

**Forcing Newness into the World:
Language, Place and Nature**
Bill Ashcroft

In 1860, during the Opium war, British forces stumbled almost by chance on the Celestial gardens of the emperor Yuan Ming Yuan:

On the slopes of man-made mountains, between banks and spinneys, deer with fabulous antlers grazed, and the whole incomprehensible glory of nature and of the wonders placed in it by the hand of man was reflected in dark unruffled waters. The destruction that was wrought in these legendary landscaped gardens over the next few days, which made mockery of military discipline and indeed of all reason . . . may well have been that this earthly paradise—which immediately annihilated any notion of the Chinese as an inferior and uncivilized race—was an irresistible provocation in the eyes of soldiers who, a world away from their homeland, knew nothing but the rule of force, privation and the abnegation of their own desires. (Sebald 144–45)

The magnificent garden, an affront to the eyes of the dazzled British military, was utterly destroyed. One hundred and forty-three years later, American forces wheeled relentlessly through a very different landscape to complete their invasion of a sovereign state on trumped up allegations of weapons of mass destruction. In the capital Baghdad, the museum holding priceless antiquities was looted and devastated while invading forces protected one building—the Ministry of Oil.

These two events are gloomy morality tales of Empire. War is an unparalleled demonstration of the violence of colonial contact, but I want to suggest that these ransackings were models for more subtle extension of imperial control. Colonial ground needs to be erased, wiped clean, to prepare it for imperialism's darkest gift—the gift of newness. The British in China and the United States in Iraq demonstrate the logic of

invasion, a logic that has its most devastating effects on place itself and begins not in politics, but in language. This ironic 'gift' is the imposition of sameness—a sameness that will never be quite the same, but one in which difference will be erased.

My allusion to newness is of course a well-known trope of hybridity. Salman Rushdie defends the *Satanic Verses* for its celebration of “hybridity, impurity, intermingling, the transformation of the new and unexpected combinations of human beings, cultures, ideas, politics, movies, songs” (394). This, he says, “is *how newness enters the world*” (394)—an inspiring and provocative thought taken up by Homi Bhabha. Newness here is the irruption of the possible, the movement beyond the boundaries of the known. But unfortunately, a different kind of newness—an invading newness—can be *forced* into the world by imperial power. This is sameness masquerading as newness, an erection of boundaries where none may have been. When this occurs, colonial space is the first thing that must be made ‘new.’

Language is the key to this process. Language, like the topographic space, can be seen in Saussurian terms as a loose, unrealized network (*langue*) actualized only in moments of utterance (*parole*), just as physical terrain is only realized in traversal. Place, we might say, is uttered into being out of space, and maintained by narrative. Yet curiously, this distinction between space as unbounded extensity and place as a location is peculiar to the English language and does not exist, for instance, in other languages, such as German. The German *raum* encapsulates both space and place in a way that provides an extremely dynamic sense of spatiality (Olwig 2).

Olwig argues that the distinction between space and place has become blurred in English language geographical thinking because it has been influenced by the dual nature of German *raum*. But the ambiguity of space and place was important to British imperialism and the distinction between space and place in English is not so much simply vague, as a tightly managed, historically located, ambivalence that justifies its contradictory tendencies towards exploitation and nurture.

Historically, we might say that the distinction between space, which can be ‘emptied’ by means of the mathematical coordinates of the world

map, and 'place,' which can be appropriated, and effectively 'owned' by situating names on that map, has been extremely important to the progress of British imperialism. The understanding of a place as a site has been essential to empire's need to establish colonial sites of its dominance, *at the same time* as the coordinates of the world map have allowed European modernity to empty out the human dimensions of space. The link between the control of space through cartography, and the location of authority in monuments and buildings is a peculiarity of the British (and French) forms of imperialism.

While the duality of space and place is important to imperialism, the balancing of this contradiction follows a similar pattern to the use of the metaphor of the 'child' in imperial discourse. The constitution of the colonized subject as 'child' is a brilliantly effective strategy for managing the ambivalence of exploitation and nurture. The child is both inherently evil and potentially good, thus submerging the moral conflict of colonial occupation. The child, at once both, other and same, holds in balance the contradictory tendencies of imperial rhetoric: authority is held in balance with nurture; domination with enlightenment; debasement with idealization; negation with affirmation; exploitation with education; filiation with affiliation (Ashcroft 36). This ability to absorb contradiction gives the binary-parent/child—an inordinately hegemonic potency. The interesting thing is that this rhetorical strategy can be almost seamlessly transferred to the representation of place.

The problem is that the balance between empty space and *colonial* location keeps overstepping its bounds. There is a constant slippage between space and place that stems from the capacity of place to signify difference and construct identity. The space/place distinction thus keeps slipping into something like German *raum*. Colonial displacement renders the environment so distinct that in Australia, for instance, the very limitlessness of space characterizes the Australian sense of place. It is out of this disruption of the space/place binary that the anxious and continuing struggle over settler colony identity emerges. My 'place' becomes an extensive tract of space I will never visit because it operates mythically in my sense of being.

Place is a text—that is an important feature of its cultural density. On one hand, place can be constructed by the interactive operation of various texts—not only written media such as documents, books and brochures, but also spoken, visual and non-verbal media including photographs, architecture, advertisements, performance media, and the artifacts of material culture (national parks and forests might be seen as one example of a social text). But place is also a ‘text’ itself, a network of meaning, a production of discourse that may be ‘read.’

Places are always in the process of being created, re-read, and re-written, particularity sites of cultural and political contestation. They are always provisional and uncertain, and always capable of being discursively manipulated towards particular ends. This is strikingly demonstrated in colonial occupation. Value and meaning do not somehow inhere in any space or place, but must be created, reproduced, and defended—whether by indigenous or colonial discourse. Post-colonial place is therefore a site of struggle on which the values and beliefs of indigenous and colonizer contend for possession. The indigenous narrations of place are never entirely erased. Post-colonial place is in a continual state of flux and creation, more rhizomic than palimpsest, a region of transformation.

The idea of place as text can be both illuminating and misleading. For instance, the metaphor of the palimpsest has been extraordinarily successful in elaborating the textuality of place. But the palimpsest suggests that newness can be brought into the world *only* by erasure. It visualizes the text as a flat plane, a misleading view of temporal continuity of the struggle over place. The perception of place as a rhizomic rather than palimpsestic text reveals that newness is always a potential product of the dis-articulated resistances and transformations of the inhabitants. Newness really is, ultimately, the province of the hybrid, the mundane, the quotidian.

Erasure

The acts that create the colonial text of place are those of erasure, inscription and narration. Notice that these terms also tend to invoke the metaphor of the text as a flat plane. But they occur vertically through

time as well as laterally in space. The moment of contact is the first erasure because place is regarded as empty, unoccupied and ‘virgin’ land—newness is forced onto it. When Columbus went ashore at Guanahani, he had royal standards displayed, banners bearing an ‘F’ and a ‘Y’ for Ferdinand and Isabella, and over each initial was displayed a crown and a cross (Jones 100). When Spanish conquistadors raised the cross over new territories they consecrated them in the name of Jesus believing that they enabled the territories to undergo a new birth. For through Christ “all things are passed away, behold all things become new” (II Cor. 5.17). The newly discovered country was ‘recreated’ by the cross, as though it had no prior existence other than unredeemed wilderness (Eliade 32). The raising of the cross is a specific example of the process of signification that occurs in language through naming and mapping: the sign locates, appropriates and identifies space as new. But importantly, this creation of newness through erasure has, very often, a sacred dimension that becomes an important feature of the moral authority claimed by colonizers. The land thus erased by the text of arrival has a virginal quality that reinforces the concept of a sacred newness. This new and virginal sacredness is often identified in apocalyptic terms: in the language of Revelation, “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21.1.1).

Colonial space is as new as the child. The doctrine of *terra nullius* corresponds directly to Locke’s claim that the child’s consciousness was a *tabula rasa*. But the blank slate is continually being inscribed and erased over time. Jay Arthur, for instance, analyzing various documents including government and private geography, economic and demographic reports finds a dizzying array of terms used in Australia, right up to the present, to nullify precolonized space, including “unawakened, uncleared, undescribed, undiscovered, unexplored, unfamiliar, ungrazed, uninhabited, unknown, unnamed, unoccupied, unpeopled, unproductive, unsettled, untamed” (66). The pre-colonized space thus continues to be erased and constituted by its ‘un-ness’ or ‘not-ness.’ The land is characterized by lack, absence, and nullity. Colonization does not necessarily fill this emptiness. Whereas pre-colonial space is ‘timeless and ageless,’ post-colonial space is ‘endless and featureless.’ Place is now revealed to be “unawakened, uncleared, undescribed, undiscovered, unex-

plored, unfamiliar, ungrazed, uninhabited, unknown, unnamed, unoccupied, unpeopled, unproductive, unsettled, untamed” (Arthur 66).

By means of such negation, language has cleared the ground, and continues to clear ground, quite literally, for a disastrous influx of foreign plants and animals. Because agriculture was held to be the only medium of development, the ‘unawakened’ bush was cleared to exposed fragile soils. In 1847 it was predicted that it would take five or six centuries to clear the ‘Big Scrub’ in Northern New South Wales. But it was gone within twenty years of clearance, starting in 1880. The resulting salinity, disappearance of topsoil and change of climactic conditions is well documented. So, upon ground cleared first in language, then in fact, ‘new Europeans’ began to build in the temperate zones of the Southern Hemisphere. A wide range of temperate and Mediterranean crops and fruits were imported to these colonies by naturalization or acclimatized societies, as ‘newness’ relentlessly prepared the way for ‘sameness.’ Introduced diseases wiped out local competitors; introduced animals such as horses, donkeys, cattle, camels, water buffalo and particularly the rabbit reached plague proportions, while thousands of indigenous plants and animals became extinct.

All this built on an act of disobedience when Captain Cook, ignoring his own description of aboriginal society as happier than its European counterpart, and disobeying orders to “take convenient situations of the Country with the *consent* of the natives, or if *uninhabited* take possession in the name of his Majesty,” erased the existence of that people when he hoisted the Union Jack of Possession Island (Carter 27). The word possession identifies the oxymoronic status of the newness of colonial space. The very act of erasure is designated to inscribe it as same.

Inscription

The name “Possession Island” on which Cook formally took possession of the whole of Australia for England by raising the flag leads us to the next process in the creation of the text of place: inscription. Possession Island not only locates the moment, but enacts the function of language in the act of possessing. Erasure is not simply a failure to perceive, it is an *act* of nullification embodied in a name.

A chilling demonstration of this is the erasure of Arabic toponymy in Palestine and its reinscription with Hebrew names (Azaryhu and Golan 178). The Hebraicization of the map began in 1949 with the establishment of Israel itself, a virtual erasure of Palestine and the inscription of the state of Israel. This erasure had long been preceded in Zionist propaganda by the slogan “A land without people (Palestine) for a people without land (Jews).” The erasure of the land as *terra nullius* was the necessary preliminary to the inscription of the Israeli State, an inscription that was conducted with a concerted state-funding program of renaming.

The ideological basis of the process was indicated by Ben-Gurion who claimed that the lack of Hebrew place names meant that the land *could not be known* by the Jewish inhabitants. The Government Names Commission began replacing Arab locations with Biblical names, but since only 174 Hebrew names are mentioned in the Bible, the process continued by erasing Arabic names and inscribing Hebrew names that had no historical provenance.

But such linguistic violence shows the limitations of the palimpsest metaphor, for the contest of inscription is still there. The Hebrew map of Jewish Israel has not replaced the Arabic map of Arab Filastin. Arabic toponymy further persists in the form of Arab folk geography and in Arab-Palestinian maps that assert the validity of Arabic place-names. Consequently, Hebrew and Arabic toponymies persist as two versions of a shared and contested national homeland (Azaryhu and Golan 193).

Sometimes erasure is much more devious when it inscribes names that putatively honour the indigenous occupancy. In Australia the surveyor-explorer Major Mitchell, who erased earlier explorers' names on the emerging map and replaced them with aboriginal ones demonstrated a dual form of erasure. Mary Louise Pratt calls this “anti conquest,” by which she means, “the strategies of representation whereby European bourgeois subjects seek to secure their innocence in the same moment as they assert European hegemony” (7). Anti-conquest explains why the representation of indigenous subjects as ‘noble savages’ can have the same effect as their demonization as ‘primitives.’ Anti-conquest exoticizes, even glorifies indigenous subjects in the very moment of their disempowerment.

The power of language to construct the physical environment is one with which the colonized must always content. Whatever the sense of inherent or cultural ‘belonging’ to place which indigenous occupants may have, it is clear that place may be ‘controlled’ by being familiarized and domesticated through language. The process of naming is fundamentally an act of power and the most important power is the power over representation, the power to present a toponymy as the only representation of a real world.

The most obvious ploy in colonial discourse in general is to name particular sites, towns, headlands, mountains, and rivers with the names of imperial politicians and monarchs. There is no doubt a cynical element of repayment for patronage and expectation of advancement by the explorers, cartographers and pioneers who do the naming. But at a more profound level the place may be incorporated into imperial discourse by a naming of its climactic, geological, topographical, and geographical features, which locate the place into a modern, universal system of reference. The Mercator projections atlas is perhaps the most comprehensive and significant example of this process. But it occurs continually and at many levels. For instance, the contestation of English names in various colonies becomes a strategic aspect of the reclamation of place. The Australian “Jindyworobak” poet Rex Ingamels, in advocating a new language to describe the country, claimed that the English idiom might apply “to a countryside of oaks and elms and yews and weeping willows, and of skylarks, cuckoos, and nightingales,” but when translated to the Australian environment’s “stark, contorted, shaggy informality, it seems absurdly out of place” (12). The universalism of the imperial language is often contested by what appears to be and essentializing local idiom. However, it is difference itself rather than an essential descriptive modality that locates (or creates) identity in the decolonizing language.

This assumption of dominance requires that the indigenous subjects be, in effect, dehumanized, their own processes of naming erased. In the play *Caliban*, written by the French orientalist and race theorist Ernest Rénan, the opening scene sees Caliban and Ariel discussing the issues that arise in Act I Scene ii of *The Tempest*. Here Ariel echoes the formative and strategic assertion of colonial occupation:

Thou sayest without cessation that the island belongs to thee. In truth, it did belong to thee, just as the desert belongs to the gazelle, the jungle to the tiger, and no more. Thou knowest the name of nothing there. Thou wast a stranger to reason and thy inarticulate language resembled the bellowing of and angry camel more than any human speech. (Rénan 17)

The pronouncement of the inarticulacy of the indigenous occupants is an important erasure, a constitution of empty space on which place can then be constructed palimpsestically by the various processes of colonial discourse. One of these processes involves endowing or denying human identity to the indigenous inhabitants, a role in which Miranda functions by providing the terms by which Caliban may know himself. It was she who, teaching Caliban language, taught him to “know [his] own meaning” (I.ii.358)

The Irish playwright Brian Friel focuses on just this link between colonial naming and power in his play *Translations*. Set in the Donegal hedge-school of Baile Beag in 1833, the play describes the process by which an Ordnance Survey undertaken by the British Army proceeds to ‘re-map’ the area by substituting English names for the original Gaelic place names. This re-naming symbolizes the wide number of social changes that ensued at that time, such as the replacement of the hedge-schools with a free National school system, and the introduction of the postal system. But the renaming of colonized place manifests the true subtlety and power of imperial discourse. This process may occur without the apprehension of those involved. The headmaster of the hedge-school, Hugh, reports the Captain Lancey, leader of the Survey, “voiced some surprise that we did not speak his language” (25). To Lancey, the survey is what the government white paper says it is: the provision of “up-to-date and accurate information on every corner of this part of the Empire” and a means of “equalizing taxation” and advancing the “interests of Ireland” (31). The naming process itself is completely arbitrary.

This arbitrariness demonstrates that it is the discourse of renaming, rather than the particular names themselves, the process of applying imperial technology to place rather than its specific details that matters.

Friel's description of the ways in which places are renamed shows that the very arbitrariness is a comprehensive dismissal of the value or meaning of any extant reality in the colonized place:

Owen: Now. Where have we got to? Yes—the point where that stream enters the sea—the tiny little beach there. George!

Yolland: Yes. I'm listening. What do you call it? Say the Irish name again?

Owen: Bun na hAbhann

Yolland: Again.

Owen: Bun na hAbhann

Yolland: Bun na hAbhann

Owen: That's terrible George.

Yolland: I know. I'm sorry. Say it again.

Owen: Bun na hAbhann

Yolland: Bun na hAbhann

Owen: That's better. Bun is the Irish word for bottom. And Abha means river. So it's literally the mouth of the river.

Yolland: Leave it alone. There's no English equivalent for a sound like that.

Owen: What is it called in the Church registry?

Yolland: Let's see . . . Banowen.

Owen: That's wrong. (Consults text) The list of freeholders calls it Owenmore—that's completely wrong. Owenmore's the big river at the west end of the parish. (Another text) And in the grand jury lists its called—God!—Binhone!—wherever they got that. I suppose we could Anglicize it to Bunowen; but somehow that's neither fish nor flesh.

(Yolland closes his eyes again)

Yolland: I give up.

Owen: (at map) Back to the first principles. What are we trying to do?

Yolland: Good question.

Owen: We are trying to denominate and at the same time describe that tiny area of soggy, rocky, sandy ground where that

little stream enters the sea, an area known locally as Bun na hAbhann . . . Burnfoot! What about Burnfoot?

Yolland: (indifferently) Good, Roland. Burnfoot's good.
(II.1.1–34)

This is an astute description of the way in which the discourse of renaming, the act of mapping, fractures the link between language and place at the very point of its central claim: the point at which it is supposed to be providing a description. The arbitrariness of the ultimate naming is an ironic subversion of the scientific posturing of the survey, and a demonstration of the way in which imperial discourse provides a constitutive grid over the local reality that reconstitutes it according to the requirements of the map rather than any requirements of habitation or personal experience. “Bun na hAbhann,” “Owenmore,” and “Binhone” are names that operate in different social and material contexts. The arbitrary “Burnfoot,” plucked from nowhere but the lexicon of English acquires an authority by simple virtue of its inscription on the authorized text of the survey map. The name itself is metonymic of the authority of the imperial discourse that commissions the map.

Narrating

Topographical space, such as a mountain, a waterfall, a river or a plain is already, to some extent, located in a discourse *before* it is encountered, inscribed and ‘owned’ and before it becomes the site of a continuing narration of occupation. This is because the names given to such space invoke the connotations of the culture from which they emerged. But it is narration that confirms the place as place. By narration, space is located in time. By narration the displacement characteristic of post-colonial discourse, the gap between language and place, becomes filled, and by narration, culture constructs the text of place. Just as narrative structures our sense of self and our interactions with others, our sense of place and community is rooted in narration.

Barbara Johnstone, in her study of place-making through story-telling, found that “just as narrative structures our sense of self and our interactions with others, our sense of place and community is rooted in

narration. A person is at home in a place when the place evokes stories, and conversely, stories can serve to create places” (5). Stories represent, pattern, and express the meanings of place across society, and therefore the study of post-colonial literary and cultural narrative is a particularity strategic entry into the dynamic space of post-colonial place.

Narration is not only verbal. An important feature of the narrating process is that it includes forms of representation such as painting. Visual representation is an aspect of the narrative process because paintings occur within a particular discourse. Representation is itself a process of giving concrete form to ideological concepts. For instance, the visual representation of Australia in colonial times fell into two broad discourses that had existed even before the arrival of European settlers. Visual representation narrated one of two stories: either the colony was Arcadian—nature as a place of freedom and possibility, as land where a ‘new’ race might develop—or it was Dystopian—a wasteland and prison at the edge of the known world to which people were relegated as punishment. One aspect of the Arcadian discourse was the element of the sublime representation imported from German Romanticism. The narration of these two discourses has dominated the representation of Australian place ever since.

There are many different imperial narratives that comprise the text of place. Narratives of exploration and discovery; narratives of adventure and rite of passage; narratives of hardship and triumph; narratives of mountaineering; and the discourse that had a huge impact on colonial place, particularly Africa—the discovery of hunting. Mountains are important to the nineteenth century narrative of adventure because they fulfill the Romantic vision of the Sublime wilderness and provide a vantage point for narratives of exploration, surveillance, and imperial vision. Hansen has described the importance of mountain climbing to the professional middle-classes of the late nineteenth century Britain. They “actively constructed an assertive masculinity to uphold their imagined sense of British imperial power” (304). In other words,

In their moral histories of climbing, the mountain turns headmaster, teaching its students the virtues that were supposed to

make them truly *men*: brotherhood, discipline, selflessness, fortitude, sang-froid. And like the far-flung regiments of empire, like the missionaries under palm and pine, like the explorer toiling up the tropical river, they were true guardians of the patriotic flame. (Schama 503)

Mountains changed from the Romantic identification as sublime landscapes requiring awe. The sublime still occupied an important place in colonial art and travel writing up to the twentieth century. In awe of the majesty and beauty of a waterfall in Africa, Mary Kingsley writes, “I just lose all sense of human individuality, all memory of human life, with its grief and worry and doubt, and become part of the atmosphere” (178). The tradition of sublime contemplation is an effective means of erasure as the scene is rendered part of an unsullied Nature. But that element of the sublime that most characterized the Romantic discourse—the mystery, unknowability, and otherness—offered a direct challenge to the imperial determination for conquest. Indeed it was their awe-inspiring nature that made mountains fitting challenges to imperial achievement.

Narrating the Story of Development

It would be nice to think of the imperial text of place as an inscription erased by post-colonial discourses such as nationalism. But this is far too simple and outcome. Because place is a rhizomic text we can see a constant and fragmented set of re-inscriptions and resistances. Nationalism, as we could amply demonstrate, not only in its narratives of place, but also in its narratives of the body, the society and identity, simply perpetuates the imperialist narrative.

The investment of nationalist discourse in the imperial narrative is nowhere more obvious than in the various narratives of ‘development.’ Although the nugatory term used to describe colonial space changes in meaning after colonization, the tendency to erase that space continues under the guise of a continuing need for ‘development.’ Just as the colonial subject may be portrayed as a child, in need of discipline and nurture, the language of development can make ‘constructions’ of place

appear to be aspects of both Nature and Culture. In a speech opening the lake Argyle dam wall in 1972, Premier Tonkin of Western Australia referred to the 300m by 100m rock and earth wall as lying “unobtrusive as a goanna” amid the Carboyd Ranges (17). The wall can be seen to come out of the landscape rather than as being places on it as apart of the land as an indigenous animal. In 1996 the *Australian Geographic* captioned a photograph of Lake Argyle as a natural beauty man-made. Here, colonizing activity is seen to belong to the place, as a part of the place’s essential nature, so that the oxymoron ‘natural beauty man-made’ indicates the process whereby indigeneity is re-invented. This linguistic strategy demonstrates the facility with which development discourse resolves the ambivalence of newness. Tonkin’s speech is a form of anti-conquest, in which the erasure of indigenous place is obscured by a language of simulation, a re-inscription of the features of a developed economy onto the landscape.

Wilderness

One supremely successful strategy for managing the ambivalence of colonial space is the concept of ‘wilderness,’ which comprehensively reformulated the Romantic conception of the natural sublime for twentieth century Western society. Despite Richard Grove’s contentions that National parks resulted from the impact on colonial administrators of non-Western views of nature, the imperial enterprise developed deep-seated myths of nature that infiltrated or even underpinned apparently enlightened ideas about preserving the natural world.

The most spectacular example of this perhaps is the rise to prominence of ‘wilderness.’ The original meaning of this work was a wild place lacking human amenity or civilization; beyond settlement; of wild animals and wild people; unused and unusable (Schama 78). Over this Lockian view of wilderness as *terra nullius* was overlaid the Rousseauian sense of wilderness as precious, unsullied, a natural wonderland, a place of natural balance and wild order, providing a backdrop for human action and a moral baseline for destructive human engagements with nature (Cronon 72). Both of these senses are combined in the Exodus story that provides and originary conception of wilderness. For here the

wilderness through which the children of Israel journeyed for forty years was a passage to the Promised Land. Both as a passage to civilization, as a wild place that can teach the adventurer brotherhood, discipline, selflessness and fortitude, the wilderness precedes the Promised Land of new birth.

The conception of wilderness was principally forged in the United States. Roderick Nash suggests, “a society must become technical, urban and crowded before a need for wild nature makes economic and intellectual sense” (343). Ruggedness, self-sufficiency and hardihood were to be found in the wilderness rather than the effete lifestyles of the city according to groups like the Boone and Crockett Club of 1887.

Wilderness re-invents newness, it separates itself from the idea of colonial space as a ground for civilization, specifically because it is constituted as uninhabited. The ambivalence of the child metaphor—of *terra nullius*, the clean slate on which civilization could be inscribed while simultaneously an unsullied, unrestricted, magnificently unknown and pristine natural world—is resolved by that essential feature of western rationality: the boundary. The boundary ensures that wilderness is Nature and kept separate from Culture. The civilizing mission can always manage to keep these totally opposed ideas in balance. But with the boundary between wilderness and human space being defined, the wilderness can be reinstated as the *tabula rasa* on which is inscribed the society’s good sense of ecological heroism. The establishment of wilderness is a very good thing that has very ambiguous consequences, because outside the wilderness, the unawake Ned, undeveloped, unimproved, undiscovered, unutilized land can be drafted into the service of international capital.

The bounded wilderness is an oxymoron that absorbs the slippage between space and place: on the one hand it is boundless, in the sense of untamed extensity, but on the other hand it is a place controlled by the processes of inscription: naming, mapping, boundary marking bring the wilderness within the spatial economy of colonized place. Wilderness is important to the imperial adventure narrative because it provides a place of primal innocence even though that native, child-like innocence hovers in an uncomfortable relation to the adult responsibili-

ties of imperial development. Hence Wilderness, the ultimate site of a Nature separated from Culture, can exist only as a cultural construct: Wilderness is Cultural.

Culturally, the boundary segregates the wilderness from the narratives that constitute the place as a hostile *tabula rasa* requiring inscription into human civilization. In Australia, for instance, the myth of the lost child, the myth of flood, of fire, of drought, all become the province of the ambivalent landscape of nationalism. But this myth of a hostile place has no resonance in the wilderness. The important thing about wilderness is that it must remain *pristine*, it must remain unpopulated, it must remain 'new.' Above all as a site of the Imaginary, it must remain an idea in the popular consciousness rather than the reality of a few hardy bushwalkers.

The prospect for the environment is grim at the moment, because the linguistic strategies built up over centuries of colonization appear quite capable of managing breathtaking examples of contradiction and paradox. Although environmental discourse appears deeply compromised by the western capacity to pass off exploitation as nurture, the post-colonial response is that resistance to this lies both within and beyond the discourse itself. Ken Saro-Wiwa was executed for opposing Shell oil's devastation of the Orgoni environment. But he showed that however compromised environmental discourse has become, the response to environmental depredation lies in appropriating and transforming that discourse itself.

Transformation occurs when the post-colonial subject occupies discursive or geographic boundaries in a way that redeploys the power they administer. The corollary of this is a mode of thinking which transforms boundaries by seeing the possibilities—the horizon—beyond them. Boundaries of various kinds and forms of boundary making are central to the colonial relationship, from the most material forms of spatial enclosure, to the most abstract modes of Western thinking. None of these boundaries is easy to ignore, and the ultimate force of imperial hegemony lies in their invisibility, for boundaries, erected forms of conceptual enclosure and social regulation, become ways of understanding 'how things are.' The transformation of colonial space therefore involves

several processes: the recognition of boundaries, a practice of inhabiting which uses them to the benefit of the inhabitants, and the development of a mode of thinking which disrupts and transcends them. Ultimately it is this principle of horizontality that can transform global discourse by dissolving the boundaries that keeps that discourse in place.

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