

Seeing the Cosmos: Ross Gibson's 'Simultaneous Living Map'

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1.

Ross Gibson's *26 Views of the Starburst World* (2012) offers, as the title suggests, multiple versions of the landscape it focuses on.¹ Written across 26 segments, it subtly undermines our expectations for a critical or scholarly text. There is no single, central argument or contention, no finite conclusion. Rather, it moves across its chosen ground—or around, through, along, between, each preposition has its moment of power—with dynamic fluidity. Centred on the colonial diaries of Lieutenant William Dawes, it offers an expansive engagement with the world of Sydney Cove represented therein. This is by nature a reduplicated space. There is no one version of Sydney Cove which takes precedence. The historical world of the diary is drawn into engagement with the reading present; Gibson's 26 views are met with a silent 27th in the reader's viewing experience of the text. To read this text is to experience the world made multiple, a sensation overt in the physical reproduction and representation of the diary's pages.

In examining and interpreting Dawes's diaries—'entering into conjecture,' as he says at one point (*26 Views* 144)—Gibson puts forward a philosophical understanding of place and its emergence in(to) meaning which ripples outward to hold significance beyond the consideration of Dawes's experience in the years of the journal's writing from 1788–1791. Indeed, Gibson generally rejects the term 'diary' as failing to represent the complexity of the text he studies. Instead, he describes them as 'language notebooks,' and sets forth on 'an examination of the philosophical issues poised within' (*26 Views* vii–viii). His approach takes the form of

a kind of montage-system, designed so you can flit through the various portions, putting sequences and propositions together in conjunctions that provoke new insights, enigmas and debates about the overall impression of the man and the bursting worlds that he encountered and impelled. (*26 Views* vii–viii)

Gibson's writing asks questions of the manner in which we create place. His emphasis on speculation, conjecture and insight through relation is part of a larger movement in his critical practice. And like his views, these questions become reduplicated as we consider our own practice in reading his work.

2.

It is notable that this discussion of space and place is framed through the language of the gaze. Gibson's constant invitation to the reader to 'view' (*26 Views* vii), in order to develop 'insight' (*26 Views* vii), encourages an embodiment of the place via the text. The landscape comes to exist through a physical process, emerges from within the body. This develops simultaneously as an emphasis on experience. Gibson describes the manner in which Dawes's language project quickly abandoned the neat structure of vocabulary and grammar he had intended in favour of 'event-fragments' (*26 Views* 78), wound like 'filaments of micro-

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