

Thesis abstract

On the Edge: the power of place, trauma and memory at South Head

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The Gap at South Head in Sydney's eastern suburbs is a place of extreme beauty. It is also famous for being Australia's most well-known suicide destination.

This non-traditional PhD consists of an exegesis and a creative work, which together form an interrogation and creative re-imagining of the site's overlapping narratives, multiple silences, and history of violence and loss. The exegesis and site-specific soundwork offer an exploration of how it might be possible to build a radically alternative narrative of place that disrupts a continuing legacy of violence.

Through primary historical research and through the lens of theorists of place (Casey, Irish, Karskens, Carter, Massey, and Thomas), the exegesis traces an affective thread connecting the unresolved wounds of frontier violence to racial and gendered violence and the acts of self-annihilation that tragically persist there today. It examines critical events and texts in the colonial naming and imagining of South Head to unpick the way they have enacted a violent cultural logic in constructing South Head as an active "gap," and it considers whether the critical terms "badland" and "traumascape" (Gibson and Tumarkin) can be usefully applied to this place, while offering "ruptured space" as an alternative term for describing a category of place that has endured profound "rup-

ture" to help it refuse to be forever cast as doomed. By utilising this term, the thesis posits a new narrative that both acknowledges a fractured sense of place and disrupts a continuing legacy of violence. Ultimately, "On the Edge" enhances our knowledge about placemaking and Australia's connection to its place in the world and considers whether reimagining this site might help us understand other layered places of silenced violence. In addition, by employing a psychogeographical approach to the fieldwork through a series of interpellated "passages" (Beudel and Debord), the exegesis offers an alternative lived experience to the multiple layers of this unsettled site, which includes the institutional, criminal, geological, energetic and more-than-human.

Inspired by artists who use digital technologies to harness affect and empathy (Cardiff+Miller, Milk, Parragirls), the immersive site-specific soundwork is offered as an experiment in how we might use affective artforms to transform the experience of being in-place. The soundwork engages with this site by enacting a fragmentary set of silences to create an artefact that allows those silences to resonate and aid in its restitution.¹

¹ The soundwork can be accessed at <https://www.ontheedge.space/> and is best experienced on-site at Don Ritchie Grove, South Head. Please wear earphones for a fully immersive VR experience.

Combined, the exegesis and creative work consider whether this approach to this complex site might help us understand other layered places of silenced violence.

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