

Landscape and representation: (re)mapping the Flinders Ranges

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THE LANDSCAPE IS ITSELF A TEXT that is open to interpretation and transformation ... It is the well-formed world of occupied places as opposed to the world outside of that – the unplaced place. In other words, prior to language, “landscape” is a phenomenon beyond immediate comprehension; it is not until we choose a prospect and map what we see, marking some aspects, ignoring others that landscape acquires meaning. Such interventions include paintings, poems, myths, and literature, in addition to buildings and other interventions upon the land (Corner 1991 p 129).

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THE ABOVE QUOTE provided an introduction to a design studio that explored US-based James Corner's theories of reading and representing the landscape in the context of the Flinders Ranges. Located in the central-northern region of South Australia, the Flinders Ranges is a place both remote and familiar; remote due to distance and physical difference from the more benign, coastal landscapes in which we typically live, and familiar through the increasing publicity of the place in film and tourist literature.

The 13-week studio was held with 40 students from the Bachelor of Design Studies degree at the University of Adelaide, with the majority having no first-hand knowledge of the Flinders Ranges. Most of the students were fresh from the first year of their degree and were intending to go on to complete a Bachelor of Architecture. For many, this studio was their first exposure to 'landscape' as anything more than grass, trees and gardens.

The purpose of the studio was to challenge the conventional tourist and mythical representations of the Flinders Ranges, which place emphasis on the picturesque qualities of the ranges landscape, while reducing the extensive plains and salt lakes lying to the west to the notion of the unexplored 'outback'. Adopting Corner's methodology, based on reading the landscape through text, social and cultural histories and collected material and immaterial evidence of place, the students were asked to develop new representations and readings of this iconic landscape.

The studio was partly designed around a six-week lecture series that explained key themes and aspects of Corner's design methodology. These lectures, given by Gini Lee, introduced the students to an extensive range of mapping practices including mapping of text, image, narrative, material culture, semiotics and territory. Through the lectures, students were introduced to a range of theoretical voices, including the work of James Corner, Mark Monmonier, Giles Tiberghien, Jennifer Bloomer and Roland Barthes, in order to provoke discussions on the pragmatic and poetic nature of landscape mapping and marking, together with ways of reading text and image.

KEY WORDS

Remote
Landscape
Representation
Culture
Design
Methodology

REFLECTION

The principal voice studied was Corner's, introduced through his writings on representation and landscape that were published in the early 1990s and his more recent publication *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, the result of Corner's collaboration with aerial photographer Alex S MacLean. The picturesque quality of the photographically captured landscapes in this book is overlaid with Corner's cultural and material analyses of the specific nature of these places. Corner's ability to present the essence of natural and cultural environments in a multifaceted graphic mapping, provided an identifiable and visually seductive framework for the novice design student delving into complex landscapes.

In introducing students to the work in *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, we hoped to show, in Corner's words "... how actions taken upon the land can either precipitate or preclude the possibility for more wholesome and harmonious modes of dwelling ... we seek to restore to measure its (life upon the land) full metaphoricity - its full capacity for representation - especially as this might forge new forms of interrelationship between people and land" (Corner 1998 p xix).

Students also examined Corner's writings on the representation of landscape and drawing, the reciprocity between the image and idea and the drawing as an abstract phenomenon, including 'Operational Eidetics' (1998), 'Representation and Landscape: Drawing and Making in the Landscape Medium' (1992) and 'A Discourse on Theory II: Three Tyrannies of Contemporary and the Alternative of Hermeneutics' (1991).

Running parallel with the lecture series were studio sessions where students began to apply mapping practices to the Flinders Ranges site, at a distance and with secondary reference materials only. Working in groups, the students researched existing representations of their sites - mapping histories, narratives, text and material cultures. The notion of the map as an emerging reality became central to their studies; the map (executed prior to making), where aspects of spatiality, temporality and materiality, must be discovered and described in meaningful ways through various techniques of drawing. (Figures 1, 2 and 3)

An important structural aspect of the studio was the decision not to visit the Flinders Ranges until midway through the 13-week studio. Instead, students were restricted to understanding their sites through the interpretation and recordings of others; recordings coloured by biases, omissions and the subjective view. This decision ultimately proved to be critical to the success of the studio.

READING THE LANDSCAPE - THE LECTURE SERIES

The beginning design students were introduced to the theoretical principles of recording and interpreting complex physical, visual and temporal places through a series of presentations about the extensive practice of mapping. Illustrated lectures outlined three themes - mapping practice, textual practice and material culture. The lectures were devised to present to the students the complex natures of mapping and representational techniques, and to suggest that methods for visually

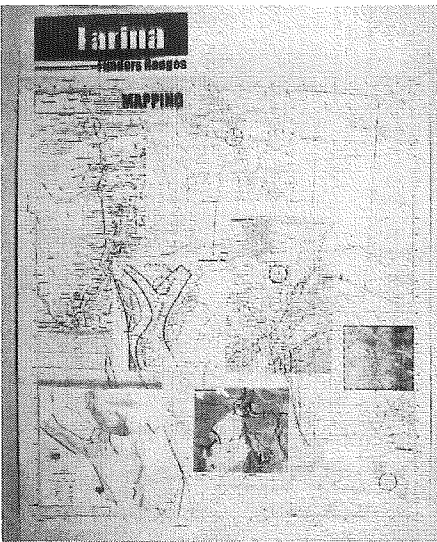


Figure 1: Mapping practice.

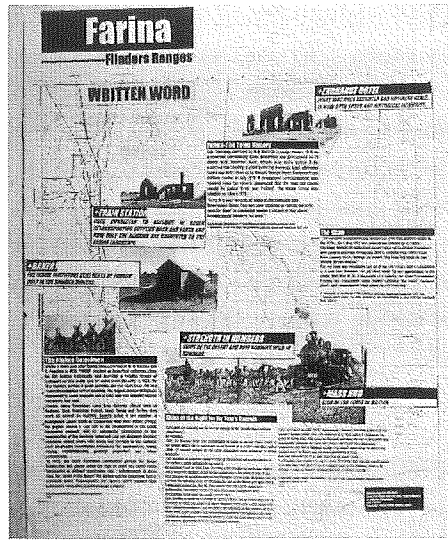


Figure 2: Textual practice.



Figure 3: Material culture.

reading, and subsequently representing, aspects of cultural landscapes could be informed by a number of other techniques such as art-based practice, cultural studies research and broad philosophical text-based frameworks.

Mapping practice

The introduction to mapping considered the pragmatic (scientific) nature of the map and the cartographic view of recording place and space. The expression of a territorial and rational view of place as a tool of “deliberate falsification or subtle propaganda” suggested to the students that they should not be too ready to believe everything the map presented as absolute truth (Monmonier 1996).

Examination of the basic elements: scale, projection and symbol, and the inherent cultural coding that are implicit in the cartographer’s art, also suggested a fertile language for experimental reworking of the seemingly factual, though representational, design expressions: collage, layering, and the like. From the early European maps, embellished with stylised and often fantastic narratives of the time, to the precisely drawn, yet flattened and reduced landscapes of generic service-station roadmaps of South Australia, the landscape has always been recreated by a very particular cultural determinism (Monmonier 1996).

A romantic mapping and marking of place, or what could be said to be the artist’s view, described to the students the possibilities available of cosmological and spiritual mappings that are often represented by somewhat graphically minimal markings on the land or by design interventions into the landscape.

Gilles Tiberghien, writing on maps and inscriptions, offers the following:

Maps like encyclopaedias, have always been dreaming devices. This is not only because of the toponymic knowledge that they are able to impart, and the etymological inquiry that they can stimulate, but also because of the game of lexical cross references inviting us to search between abscissas and ordinates for the location we seek (Tiberghien 1995 p 165).

Further, the work of Deleuze and Guattari introduced the students to the distinction between a map and a tracing. In this view, a map is a generator of forms. "It constructs the real, more than it represents it. It does not indicate a reality, rather it causes meaning to circulate, become each artist's medium for these meanings" (Tiberghien 1995 p 165).

Various experimental mappings were articulated through the lectures, with particular emphasis placed on the nature of the earth as a surface for inscription through expressions of vast scale, sacred connotations and views without distortion. Mappings and markings, such as the historic (300BC) Nazca lines in the Peruvian desert, and Richard Long's 1972 companion walk along those lines (his footsteps acting as an evaluation of time and space) identified clearly a contemporary mapping practice based on historical precedent. James Turrell's cosmological mapping and reworking of Roden Crater also introduced students to the nature of material and immaterial conditions as sources for layered mapping practice.

Interwoven throughout the theories were visual references – photographic representations, the aerial, drawn and particular tourist view, of the landscape and culture of the Flinders Ranges.

Textual practice

We invited the students to consider the notion of reading the Flinders ranges landscape through visual and text-based examples that had been generated by artists and designers. We wanted to encourage an encompassing view of the places and references they could go to for inspirational approaches to mapping. The references also introduced the students to a series of journals (including *Architectural Design*, *Daidalos*, *Word and Image* and *Assemblage*) that would help them to develop design literacy.

The particular view of Jennifer Bloomer, in her article 'Hypertextual Picturesque' that discussed the "relationships of architecture, painting, the interweave of time and space, old and new ..." introduced the students to the position of "the tourist as a collector of pictures of places". We felt Bloomer's notion of hypertext was a particularly potent prompt allowing the students to engage in an open-ended investigation, working towards a narrative in which structure, logic and closure fluctuate, with the eventual possibility of establishing multiple links between different spaces in a spatial text mapping (*Architectural Design* 1996 pp 43-44).

A strategic model of negotiation, used to describe new planning forces in Helsinki, such as ecological issues, urban icon formation and city management, large-scale economic developments and geo-political changes, introduced students to a graphic mapping technique where text overlaying plan imagery is the key to the translation of complex spatial dynamics in the descriptions of cities (*Architectural Design* 1996 pp 11-14).

The students also studied other intervention projects based upon intensive cultural mapping and historical research, such as the Gifu project of Arakawa and Madeline Gins. This urban intervention interrogated the personalised language

of the street – language that is provoked through naming and repetition and consequent associations. The article ‘Marking the City Boundaries’, by Daniel Libeskind was examined for its development of the text/graphic *Books of Groniken*, the primary brief for the creation of artistic monuments as representation of the celebration of a city’s identity (*Art & Design* 1992).

In the examination of these projects, the students were taught how to acknowledge the essential link between the visual and the literary and, through this, the potential for meaningful intervention into the cultural landscape was enriched by a layered and expansive research and mapping practice.

Material culture

The work of Roland Barthes on the structural analysis of the press photograph and the messages gained through the juxtaposition of text and image, introduced the students to the basic concepts of reading pictures and images. Readings on semiotics and material culture definitions and practices spoke of the nature of cultural coding of artefacts specific to place and time. The students considered at length the practice of mapping of territory, together with the theoretical perspective gained through shifting perceptual viewpoints and provoking alternative lexicological cues, in order to learn how to interrogate the cultural landscape.

CORNER’S MEASURES

Corner’s five measures, which form the theoretical framework behind his studies of American landscapes in *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, are those of Land, Control, Rule, Fit and Faith. In these measures, the complex forces acting upon landscapes are being described through mappings of environmental, habitational and spiritual interactions, and are measured through the various methods that humans have at their disposal.

In summary, Corner’s measures are those of:

- Land – where an environment reveals itself through “habitation and access, spacing, marking, delineation and occupation”;
- Control – where measures facilitate possession through occupation and manipulation;
- Rule – the act of delineation and coordination of sequences of events;
- Fit – about beneficial reciprocity between occupant and environment; and
- Faith – which “reconcile the joys and stresses of life with the hopes and revelations of the human spirit” (Corner 1996 pp 41, 69, 97, 121, 149).

Julia Czerniak, in reviewing *Taking Measures Across the American Landscape*, suggests that Corner’s work is a “thoughtful and much needed critique of landscape conventions” where “the most successful map-drawings display invisible aspects of landscape, supplanting how it looks with a knowledge of how it works as a physical and cultural place” (Czerniak 1998 p 13).

That the construction of pictorial collages of places in our own landscapes could be an effective method for encouraging design students to immerse

themselves in familiar and unfamiliar landscapes, and provoke questioning and readings of place seemed a good basis for a special studio. However, we wondered how this seductive, representational mapping method could inform the design process? Certainly, Corner alludes to the possibilities of this in his writing, but any demonstration of potential interventions into his beautiful, yet somewhat rarefied, collaged landscapes, has so far been absent in his reporting of the methodology.

The rules that Corner uses for measure, and his working methodologies, were presented as the final lecture prior to visiting the Flinders Ranges. We received lively comment from the students for having made them wait, only to reveal that, to complete the project, they should adopt Corner's method and graphic style! However, our strategy was designed to encourage the students to produce their own readings, because we had always felt that our seduction with Corner's graphic representation would be as equally seductive for the students. Encouragingly, many of the initial studio mappings demonstrated a quantum improvement in the ability of the students to communicate through drawing and text from their tentative beginnings, due to their exposure to various representational techniques, including Corner's powerful imagery.

Armed with a potted knowledge of theoretical musings on the potential relationships to be gained by interrogation of a most particular landscape, and inculcated by Corner's high ideals, we took the students out of the studio and off to the Flinders Ranges.

THE SITE - THE PLACE

The area selected for the studio lay to the west of the Flinders Ranges, stretching from Farina in the north (a 10-hour drive from Adelaide) through to Edeowie in the south. By working within the existing South Australian topographic mapping grid, the site was defined as a series of 18 grids, each 26km by 28km, combining to form a total area 150kms long and 90kms wide. As shown in Figure 4, Highway 83 provided a central reference point, dividing the site in a north-south axis. Lying to the west of the highway were flat, sparsely vegetated plains and the salt lake known as Lake Torrens - to the east, lay the foothills of the Flinders Ranges.

The site was chosen for three reasons. First, it allowed for the exploration of conventional representations of the Flinders Ranges and the 'outback', both of which tend to romanticise the picturesque qualities of the ranges (Figure 5), while reducing the flatter plains to a landscape of emptiness (Figure 6). Secondly, the site offered a contrast to the design studios conducted at the University of Adelaide, both in Architecture and Landscape Architecture which gravitate toward urban sites located in Adelaide or the more intensively occupied South Australian rural settlements closer to the coast. Thirdly, it allowed the exploration of a particular South Australian landscape that is often described by the number of hours taken to traverse it en route to a further destination, rather than as a landscape in its own right.

RELOCATING TO THE FLINDERS

The studio group, equipped with the preliminary readings developed in the studio sessions, relocated to the Flinders Ranges site for a four-day field trip. The journey involved a drive, spread over one-and-a-half days, to the most northern site at Farina. During the drive, the students were asked to record impressions of the landscape through photographs, journal entries and the collection of found objects. Expectations rose as we travelled north – when would we arrive and what would be there? Starting at Farina, the field trip worked its way south visiting as many of the landscapes as possible (some areas were difficult to access due to road conditions and the size of the bus). A nightly briefing, using the preliminary readings as a discussion point, prepared the group for what was to be encountered the following day, with each student determining the place they specifically wished to explore within their allotted area. As a consequence of this preparation, the students began to ‘own’ their sites and became eager participants in the field trip.

By holding the field trip at the completion of the preliminary work, the students were able to experience first-hand the biases of mapping as a graphic representation.

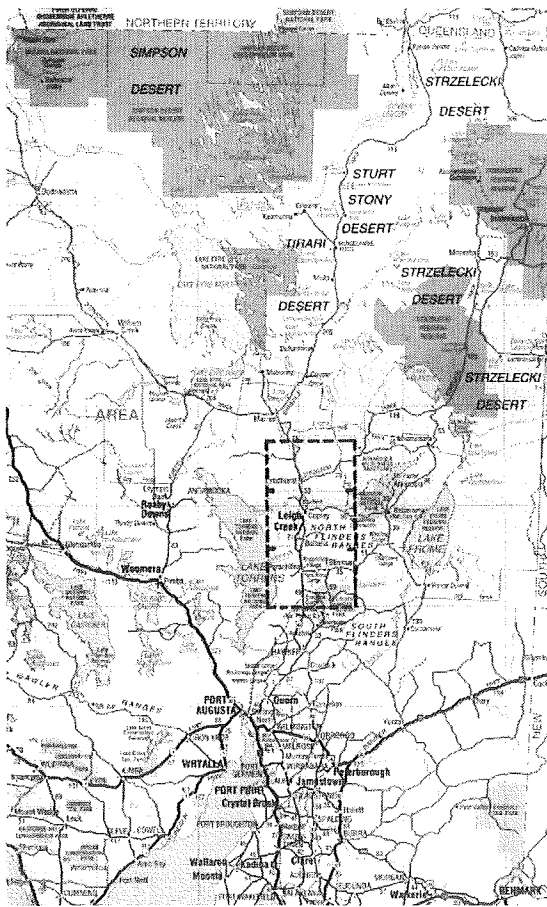


Figure 4: Flinders Ranges studio site.

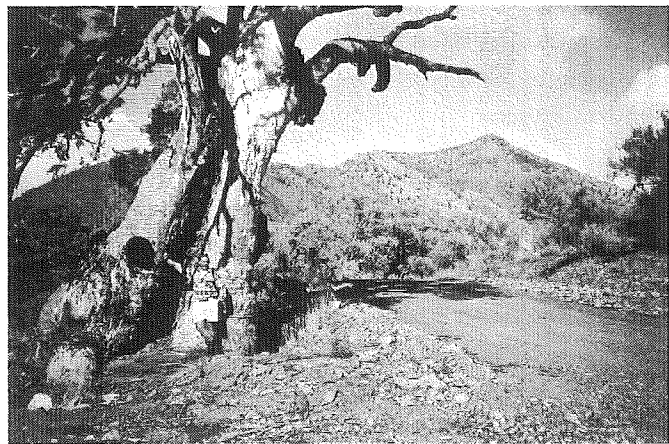


Figure 5: Flinders Ranges picturesque.

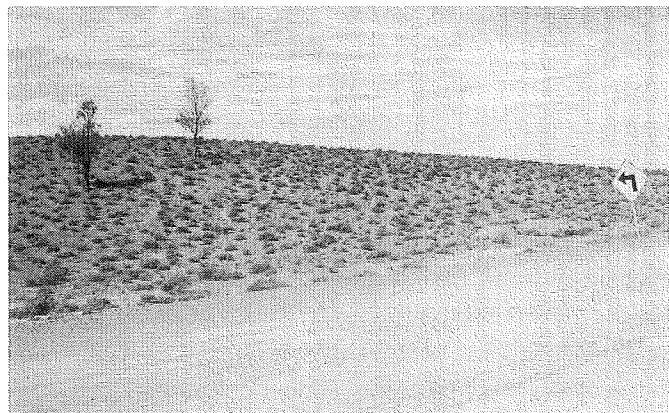


Figure 6: Flinders Ranges plainscape.

This experience was particularly true of the students who studied the plains, where topographic maps indicate the area as empty, compared with the contour-rich landscape of the Flinders Ranges foothills. Prior to experiencing their sites, many of these students felt that the sparsely vegetated, flat plains would be boring and empty when compared with the rolling ranges of the Flinders. This was, of course, challenged when the students started to explore the landscape qualities associated with the plains. Three major themes emerged.

The first related to a sense of time, which was recorded in the landscape by patterns of human occupation and desertion. These patterns were apparent in physical traces such as ruins, tracks, markings and debris. Strongly connected to this theme was the feeling of human vulnerability in such a remote and often hostile environment, and a tension between the landscape and those that occupied it.

Another major element was the power and scale of the sky, both during the day and at night. Exploring the landscape throughout the day, exposed students to the changing quality of light from dawn to dusk and how this affected one's perception of the landscape. The final theme was the spatial imbalance that the students encountered first-hand when travelling along Highway 83 at speed, with the defining Flinders Ranges on the eastern side and the vast, undefined plains lying to the west.

DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVE READINGS

On arrival back in Adelaide, the students were given two weeks to develop their final site reading, incorporating the preliminary work with the new understandings of their landscape. It was at this point that most students altered their mapping approach significantly, wishing to incorporate the previously 'unmappable' landscape qualities discovered during the site visit. The question most often raised by the students was what was it, exactly, that the studio wanted them to produce – a map, a picture, a cultural reading? From our perspective, the studio required students to produce a cultural reading that reflected a new-found landscape literacy. As is demonstrated in the following three examples, the student responses were graphically seductive and far more evocative than their preliminary work.

The first example (Figure 7) was developed for the most remote and isolated site, Farina. The student described his reading as follows:

Lines of past and present human occupation march across the landscape, contrasting with the natural lines of the topography and an enveloping horizon line. Linearity is continued through all scales, right down to the detail of the material relics of a long gone era. Out of the hundreds and out of this time, yet lines are still present throughout, giving an insight into the past and helping to reveal the ever changing nature of a harsh and unforgiving landscape.

Tom Richards

The second reading (Figure 8), for a site located in the northern part of the Flinders Ranges, was described as follows:

On the left is a simple black strip representing a long extinct Aboriginal trade route. It is also a metaphor for the simple, non-intrusive relationship the Aborigines had for the

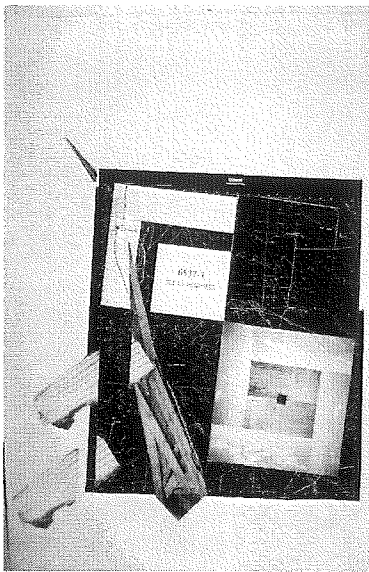


Figure 7: Richards Farina reading.

land. In the middle is the modern road cutting through the predominant red earth and blue sky of the Northern Flinders Ranges. This is a reminder of the damage inflicted on the landscape by roads and a comparison with the trade route that had far more cultural significance and yet had had a lesser impact on the land. And finally, the black box full of crisp “satellite” imagery of the mapping of today, a representation that is precise and yet fails to communicate the experience or reality of the land. Linking them all are the green veins showing the land as it has always been, trees and green only along the dry river beds and nothing beyond this but bald hills.

Shawn Watson, Josh Zeunert, Sam Alexis

The final reading (Figure 9), located around the historic town of Parachilna, aimed to capture the feelings of loneliness and isolation, was described in the following way:

The centralised dividing strip represents the route of Highway 83, Leigh Creek to Port Augusta railway line and transmission lines, capturing the essence of repetitiveness and motion that these objects portray. The township of Parachilna, in our eyes, is an oasis in this unending landscape. Therefore, we have represented it with its own colours, images and respective location, trying to express the personality and traits of this historic town.

Damien Jenke and Stuart Dunsford

MEETING JAMES CORNER

This event could be described as a kind of postscript, because it was not on the agenda at the commencement of the studio, but the opportunity arose for Gini Lee to present the final mapping outcomes to James Corner in Philadelphia. After contacting Corner, and introducing him to the topic of our studio, we asked him if he might be interested in seeing the work-in-progress. We also explained to him our interest in developing the mapping methodology as a design tool. Upon Corner’s positive response to Gini Lee’s visit, we informed the students, who reacted with a sense of enthusiasm and a resolve to explain to the authority (Corner) the presentation of places to which they were becoming more attached and proprietorial.

Corner conveyed a bemused delight at the interest in and interrogation of his work from a place so distant to his practice. His response to the student work

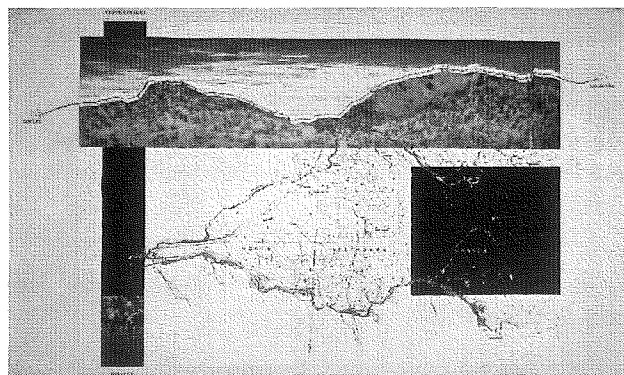


Figure 8: Watson, Zeunert, Alexis route mapping.

was encouraging, he was impressed both by the sophistication of the students' representational readings and the particular nature of the spatial and graphic qualities provoked by the complexities of the landscape. Our desire to take this programme further, to use the analytical work as a tool for promoting design intervention, became the key focus of discussions into the ongoing benefits and potential evident in the application of this methodological approach to a critical mapping of place and cultural landscape.

THE INTERVENTION

The final stage of the studio required the students to develop a refined understanding of their site into a strategy for design intervention. The brief was left deliberately open, the only specification was that the design intervention should highlight a specific quality of the landscape that should be apparent to the viewer, who was most likely to be a tourist. Many of the students struggled with the challenge of developing their final reading into a design strategy, having had little exposure to design in other studio programmes prior to this experience. However, despite this, some interesting concepts were developed.

The first intervention (Figure 10) was based on the notion of using a veiling technique in the form of a cloth wall to restrict the usually expansive view of the western plains. This design strategy aimed to attract motorists, who tend to look only at the picturesque view of the Flinders Ranges to the east, to stop for a closer examination and, hopefully, gain a better appreciation of the western plains.

The second installation (Figure 11) was based around the unhappy historical interaction between early settlers in the area and the indigenous population. An outcome of this difficult period was that some settlers decided to fence Aboriginal people off from water sources. The concept for this installation involves luring the tourist off Highway 83 in search of an 'oasis'. The tourist travels an increasingly frustrating journey through a number of gates and fences to arrive eventually at a dry watercourse that is completely fenced off. It is at this point that the historical relevance of the journey is revealed to the tourist.

The final example (Figure 12) challenges the high-speed tourist adventure – the two- or three-day outback experience as viewed from the tour bus. This conceptual work involves the use of words carved out of the earth that intend to refocus the viewer's attention away from the scenic Flinders Ranges backdrop to the details of the foreground landscape.

CONCLUSION

Despite the difficulties encountered with the final stage of the studio, and organising a field trip into a remote area, the studio, from our perspective, proved to be very successful. First, students were introduced to a new representational literacy, which acted as a catalyst for re-reading and re-mapping the mythological and iconographic landscape of the Flinders Ranges.

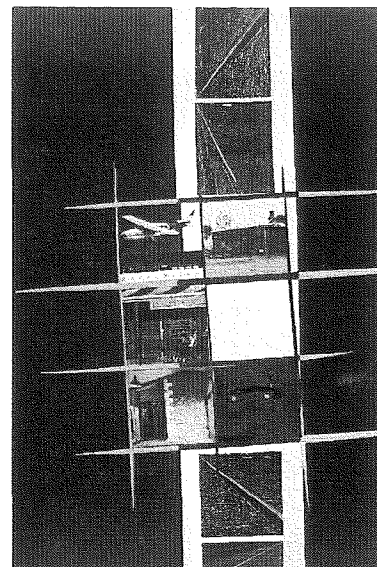


Figure 9: Jenke, Dunsford Parachilna reading.

Secondly, the seductive, graphic presentations highlighted the link between theory, representation and landscape architecture to the rest of the student body and staff. This achievement was particularly important because the Landscape Architecture degree was introduced at the University of Adelaide only relatively recently and has been struggling to assert itself as a design degree distinct from the notions of landscape planning and environmental studies.

Certain aspects of the design studio had some unexpectedly positive results. For example, the opportunity for the work-in-progress to be presented to James Corner resulted in a somewhat unpredicted sense of resolve in the students to explain their work carefully to him. There was also an unforeseen value in deciding not to visit the site until midway through the project. The development of the preliminary work before the site visit established a framework of understanding that the students were eager to explore and challenge on site. This produced in the students a stronger sense of ownership and identity, which was reflected throughout the remainder of the studio.

Finally, the studio demonstrated that, by reading the landscape through text, social and cultural histories, collected material and immaterial evidence of place,

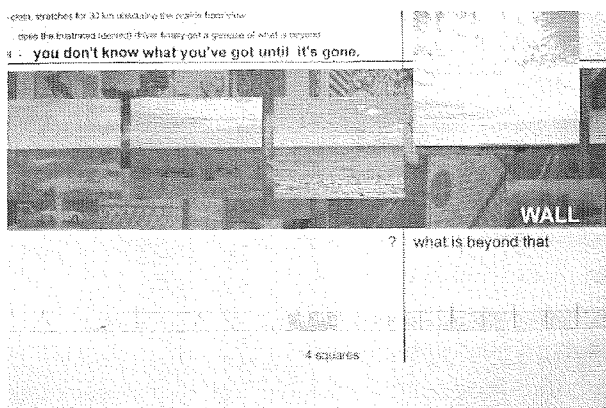


Figure 10: Wall.

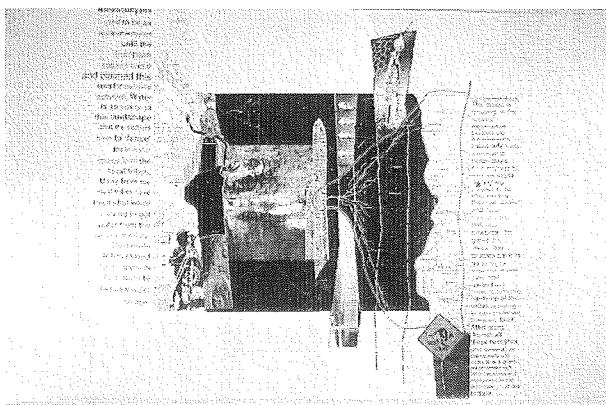


Figure 11: Oasis.

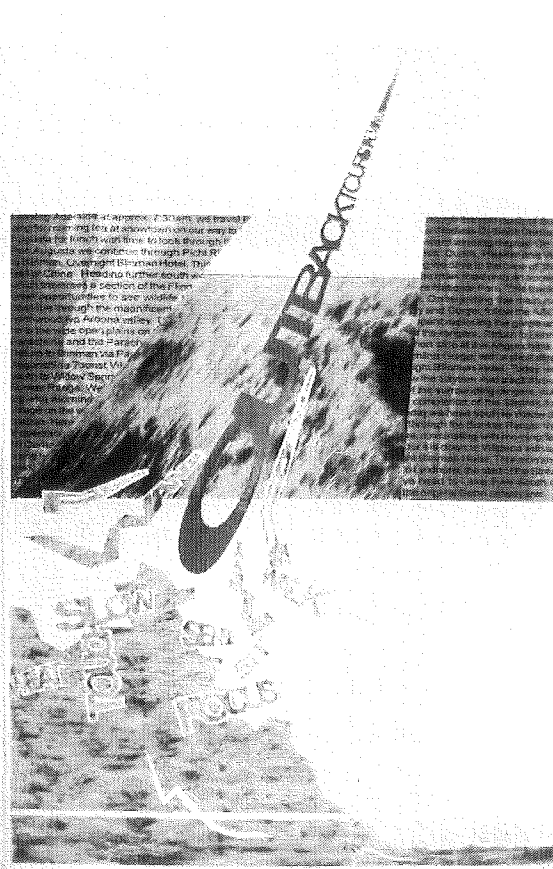


Figure 12: Outback.

it was possible, with a limited timeframe and resources, to gain an understanding of a complex South Australian landscape. Further, presenting this work as a graphic and text-based representation acted as a powerful catalyst for the development of strategies for design intervention that respond to the unique and intrinsic values of the landscape.

The degree to which the students proposed poetic or pragmatic design interventions interestingly conveyed much of the Corner graphic response, but equally, many students responded to the theoretical ideas conveyed through looking at land-art practice. Indeed, the most successful design outcomes responded to these land-art practices in a direct sense. The benefit of working through Corner's methodology was that it enabled beginning design students to learn ways to represent and describe their ideas that are apart from the more formal traditions in design practice.

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