be the option I formulated in the specific spatio-temporal crosscurrents I found myself inhabiting; it is also highly possible another body located elsewhere might invent the same or a similar interpretation for chora-logic or, more likely, arrive at quite a different set of outcomes.

### Finally ... ?

What then is the explicit relationship between the geo-political discipline of chorography (the systematic study and analysis of regions) and chora-logic? If literacy is the technology that freezes and exteriorises the Word (either as that of God, the Papacy, or a centralising ideologue),<sup>100</sup> chora-logic methodologically 'structures' electracy as an always fluid and tentative definition of the body's

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<sup>100</sup> One good analysis of the relationship between literacy and religion is Jack Goody, *The Logic of Writing and the Organization of Society*, especially "The Word of God", pp.1-44.



physically and psychically delimited, knowledge-producing state, defined primarily in relation to its place-making sensibilities. This shift in communicative arrangements returns the multi-sensate motility of the human body and its mnemo-technical capacities to a pre-eminent position in the production of knowledge. For *Chora-Logic* (and others), memory displaces the hierarchy of any abstracted methodology (literacy or the scientific method in this case) with the actual contingencies of space, or, the actual *place* of the memorising, knowledge-producing body.<sup>101</sup>

*Chora-Logic* attempts to identify and offer a possible entry point into this significant trouble spot in our ‘political unconscious’: the multiple disjunctions that occur between a nationalist ethos and literacy, and its patch-like evolution into a planetary polity based on regionality/electracy/globalisation. As stated and implied throughout this discussion, communicative and political structures are hyper-linked. In current connections between the two, link-rot has set in. Saskia Sassen sound-bites the problem neatly: ‘The political system, even in the most highly developed countries, is operating in a pre-digital era.’<sup>102</sup> Also, via a reading of Australian politician Barry Jones’ important book *Sleepers Wake!* (an early Australian rendering of the shift from manual to mental labour, from the primary, manufacturing and services industries to the ‘information economy’), McKenzie Wark makes the point that, ‘While other institutions have modified themselves, often beyond recognition, in order to make the transition to cyberspace, Parliament has changed only incrementally.’<sup>103</sup> Equally worrying, and still relevant despite the advent of the Internet and the continuing democratic appeals that surround it, is James Monaco’s comment that, ‘Not only in the U.S. and Europe, but throughout the world, the media – newspapers, magazines, films, radio, television, and recordings – have been and continue to be effectively governed by a narrowly defined upper-middle class male white executive caste.’<sup>104</sup> *Chora-Logic* is aimed roundly at questioning this vexatious aspect of the following political↔communicative interchange: the largely moribund state of our political institutions and communicative structures, and the compelling dynamism that an incrementally advancing state of electrated regionality brings to the psychic, social, cultural, biological, economic and political *planet* we all now inhabit.

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<sup>101</sup> The Greek word for place is *chôros*, an indication of the persistence we direct to the ‘sense of place’ debate. Furthermore, for an illuminating analysis of the role ‘memory-work’ plays in the domestic production and consumption of knowledge via family photos see, Annette Kuhn, *Family Secrets: Acts of Memory and Imagination* (Verso: London, 2002), in particular, ‘From Home to Nation’, pp.147-169.

<sup>102</sup> Saskia Sassen, ‘Electronic Space and Power’, in *Journal of Urban Technology*, vol. 4, #1, 1997, p.15.

<sup>103</sup> McKenzie Wark, ‘Island in the Stream: On Being a Small Country in the Global Village’, in Nareen Chitty (ed.), *Mapping Globalization* (Southbound: Penang, 2002), p.20. And, Barry Jones, *Sleepers, Wake! Technology and the Future of Work* (Oxford University Press: Melbourne, 1982).

<sup>104</sup> James Monaco, ‘Mediography: In the Middle of Things’, in James Monaco (ed.), *Media Culture* (Delta: New York, 1978), p.5.





Finally ... this whole study, not just its regional or electrate aspect, is constituted firmly in what Jürgen Habermas, and others, are calling ‘the postnational constellation.’<sup>105</sup> This view foregrounds the idea that a national political formation, and by inference its literate epistemological infrastructure, can no longer be dominant formations in the ordering of any given polis under the prevailing conditions of electro-globalisation. [“OK, enough said ... move it along!” Ed.]. The principal task of *Chora-Logic* is to point out one idiosyncrat’s view of the entwined, sometimes enlightening, and the sometimes diabolical relationships among regionality/electracy/globalisation and their possible emerging roles in this ‘postnational constellation’, largely in an effort to understand the relationship between the thought and action constituted by everyday phenomena and how this might or might not contribute to long-term macro-political change. And in being an idiosyncrat’s view it remains suggestive of further thought and action rather than prescriptive.

Given that *Chora-Logic* questions some common understandings of both political and epistemological structure, it is important now to micro-analytically interrogate how its method – ‘The Chora Meta-Physique’ – might fit in, through, and around, as well as contradict this constellation, while perennially recognising that for the most part chora-logic is itself an idea powerless to satisfy any totalising quest at comprehension, or even a solitarily conceived and unified conclusion. This is a direction of thinking, feeling and acting distinguished by increasingly important and escalating relations between an infra-conception of electracy and tacit/codified forms of knowledge, between what we knowingly transcribe about a place (or more broadly, a space) and what we un.consciously and instinctively/intuitively feel and think of it, and the constantly recurring efforts of intermediation that vice-versa translates the *lived life* into and out of the *represented life*. This is both a personal/collective and a competitive/co-operative struggle for every/body on the planet, one increasingly played out through a matrix of local/regional concerns sometimes mediating, sometimes being mediated by an electrate epistemology whose global demeanour is also often slanted towards an expanded understanding that incorporates both cosmologically *and* nanologically orientated rhythms and textures. In short, an electrate epistemology re-acquaints us with this globally expanded ‘logic’ of the region, variously a/synchronised to the reality of an implaced spatio-temporalised actuality *and* the always morphing, relativising virtuality of an electronically codified timespace cosmology.

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<sup>105</sup> Jürgen Habermas, ‘The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy’, in *The Postnational Constellation: Political Essays*, trans. & editing Max Pensky (MIT Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2001), pp.58-112. Secondly, see Zygmunt Bauman, ‘After the Nation-State – What?’, in *Globalization: The Human Consequences*, pp.55-76. And lastly, Manuel Castells, ‘A Powerless State?’, in *The Power of Identity*, pp.243-308. Undoubtedly, we are in the middle of an extensive debate about what might constitute the structure (and play) of any future electrospherically articulated global polis and the integration (and modularity) of its various implacements.