

A Theoretical Approach to a history  
of national parks in New South Wales and Western Australia  
(derived from Paul Carter, 1987)

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**I: In the Beginning was the Name...**

A geographical name is a striking figure of speech, a yoking of writing and landscape. (Carter, 1987: xxiv)

A place name is a metaphorical way of speaking, indicating the cultural space where history begins - not at some particular time, or in a particular place, but in the act of naming. It is by the act of place-naming that a space is symbolically transformed into a place. **A place is a space with a history.**

The 'facts' of such history are not national parks as such, or physical sites within them. Rather, the 'facts' are phenomena as articulated by the park-maker, as they are invented by the park-maker's intentions. The 'facts', then, are the spaces within which national parks may be imagined and constructed.

Landscape-making is a spatial discourse. It is attentive to the 'where' and 'how' of its discursive objects. The strategic use of place-names is integral to its discursive transformation of spaces on maps into objects of knowledge.

There is a need to dismantle park-names as definitive statements of creation and let them function as points in a 'landscape-making process' - a process of making and imposing an 'Australian' landscape upon the unrecognised/unrecognisable landscape made by Aboriginal societies.

To do so is to recognise the role playing by national parks in maintaining a culture of *terra nullius* in Australia. No other name can speak with greater authority about a place than its own name. It is the shadowy outline of a place that its name brings into being. The map has always been designed to record certain information. As the spaces of its grid were written over and coloured in, there was revealed a palimpsest of the park-makers experience, a series of contracting and expanding boundaries gradually firming and forming an estate of parklands within a broader landscape. The original Aboriginal narrative of the landscape has been effaced by the new map.

The park-makers aim was to make places that could be definitively mapped. To name them was to invent them and bring them into cultural circulation. The metaphorical function of their names was to characterise these places in a particular way. The rhetoric of landscape-making is essentially spatial in nature, and its metaphors are literally spatial figures of speech. They stand in for or in place of something else, making what was invisible or only dimly perceptive emerge clearly. The translation of the park-makers experience into the texts of Government Gazettes is necessarily a process of symbolising,

of bringing the invisible into focus on the lines and columns of the written page.

The language of 'facts' is a literary convention, a rhetorical trick in which language derived its meanings in new contexts from its meaning in old contexts. Even the most objective name was applied by way of analogy - the observation of a 'parkland' employed a figure of speech rather than described an empirical object. The association of ideas depended upon an assumption that distinct ideas exist that can be related by analogy. But a distinct idea can only be defined in relation to other ideas. Barron Field wrote in the 1820s that

European poetry has made the change of the seasons, and its effect upon vegetation, a part, as it were, of our very nature. I can therefore hold no fellowship with Australian foliage... (Field, 1825: 424, in Carter: 43)

For Field, Australia is indescribable, its nature undifferentiated by seasonal change lacks a distinct character. It cannot be compared, and therefore known. Its aseasonal uniformity makes it un-namable because no namable parts distinguished themselves. Unamenable to the logic of association, Australia seems unknowable. Consequently, associative place-naming seems absurd - tablelands, glens and valleys fail to suggest 'real' tablelands, glens and valleys.

This underlines the point that both elements in place names were figurative and non-factual. It is not only the particularising element 'National' that is metaphorical - the apparently more objective term 'Park' is equally fanciful in Robertson's 1879 gazettal of 'The National Park' south of Sydney, and Forrest's 1895 gazettal of 'The National Park' in the hills behind Perth. So, if the colonists were bound by the laws of analogy, why did they not leave these culturally invisible spaces silent and un-named? The naming process was metaphorical rather than associational in intent. It was the names themselves that brought the 'National Park' into being, and invented the spatial and temporal co-ordinates of a place within which history could occur. Without place-names as agreed points of reference, how could information be exchanged, 'wild' and 'civilised' be defined?

The normal logic of association that worked in England broke down in the colonies. But, if these 'parks' were not parks, if the 'forests' were unforestlike, what do the names mean - what is their function? The paradox they express is not descriptive, rather it refers to the park-makers expectation and intent. More than this, such class-names as park, common and forest do not reflect what was already there - on the contrary, they embody the necessity of inventing a place that can be inhabited. The fundamental desire in applying class-names was to differentiate the landscape so that it could be written about and read. Geographical class-names rendered the world visible, bringing it within the range of discourse. They were descriptive, not of geographical objects, but of places where things could happen and become

history. The important point was that the name described a conceptual place where some things could happen and others could not.

Possession depended to some extent on civilising the landscape, bringing it into orderly being, so that it could be made readable. Investing the landscape with rhetorical interest reflected the linguistic practices of land administrators, for the language of administration was not the language of the dictionary, but a dialectic characteristic of landscape-making.

Aboriginal names, with their local genealogy and resistance to possession, pronunciation and transliteration, could be said to express the 'otherness' of the landscape-makers experience. If the essence of possession was to hold and enclose a space in a web of association and neutralise its 'otherness', then the untranslatable names with which Aborigines inhabited their landscape had no value, for they were atypical, obeyed no known rules, and most importantly of all, conveyed no useful 'facts'. Landscape-making civilised the country by translating it into English.

The historical space of the colonists emerged through the medium of language - the language of naming, of possession. What was named was an intention, a means of transforming space in an object of knowledge.

## II: The Text

Park-names need to be read in the context they originally occurred in - departmental papers, parliamentary debates, and particularly Government Gazettes. Attention must be directed to the place of the name in the text, and to the way in which the text changed over time, from a series of *ad hoc* statements to a regular process of tables and descriptions.

Seeing the park-name as a characteristic device of landscape-making is to see a link forging the discontinuous entries in the Government Gazette into a continuous narrative. The world the park-name refers to is the world of the text, not the mind or of the intentions of the author or of public policy.

Administrators who 'wrote up' the surveyor's field books aimed to bring the country before the eyes of the reader's of the Government Gazette. Their logic originated in the logic of landscape-making itself, in the continuity of the Gazette, which week after week, left no spaces unrelated and brought even the most distant objects into the uniform, continuous world of the text. The principle of association was found in the orderly succession of gazettals, not in any logic inherent in the landscape.

Gazette readers understood that while the Gazette might resemble a journal of letters or short stories, it also supplied the 'facts' of history and science in the landscape. What allowed the Gazette to meet these apparently antithetical conditions was its spatiality, its metaphor of the world as a

landscape. The 'narrative' of the Gazette may resemble the plot of a novel, but it was not fiction. The gazette was rooted in the historical space of the landscape-makers unique historical and spatial experience that formed its subject matter. In place of a fictional plot, the Gazette substituted the logic of the gaze\* - it turned the world encompassed by the gaze into a narrative peopled by the character of the country.

The Gazette is a 'telling' of what is gazed upon, it is a narrative. It is not an objective slice of reality. What the landscape-maker writes about is not the country or his own state of mind, but the process of looking, of seeing, of gazing. This is what the Gazette is about. It is a series of uniformity rather than a succession of sameness. The Gazette aimed to capture the process of landscape-making, and with this in mind, entries were written and arranged as a work of literature under the unifying sign of the Crown.

Landscape-makers approached their narrative according to certain conventions of what was appropriate to the telling of of a place. Draft notes were worked over, altering and replacing names, clarifying points of references, and adding other details to make all their descriptions conform to the requirements of gazetting. Perhaps the most obvious convention that the landscape-maker accepted in writing up these entries was the notion of the gaze as a description of measurements and boundaries. The object of the descriptions was not geographical but rather to constitute the space as a defined place by adopting a point of view within the gaze rather than the overview of prospective historians or geographers. The landscape that emerged from the landscape-maker's pen was not a physical object but an object of desire, a figure of speech describing the writer's intentional gaze.

### III: The Landscape-maker

The landscape-maker does not really exist as such in pantheon of colonial legends. Instead, it is as a convention of the landscape-making discourse that the landscape-maker emerges as a figure able to transform the country into a narrative of landscape. The landscape-maker was able to forge a metaphor of the writer that makes the Gazette narrative Dispensatory and Just. The landscape-maker may not have 'discovered' any parklands, but his narrative had the power of transforming unmapped spaces into a series of commons, parks and forests as potential places where the history of commons, parks and forests could continue in the colonial landscape they were inventing.

The survey, the sketch, and the description provided by the notes of the surveyor were made into instruments of cultural conquest rather than geographical observation by the landscape-maker, who sought to invent a

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\* gaze: to look steadily or intently, look with curiosity, wonder; a steady or intent look (Macquarie), look fixedly at, upon, intent look (OED), to look steadily, intently, earnestly; to look with eagerness or curiosity; a fixed look (Websters)

plausible place rather than discover it. A network of class-names, firstly of commons, then parks, national parks and state forests, defined a geographical estate strategically and historically as a series of places that made settlement possible. The Gazette thus formed a strategy for the invasion of unknown space. By ordering these spaces and rendering them conceptually and culturally visible as communal places the landscape-maker initiated invasions and made settlements possible. The gazetted ordering of the surveyors notes was a method for giving all objects a place in the new landscape. The logic of connection ensured that they could never be lost or overlooked. A country was brought into being that Gazette readers could imagine and inhabit.

The conferring of ownership upon invented places required a process of making the country readable. Asking Aborigines their place-names resulted only in an ability of the surveyor to suggest names for isolated geographical objects. Unable to incorporate the concepts of living places integral to these names, the landscape-maker had to invent places rhetorically rather than etymologically. They had to be invented as objects of desire and brought into being by the act of articulating that desire through the Gazette, thus making the country readable. Names had to precede places in order to transform 'there' into 'here'. Space became a place, and the class-name provided the place with a 'history'.

The landscape-makers wrote the Gazette, not so much for settlers as such, but in order to provide a blueprint for settlement, and settlers, looking for habitable places, read them accordingly. They read them with an end in mind, and interpreted what they read contextually from their own point of view. The Gazette provided the literary medium.

#### **IV: Of Boundaries and Differences...**

Writing about ownership implied writing about boundaries. The Gazette named spaces in order of their placement in the landscape, differentiating the named place from the unnamed space. Naming allowing associations to congregate around the new place, but it also served to dissociate this place from that place and from space. 'Ham Common' in the County of Cumberland bore no resemblance to 'Ham Common' in Surrey, England, but in spatial terms, the boundary conditions differentiating a new place had been made. The point can be illustrated by the use of the term 'park' in early New South Wales.

Where the soil is pretty good it is lightly timbered, occasionally resembling a gentleman's park; but the traveller soon loses this idea from finding no mansion at the end of the scene. He plods on from park to park, as it were, and rests at night, with his horse tethered beside him, near some pool of water. (Dawson, R., nd: in Carter: 243)

Connoting both a treed grassland and gentility, it was the latter characteristic that had to be emphasised in the colony. The attractiveness of such country

lay in its picturesqueness and its contrast to the surrounding country. The newcomer felt a need to differentiate and delimit in order to possess. Dawson could pass from the 'end of the scene', and on through 'park to park', all the time using a class-name that he has to admit is unsatisfactory, but far better than un-named space. The bounded enclosure of each 'park' was visible and possessible. The pleasure of the parklands could best be appreciated from a 'gentleman's mansion', but the mention of gentility, in this as other cases, was premature. Rather, the viewer could locate himself in the landscape and possess it merely by gazing over it. It was the naming of what the boundary zones of these 'parks' enclosed that transformed them from spaces into places.

The transition from possession by gaze to ownership by gazettal was only the beginning of a process of transforming the now historicised place into a home with a future. With places such as commons, the process of communal settling appears to have been beyond gazettal description. The landscape-maker had described the boundaries, named the space and given it a history, but the process of managing the place and so continuing its history into the future often seems to be marked by a hiatus of some years. The Cumberland Commons were invented by gazettal in 1804, but then fall silent in the literature of gazettal until the 1840s. Even retrospective financial statements published in the 1850s can only reach back to the 1830s. Why is this? If the process of making commons was as much a process of symbolically bringing the place into being as it was of shepherding flocks, the absence of written accounts is explainable, for it is not only a communal resource that has been made, but a language of the place as well. While the class-name 'common' could be transported from England, only some of the language of 'commonage' survived the journey. Rights to estover, herbage, pannage, pasturage, piscary, sheepwalks, turbary and vesture were apparently upheld in 1805, but by the 1850s, when common accounts began to appear in the Gazette, they are dominated by a language of pasturage, timber and recreation. During the intervening decades, a symbolic boundary between 'culture' (here) and 'nature' (there) has been marked out in the named space. In that boundary a space has been created for talking and doing, a space in which the settler's communal history can begin. The function of the boundary has been to facilitate communication, to be a place of dialogue where differences can be negotiated. The common gazetted in 1804 was indistinguishable on the ground from the surrounding space. The commoners had to agree upon where to begin making the common, upon where 'here' was to commence. They had to negotiate with each other about what rights-of-common were to be spoken about, and so recognised, 'here'. They had to invent a language of place within the boundary space. It gave them something to talk about, even if that talk was not always friendly. The frequency of litigation on some commons suggests that some commoners continued to negotiate that language of place with the Common Trustees long after their authorised gaze had moved to a wider horizon.

Attempts to reconstruct the language of negotiation in communal places such as commons and parks rest upon an assumption of the boundary as a place of dialogue as 'there' is processed to 'here' in each place. The initial invasion of a space is a form of spatial writing that erased earlier meanings. Aboriginal languages of place were unknown before an invasion, and unknowable after massacres and dispossession. Settlement then became a question of inventing a new significance for a desolate and depopulated country. This process of settlement was not only confined to immigrants and currency-born. The Aboriginal diaspora resulted in the making of another language of place which was reflected in the gazettal of 'native reserves', and the significance of commons and parks for a mixed-race people increasingly confined to the spaces between the boundaries of an increasingly privatised landscape of towns and farms. The myth of the ruggedly individual pioneer on the frontier was invented so that contemporary Australians could gaze upon a readable, unquestioning landscape.

The act of settling the country was an act of spatial translation. The neat, geometrical arrangement of boundaries on the map is largely a cartographic artefact that had little to do with the settler's experience of boundaries as unoccupied, unspoken for, unnamed space 'over there'. The particular and class-name combinations gazetted in order to bound and historicise certain spaces for communal, rather than private, activities were, metaphorically, the bridges between invasion and settlement.

(3 068 words, exc. title)