

RERM guest editorial

Space, place and body: temporary coalitions, nodes in a network

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The articles in this collection share a concern for place, space and bodies as frameworks for thinking about and conducting educational research. The authors range in experience from senior academics, independent educators, beginning and emerging new researchers spanning a range of educational sectors. The articles originate from connections forged within and between Australia and northern countries with visits back and forth between 2004 and 2010. Some of the writers have met each other in these travels and others have not. All have encountered and participated in some way in the work of the *space place and body* research group, which originated in 2007 as a named research 'node' at Monash University.

The *space place and body group* formed as a result of a process designed to re-imagine research in the Faculty of Education at Monash University in order to address 'the big questions of our time'. As a leading global university with campuses in Asia and Europe as well as several in Australia, the Dean of the Faculty cited recent evidence that the field of educational research had become too narrowly focused and that new approaches were needed to enliven the field and move it forward. Individualistic research was no longer supported and groups were formed organically around coalitions of interest. The purpose of the *space place and body group* was to come together to generate new conceptual, theoretical and methodological resources within the core concepts of space, place and body by collaborating across our differences. In the early phase of our development we focused on linked identity (ontological) and knowledge (epistemological) work, at the intersection of postcolonial and poststructural approaches to place in educational research. A specific interest in alternative and creative methodologies emerged from these onto-epistemological activities.

As part of our process we initiated temporary definitions of space, place and body, to appear on our group's website drawing on examples from our collaborative projects. The text was accompanied by a series of images, which were as important in conveying these early meanings-in-progress as the words. Our website was intended to share these ideas as 'a stammer', a work in progress rather than the closed texts of experts. We invited others to participate in a wider conversation of global exchange towards their ongoing evolution.

Space

A classroom is a space that is co-produced as a place by teacher and students and constituted anew each time a new class moves into that space. A classroom only becomes a place temporarily while it is the home of a particular collectivity of children described as a 'class', and their classroom teacher, the teacher who belongs in and co-creates the place of that class. Children and teacher/s mutually understand, invent and reinvent subjectivities for occupying that collectively constituted space.

(Adapted from 'Forty Teachers Go to School').

Place

Place occupies the space between grounded physical reality and the metaphysical space of representation, facilitating conversations across disciplinary boundaries, conversations which are imperative in addressing questions about human interventions in social and ecological systems. Imagine the river without a map, having it in your head. That's how people found their way if they got lost. The little ones would start with a small cloak, as they got older they could come along with it on, just throw it down and talk with the mob. This is my country, where I come from. (Treaahna Hamm, possum cloak artist, from *Bubbles on the Surface*: a place pedagogy of the Narran Lake).

Body

Much of our learning about space and place is through our immediate sensory experiences. The weather, and the quality of the air and clouds, the sound of the frogs, the smell of the tadpole holes ... It is place learning that derives from a deep, embodied intimacy. This place learning gives rise to a different ontology, an ontology of self becoming-other in the space between self and a natural world, composed of humans and non-human others, animate and inanimate; animals and plants, weather, rocks, trees. (from the Morwell River Wetlands project with Commercial Rd Primary School).

Other temporary coalitions formed in connections with the *Space place and body* group in Australia, Sweden, Norway, Canada and the UK, forming nodes of knowledge production on a loosely held network operating at different speeds and intensities. These formed as we attended and presented at conferences, visited universities during study leave and developed collaborative projects.

The way that we conceptualise these nodes and networks as flows and intensities adds to the thinking about the nature of collaborative knowledge production with and for place. Another way to imagine them is through the concept of Australian Indigenous storylines, which always remain connected to the materiality of specific local places. Indigenous storylines are lines of travel that traverse large tracts of country linking the special places formed by the creation ancestors as they travelled across the land. These special places, or intensities, are marked in ceremony when song, story, body and ground symbols come together in a particular place. The place is sung into being each time the ceremony is performed. We could think of this Special Edition as another intensity within lines of connection transformed in cyberspace while still informed by the body/places of our collaborations.

An onto-epistemology of the body

The onto-epistemological work of the *Space place and body* group was significantly informed by Elizabeth's Grosz's early writings on the relation between bodies and language. It was important to understand the genealogy of these ideas from their emergence in the particular space/time conjunction of early second wave feminism that continues to inform the methodological work in this Special Edition today. Feminist poststructural theory reconceptualised the work of key male theorists such as Foucault, Freud, Lacan and Derrida with the fundamental aim of deconstructing the biological determinism of the male/female binary. Never a closed category however, feminist poststructural theory arose as a living dynamic system of thought that has evolved along many different pathways. It continues to emerge in new forms described as 'post-poststructural' today, which can be traced back to its beginnings in the feminist body theory of this time. The category of the body has been the most radical and productive for these new forms of thinking and feminist body theory continues to inform the new relational materialist methodological work today.

Grosz's first published work in feminist body theory began with the French feminist philosophers Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray and Michelle Le Doeuff (Grosz, 1987). This first book, 'Three French Feminists' began, like many of her published works, in her intellectual conversations with similar groups to the Space place and body group as a collaborative but distinctly pedagogical process. These particular feminist philosophers were chosen for study because each of them fundamentally challenged the works of influential

psychoanalytic theorists of the time. The episteme began with Freud whose theoretical contributions fundamentally depended on the women who engaged in psychoanalysis with him and in the process translated somatic symptoms produced by repressed trauma into language. Lacan followed Freud to develop a highly sophisticated albeit masculinist understanding of processes of human development, in particular the insertion of the child into the symbolic order of language at 'the mirror stage'. Grosz was interested in understanding the distinctive scholarship of each of the French feminist philosophers chosen for study but more significantly for our genealogical tracing, summarised the collective thrust of their ideas: a fundamental antihumanism and materialism, a recognition of the powers of prevailing (patriarchal) modes of representation and knowledge, a recognition of the cultural debt owed to women and maternity, [and] a concern with the social, institutional and discursive construction of sexual identity' (Grosz, 1987, viii).

Each of these four elements has been taken up in her later work to interrogate philosophy from a female embodied perspective. It is the focus on 'antihumanism and materialism' through which the primacy of the enlightenment male subject as a singular, rational, autonomous human being is fundamentally deconstructed, and the challenge to the related modes of representation through which this subject is constituted that is of most enduring relevance in the genealogy to our current thinking. Antihumanism challenges the dominance of human beings in both discursive formations and practical actions-in-the-world, and materialism focuses on the possibility of alternative relations with 'the flesh of the world' through different ways of being and knowing. Grosz's original work is to select and filter their ideas through the lens of the body to develop a loosely held theory of corporeality that was to extend in other lines of flight in her own work and the influence other feminist scholars in a multitude of directions:

Conventionally conceived within the history of philosophy as the polar opposite of mind, corporeality, or the body, is associated with a series of negative terms within pairs of binary opposites. Where the mind is traditionally correlated with reason, subject, consciousness, interiority, activity, and masculinity, the body is implicitly associated with the opposites of these terms, passion, object, non-conscious, exteriority, passivity and femininity. Where mind is the provenance of philosophy and psychology, the body is regarded as the object of biological and medical investigation. Mind is understood as distinctively human, the motor of progress and the cause and measure of human achievement. By contrast, the body is assumed to be brute, animalistic, inert, outside of history, culture and socio-political life (Grosz, 1987, xiv).

The most immediate trajectory of this thinking is published in *Volatile Bodies* (1994) which interrogates the work of a number of male philosophers who are chosen for their particular contributions to the development of feminist body theory. 'This book is a kind of experiment in inversion. It is based on a wager: ... that all the effects of subjectivity, all the significant facets and complexities of subjects, can be as adequately explained using the subject's corporeality as a framework' (Grosz, 1994, vii).

Grosz's latest work, *Chaos, territory, art* (2008) informed by all of her previous work and by the philosophers of her most generative engagements, Deleuze and Irigaray, is the first to address the question of place (as territory). The book, however, is not about place as such but about a new theory of Art as emerging from the excess of sexual production, a territorial reclamation of the self and sexual difference.

Body/place theory and practice

Margaret Somerville's distinctive contribution to feminist body theory is to link it to place. Her work in body/landscape began with her early collaborations with Aboriginal co-researchers when she was initiated into seeing the world through the lens of place (Somerville 1999). Her continuing collaborative research with Aboriginal knowledge holders and artists offers alternative ways of thinking about and researching landscape as subject, in particular about water, the major environmental factor in the dry Australian continent that limits life (Somerville et al 2008; 2013; art exhibitions 2007, 2008, 2010). Some of the images generated from this research can be viewed online (Routledge Innovative Ethnographies website <http://www.innovativeethnographies.net/water-in-a-dry-land>).

Somerville applies alternative postcolonial, feminist methodologies, body/place storylines, pedagogies and forms of representation to offer positive alternative directions on how to care for local places and build community in the context of global issues such as climate change. From her own and student work-in-progress, Somerville theorized the capacity of place methodologies to generate new knowledge as 'a methodology of postmodern emergence' (2007). Her body/ place educational work offers 'three key principles for a reconceptualised place pedagogy: our relationship to place is constituted in stories and other representations; place learning is local and embodied; and deep place learning occurs in a contact zone of contestation' (Somerville, 2010 p. 326). These principles are evident, and in some cases directly influence, the papers in this special edition.

These papers represent a diverse range of expressions of how the theoretical work outlined above has been taken up and how it has been applied in different bodies and places, beginning with the body at the scene of writing.

In her article, Susanne Gannon uses storylines of inhabiting, learning and losing places during her writing, teaching, dwelling and moving life. Her poetic and literary modes of writing opening space for a reader to bring their own meaning to her 'temporal and spatial cartographies of becoming'. Her interactions enact a mutual constitution between the writer and other bodies, storied beings alongside storied objects in country. This methodology explicitly problematizes linear logical forms of argument and evidence aimed at fixing truth. In prose, poetry, pictures and imagery she enacts writing as a method of inquiry, gesturing towards shifting trajectories of being and knowing.

Nina Rossholt employs a 'double vision' in her theoretically sophisticated and rhythmic body/place writing technique, investigating the becomings of both her research participants and herself as a researcher in bodily relations with time, space and materials. In her research she questions many binaries to analyse the daily bodily practices of very young children up to two years of age in two Norwegian preschools (barnehager). In a move reminiscent of and yet transforming the category of 'parallel play' traditionally employed in child studies, she writes 'The children and I were more or less a research team—we did research together, not in the conventional sense, but because we investigated more or less the same matter... The children showed me the field while we shared the same space and activities.' This paper documents and recounts moments in time and space to convey rhythms of energy, tempo and rest in the children's bodily practices in relation to seasons, places, materials, the researcher and each other.

Phillip Wadick comments 'I have been forced to insert my body into the frame as I contemplate what facilitates safe bodies'. His various representational forms support a position towards workplace health and safety research that offers alternatives to dominant structuralist and positivist paradigms that tend to objectify and commodify the body. His 'wanderings and wonderings' occur in a field where workers' are so sceptical of the about 'visibility politics' around safety they expose themselves to bodily risks. The disjunction between the 'theoretical and impersonal bodies' of dominant technical and medical discourses of workplace safety and the human encounters and social interactions affecting 'individual and personal bodies' led him to disrupt 'old certainties' and fixed oppositions in favour of poststructuralist thinking and alternative forms of representing knowledge. Hope emerged where workers 'found energy for change in the space between the arbitrary and unhelpful oppositions'.

Karin Hognestad and Marit Bøe put place at the conceptual centre of their study of the bodily relations of children in kindergarten to 'strengthen... kindergarten as a learning area'. They move away from humanist research perspectives towards a decentring of the researcher as a subject. Drawing from a range of body/place work by international and Nordic researchers (among them Davies, Somerville, Lenz-Taguchi and Rossholt) they examine with preschool teachers the mutual constitution of children and their environments. They construct the material environment and landscape as active agents in the process of being, engaging as researchers in the flows, intensities and speed that emerge from both human and non-

human agency . This merging of being and knowing parallels the ever diffractive (ie change-generating) body-place relations of young children.

The collaboratively written final article by Sue Collins and her eleven co-authors is a collection of writings by researchers in the current Space, Place and Body research group based on walking as a methodology. The distinctive contribution of this paper is to disseminate a précis of new place research by emerging writers and to demonstrate an enabling place pedagogy that opens up a living space for collaborative writing. Each researcher has responded differently about their embodied becomings while walking one day in the Morwell National Park, Victoria. Each has contributed to the requirement for the overall paper to adhere strictly to classic thesis form. The pedagogical design included small group work that allowed the rapid assembly of a first draft within a week by twelve people. The paper was assembled into a coherent, fluent and elegantly theorised account by its first author. It documents group-generated analytical categories, extends storylines of self-other relationships in a particular place and concludes with an individual trajectory of narrative, one of many potential stories generated by the process.

Encountering these exciting paper is entering into a cultural contact zone that leaves a reader with a sense of possibility in approaching educational research.

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Major art exhibitions

(selected images are web- accessible on <<http://www.innovativeethnographies.net/water-in-a-dry-land>>):

Somerville, M., with Badger Bates, Treahna Hamm, Chrissiejoy Marshall, and Daphne Wallace. 2010. *Water in a Dry Land*. Major Exhibition Albury City Regional Gallery, Albury NSW. Catalogue: *Water in a Dry Land*.

Somerville, M., with Badger Bates, Phoenix de Carteret, Treaahna Hamm, Chrissiejoy Marshall, Sarah Martin and Daphne Wallace. 2007. Bubbles on the Surface 11. Major Exhibition, Switchback Gallery, Gippsland, Victoria. Catalogue, *Thinking through country*, DVD, Chrissiejoy Marshall and Dale Ross.

Somerville, M., with Badger Bates, Phoenix de Carteret, Treaahna Hamm, Chrissiejoy Marshall, Sarah Martin and Daphne Wallace. 2008. Bubbles on the Surface 111. Major Exhibition Switchback Gallery, Gippsland, Victoria. Catalogue, *Always unfinished business: of singing the country*, ISBN978-0-646-50638-8.

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