Interpretation through art: site/memory – veiling space

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The following paper is based on a slide presentation given at the ‘telling tales’ conference. In that presentation I discussed individual projects and the ways in which they interpret the site. For me the potential in artwork is to reveal aspects of the site and provide ways of interpretation that remain allusive and correspond more to a poetics of language and space. The work plays between fixity of meaning to create a fluid space of remembrance and transformation. As aspects of the site and the viewer’s relationship to it, is a shifting and living experience, my art attempts to create an opening for the individual’s imagination. My work tries to evoke a spirit of the place, more an invocation than an interpretation.

Fugitive Spaces

- I’m making propositions through works by creating spaces of perception that can bring us into contact with the ‘life-world’.
- ‘In my depth I’m indistinguishable from the world’ – Merleau Ponty
- Our porous bodies breathe in and spill out into the world
- To recognise this interdependence is the ecological undercurrent within the work

I am attempting to create elemental and fugitive spaces that express apermeability through a language of veiling, transparency and transluency to form enmeshed environments, slowed spaces that express porosity and fluidity and a fusion with the environment. There are no boundaries, only membranes. Thickening with a content that seeps through: organic matter in its states of transformation, spilling solids and fluids and layered texts on varying materials seen through the eye of our body.

This attempt to enmesh the body through materials is my desire to slow, engage and enter the world, recognising the intricate web that entwines us.

Edge of the Trees
completed 1994

An Interpretation of materials and mapping

A sculptural installation curated by Peter Emmett

Both an exhibit of the museum and a public sculpture, on the site of First Government House

There is the memory of the site
The botanical memory
The Eora memory
The colonial memory

These are expressed through a language of materials, naming and mapping

SANDSTONE

Sydney’s historical building material
The substance on which Sydney is built
The ground for Eora camps
The material and architectural connection to the museum wall and to Bridge Street

Engraved with:
- names of people - Eora men and women in Sydney around 1788-1850
- names of places in the harbour from Dawes notebook

STEEL

Links to the steel and glass of the museum architecture
Their placement of geometry of the building extending the building and site

Housing substances, oxides from nature and cultural life of the people, shells and midden ash

WOOD

A grove of stone pines once stood here
These pillars were once trees from around Sydney ironbarks and tallowwood recycled back into the ground … after their industrial history as posts in a Pyrmont foundry that became the McWilliams Building.

Their checks have opened as windows holding substances symbolizing, memorizing an earlier life here from both archaeological and Eora histories

- honey
- pipe clay
- bones
- resin
- shells
- oxides
- ash

ENGRAVED NAMING

Species from a pollen reading of the Governor’s garden, in Latin and in Aboriginal language

First Fleeters labels in zinc

Figure 1 Edge of the Trees. (Ray Joyce)
CORTEN STEEL
rusting back into nature
symbolic red bleeding into the sandy ground
transformation of culture into nature and back again

THE SOUND
as a map naming places of occupation
Koori voices record a moment in time as also the 29 pillars
The Edge of the Trees as a symbolic space - a membrane
where two cultures looked through to each other - here they mingle and intertwine like a weaving towards the future

Veil of Trees
completed 1997
Located adjacent to the Botanic Gardens in the Domain Sydney. The work aims to create a passage of reflection, a space where memory is gathered. Entailing the planting of a ribbon of 100 red forest gums - *eucalyptus teretiaris* - that once forested this site and will transform the work as they grow. Within this line of trees are placed 20 translucent glass panels edged with corten steel. These glass panels enclose substances that embody botanical memory. Substances such as ash and seeds.

Verses of Australian poetry by major Australian poets, selected for their evocation of the nature of trees, are inscribed into the glass panels creating a poetry walk.
Weaving either side of the ribbon of forest and panels, native grasses have been planted to define the linearity of the passage. The relationship of glass and plants connects to the history of conservatories. As this site is within the grounds of the botanic gardens, the work attempts to focus the viewer onto trees and their relationship to them, as they, the trees and the surrounding landscape are enfolded into one, and reflected into the glass.

If one engages with this work, it enables a perceptual experience - very light-oriented - as one shadow and reflection play against the reflection and view of the surrounding landscape, and layer onto the seeming enclosed memory within the glass. Like the speaking of trees, the poems scripted in the glass enable one a more intimate connection to the particular content I want to focus on - a botanical voice.

The seeds within the glass speak of the phenomenology of the life forces themselves as well as the relationship of this space to the herbarium nearby and its scientific way of analyzing such material.

Here in the slack of tideless night
the tree breathes honey and moonlight.
Here in the blackened yard
smoke and time and use have marred,
leaning from that fantan gloom
the bent tree is heavy in bloom,
Under the house the roots go deep,
down, down, while the sleepers sleep ...

Judith Wright. From Camphor
**In the Shadow**

completed 2000

An environmental work for Olympic Park, Homebush Bay. In the shadow is an environmental art work which creates an atmospheric zone through which one passes via three bridges connecting the Southern Boulevard terminus to the Tennis Centre.

The work is made of a series of vertical transparent wands echoing scientific measuring instruments standing at various heights within Boundary Creek. Twenty one wands symbolise and represent measurement of the various elements and water qualities monitored regularly.

At varying intervals, water blurps, aerates randomly-whilst sequenced along the 100 metres length of the art work, atmospheric vaporous fog moves, rises and dissipates, transforming and cooling the creek environment. The edges of the creek are lined with bulrushes and the banks form a Casuarina forest either side framing the work while creating a soft organic green, ribbon like space between the very highly constructed tennis centre and boulevard.

The work aims to reveal the transforming chemistry of water remediation by creating a poetic alchemical zone as a metaphor for the actual transformation of Homebush Bay from its degraded contaminated industrial past into a green and living site for the future.

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**List of Chemical Abbreviations**

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<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Temp</td>
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<td>Cond</td>
<td>Conductivity</td>
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<tr>
<td>pH</td>
<td>pH Levels</td>
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