

Unsettling the Field: Christopher Brennan and Biodiversity

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In this paper I consider the ecological term ‘biodiversity’ as a metaphor within that of the more generally metaphorical term ‘field’, specifically in relation to Christopher Brennan’s unusual work, the *Musicopoematographoscope*. The term ‘field’, in the literary context may not preclude, but does not suggest, biodiversity: it suggests instead evenness, tamedness, industry, fighting or sport—and settledness. I use the ecological figure of biodiversity not as an indication of a relation between writing (poetry) and natural environments per se, but as a way of signalling attention to survival. A literature that can be compared to a biodiverse ecosystem—rather than a field—suggests the wholeness that health is derived from.

The make-up of Christopher Brennan’s *Musicopoematographoscope* is as follows: a title page in an exaggerated poster style; followed by instructions for performance of the following poem; followed by the poem which clearly mimics (though handwritten) the spacing and varied typography of Mallarmé’s ‘Un Coup de Dés’ (sixteen numbered pages including a final blank page); followed by a collage of extracts from ‘Press Notices of [Brennan’s] XXI Poems’, which has at the foot of the page a similar list of quotes titled ‘Private Notices’; followed by a fourth work, the shorter ‘Pocket Musicopoematographoscope’ (four pages). The published version includes an ‘Introduction’ by editor Axel Clark, a photograph frontispiece of the heavily foxed first page of the ‘Pocket’ poem, as well as typeset title pages. Though the announcing of the *Musicopoematographoscope* refers to the Mallarméan poem, I will also consider the constitution of the poster and collage pages as poems. My use of the term ‘Musicopoematographoscope’ will therefore refer to the work as a whole, and I will distinguish between the several forms as necessary.

Brennan’s work is not only diverse in form, but takes on the diverse institutions of typography, the page, the audience, and poetry reviewing, in explicit, indecorous and avant-garde fashion. It is, in other words, an assemblage. Deleuze and Guattari’s original term *agencement*—conventionally translated into English as assemblage—suggests *agency*: a term denoting both ‘a collective assemblage of enunciation [and] a machinic assemblage of desire’ (81). As Deleuze and (further collaborator) Claire Parnet’s translators emphasise, the term ‘has both an active and a passive sense’ (Tomlinson and Habberjam xiii). In poetry terms this finds an equivalent in Shelley’s ‘great poem’, cited by Brennan in his ‘What is Poetry?’ (*Prose* 18). The ecological equivalent of an ecosystem (that might be joined to other ecosystems) is a less ambiguous term, but it also has connotations of activity and passivity: it contains multiples of life, yet is also vulnerable to destruction.

In his introduction to Brennan’s work, Clark (also Brennan’s biographer) uses the terms ‘synthesis’ and ‘fusion’ in relation to Mallarmé’s and his follower Brennan’s aesthetic aspirations—of synthesising different art forms. He writes, in relation to Brennan, that ‘After losing his Catholic faith in 1890, he had tried various ways ... of restoring unity to life’, and that ‘in 1893 he came across the poetry of Mallarmé, which encouraged him to believe he might find, through poetic symbol ... a sense of organic wholeness—of “Eden”, as he now called it, after Mallarmé (Clark 3). As well as a symbol for wholeness, ‘Eden’ might well—

from a Western, Christian perspective—function as a symbol for biodiversity. My intention is to read the biodiverse as a metaphor in Australian poetry, specifically in the *Musicopoematographoscope*, for the unsettling purpose of constructing a new foundation. In doing so, I draw on the following quote from Rodney Harrison:

Archaeology in Australia, as in other settler-colonial contexts, has a key role to play in ‘constituting that which has fallen outside the realms of discourse’, making present that which has become absent from the history of the recent past. The idea of trace, or foundational ‘things’, is integral to writing such histories. Imperial histories seek to erase the trace—this erasure is a fundamental tool of concepts such as *terra nullius* which seek to overwrite Aboriginal people's foundational influence on Australian society. Shared histories work directly against such a stance. (Harrison 102)

Harrison provides an archaeological model for poetry criticism, in order to remake the history of Australian poetry as a ‘shared history’, and to make ‘present that which has become absent from the history of the recent past’. As the recent *Macquarie PEN Anthology of Aboriginal Literature* makes clear, Australian literature contains a bounty of Indigenous texts, some of which are part of Australia’s poetics history: not only those texts in English verse form but also those whose ostensible genres may be letters or petitions such as, I would argue, in terms of its language and combination of form, Norman Harris’s ‘Letter to Jim Bassett’ (Heiss and Minter 25-28) and in the concrete visual aspect of both Kitty Brangy’s ‘Letter to Edith Brangy’ and Maggie Mobourne’s ‘Petition to D.N. McLeod ...’ (ibid 14, 18). The sharing of Australia’s poetry history requires, then, an opening up of the definition of poetry: an unsettling of the dominant model of verse (however ‘free’) and things that look like it—for example, traditional Indigenous song, translated into English and typeset as verse. It is not that anthologies=history, but they do function so as a default if critics allow other possibilities to fall ‘out of the realms of discourse’.

The *Musicopoematographoscope* is not, after all, an easy text to anthologise—being an A3 facsimile. That is aside from the problems of extracting from it one part, and of repressing other parts. Yet it is these problems that point to its importance as a work of Australian poetry: it is itself a model of assembling different forms, a shared space. It resists fusion and synthesis. Like the biodiverse ecosystem, it has not been reduced. To do so would be to destroy that diversity. Though it is to an extent reliant on European literary history, the *Musicopoematographoscope* also ironises that history; it is not a work that in its sentiments or style makes for a comfortable ‘imperial’ history. It is a grand, unsettling statement, one that opens up poetic space, one that ironically ‘DAMN’s those who would close it down or say that it begins at a certain date (the equivalent of a *terra nullius* claim). It is a model for different kinds of poetry coexisting, rather than merely different styles of the same thing: it is in itself a ‘whole thing’.

Stephen Fredman, in *Poet’s Prose* (1990), opposes the term ‘wholeness’ to ‘completeness’. He writes, ‘... *wholeness* will represent organic, implicit, or generative forms of the sentence (often employing parataxis), and completeness will represent normative, explicit, or preconceived forms of the sentence (often exhibiting parataxis)’ (30). In Fredman’s terms, then, the *Musicopoematographoscope* tends to wholeness rather than completeness, as it not only tends to parataxis but also challenges normative conceptions of—and relations between—para- and hypotaxis through new uses of the page, and of script size and style. For example, a line that is broken and staggered down a page suggests a subordination that may

not exist syntactically—and that is distinct from a more regular stanzaic form. Lines—or sentences—that are in large script might be said to subordinate those in smaller, regardless of narrative or syntactic relation. Further, spacing creates a sense of disjunction that interrupts hypotaxis, making the line sound paratactic to an extent that wouldn't occur in prose, while at other times, as Clark notes, subordination has a harmonic effect (5).

The problem with terms like 'synthesis' and 'fusion' is that they suggest the work has already been done: the elements have already been fused, synthesised, the differences dissolved, assimilated. In reading Brennan's *Musicopoematographoscope*, I favour Deleuze and Guattari's term 'assemblage', while also taking into consideration a more literal definition that poetry critics Marjorie Perloff and Peter Quartermain have both borrowed from art criticism. Even without the French connotation of agency, an assemblage (though it may be said to be already assembled) lacks the stability of synthesis or fusion. There is still the possibility of disassembly and reassembly. An assemblage also suggests that it is made of different kinds of elements that are perhaps not so easy to synthesise or fuse. As Deleuze explains in *Dialogues II*: 'What we call an assemblage is, precisely, a multiplicity' (132); hence an apt relational figure for the biodiverse ecosystem, which may contain different kinds of plants, animals, birds and microorganisms. The model of the ecosystem is directly referred to in an explanation of the 'multiple' (and the *evental-site*) by Oliver Feltham and Justin Clemens in their introduction to Alain Badiou's *Infinite Thought*. As they point out, each element within the multiplicity of an ecosystem is also a multiple; if we take the example of a fish, 'each fish's eating and breeding habits belong to the ecosystem as well as to each fish' (25). Therefore, a fish, too, is an assemblage; and by rough analogy any element of Brennan's poem might be thought of as an assemblage—even a punctuation mark which, if it does not have habits exactly, does have a history of usage.

Perloff uses the term 'assemblage' as a synonym for collage when she relates Ezra Pound's work to the assemblage practised by visual artists (34-35). I need only point to the visual aspect of Brennan's work to remind us of the lack of critical attention paid to the visual in Australian poetry—and in Australian literature generally. As one attempt to diversify the settled field of local critical practice, I propose the adoption of Perloff's more recent term 'visual prosody', as a way of beginning to write about visual aspects of Australian poetry—in relation to the concept of the field, as defined by Charles Olson and adopted by later poets and critics—and, in the process, reviewing the institution that is Christopher Brennan. Along with Mallarmé, Pound is considered an important precursor to concrete poetry (de Campos 376), as well as being an important influence for Olson. Yet the assemblage examples of Pound's *Cantos*, TS Eliot's 'The Waste Land' and William Carlos Williams's *Spring and All* and *Paterson* are more synthesised (at least partly the effect of more 'hands on' editing and typesetting) than that of Brennan's assemblage work, its handwritten aspect perhaps ironising itself as a relatively primitive precursor to more elaborated modernist forms. Where the aforementioned modernists mix quotation with allusion, Brennan's work is made up of parts that are allusive *as works*, full of quotation rather than allusion (although these quotes also include their own mix of allusion and quotation). The *Musicopoematographoscope* operates *as assemblage* in a way that is formally macro: in large consistent parts.

In his *Disjunctive Poetics* (1992), Peter Quartermain writes, 'Our sense of completeness demands the separation of one object from another ... [we] assume the universe is not only knowable but *known* ...'; adding that rather, 'we must keep our options open. The logical mode for the expression of such ideas, the form, is collage, for collage resists finality, resists categories and the notion of completeness' (Quartermain 173). The multiple forms of

Brennan's *Musicopoematographoscope* constitute an open form (or megaform)—unlike a sonnet, say—as do the (relatively discrete) forms within it; here, Brennan 'resists categories and the notion of completeness'. Quartermain's description of 'assemblage' (drawn from the art context of Jean Dubuffet) makes a more precise distinction between collage and assemblage than Perloff, who treats assemblage as a general, encompassing term:

What is most striking about *assemblage* (besides, frequently, its three-dimensionality) is that its raw materials are often associationally powerful, almost always ready made, and *identifiable* (nails, dolls' eyes, photographs, dried flowers, old wood). That is to say, they retain much of their previous history (their contextual residue); it is also to say, in the words of one critic that (compared to *collage*) 'its ultimate configurations are so often less predetermined'. (ibid 180)

That they 'retain much of their previous history (their contextual residue)' is true of the three forms of the *Musicopoematographoscope*. The poster-poem refers explicitly to Mallarmé, as well as to the extended list of possible forms encapsulated by Brennan's overall title; this is followed by the pastiche of 'Un Coup de Des' that also represents a riposte to Brennan's friend, the poet Dowell O'Reilly who had 'attacked Brennan for obscurity' (Clark 4); finally, the collage of quotations that concludes the work (or rather concludes part one, as there is the coda of the 'Pocket' version to come), lists their sources: 'The Freeman's Journal, 'The Bulletin' etc. The forms and references are 'identifiable', but in juxtaposing them the 'ultimate configurations are ... less predetermined': literally, in that Brennan didn't publish them while alive. The open interpretive effect of juxtaposing different forms in the one work also creates a network of infinite possibility, and an analogue to biodiversity. Katherine Barnes in fact refers to the 'Notices' collage as a 'metaphorical landscape' (46).

Biodiversity is a key term for Jonathan Bate in *Song of the Earth* (2000), one of the first books of explicit ecopoetics. Bate describes the Keats of 'To Autumn' as a poet aware of biodiversity, which, he writes, 'depends on a principle [of] *illusory excess*' (106). The example he gives is the 'wild flowers' in Keats's poem. In this reading, Bate has already constructed the field as a place of produce, where 'wild flowers' fit his definition of biodiversity as dependent upon 'illusory excess', rather than considering the poem itself as a potentially biodiverse language construct or as a distinct organism within Keats's oeuvre: also potentially characterisable as biodiverse. For instance, Keats's poem 'To Autumn' is in three stanzas; in the Modern Library edition the stanzas are numbered (but not in Bate's version), and the poem both follows and precedes poems of one stanza. Go a poem further back and there is the unfinished 'Hyperion' in one long canto and a truncated second; go one forward and there is the 'fragment' of the verse tragedy 'King Stephen' (370-90). Bate's argument is therefore limited by its semantic, interpretive reading. The notion of 'illusory excess' is itself a weak definition, requiring an outside interpretation of excess that is then corrected as illusory: whether by the same evolving consciousness or a more enlightened one is not clear. To be fair, Bate's reading goes beyond this by, for example, pointing out that, unlike other poems by Keats, in 'To Autumn' 'the self is dissolved into the ecosystem'. The poem is a decentred network (107), and a Romantic alternative to Charles Olson's later theory of the open field with the poet as object within the field: to which I will return.

Bate's choice of 'wild flowers' as 'illusory excess' is a curious one. There are other contenders, the 'small gnats' or 'hedge-crickets' in stanza three, for example. But the poem itself points explicitly to an excess of produce in both stanza one (the 'o'erbrimmed' honey),

and stanza two with its reference to a ‘gleaner’, whose existence depends on a (non-illusory) excess. Bate’s reading, in other words, displaces excess as an ordinary effect of agriculture—or other production, such as *poiesis*—with the notion of excess as something illusory. In this way he avoids the notion of the poem itself being in any way excessive or vulnerable to deconstruction, eliding in a sense his own criticism by showing the perfect match of poem and ecosystem. Such an exemplary reading creates the possibility of other poems being read in similar fashion, but the complete reliance on semantic content makes for limited possibilities of the biodiverse poem.

Turning now to Brennan and his poem-assemblage, the *Musicopoematographoscope*, I want to argue for its biodiversity by focusing on different formal, non-semantic elements; first, however, I will briefly review the critical context of Brennan’s work. Brennan’s critics largely ignore the *Musicopoematographoscopes* in favour of his normative verse oeuvre; though admittedly this verse was considered ‘highly unorthodox’ at the time—and it was the negative reaction to these poems that generated the poem under discussion (Clark 3-4). His critical reputation is, though granted, unstable—swinging through deep ambivalence from positive to negative extremes. This ambivalence is characterised by Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra thus: ‘In histories of Australian literature Christopher Brennan’s work is treated as an anomaly, a sport’ (182). Here are some quotes about this poet: Geoffrey Dutton: ‘Brennan led Australian poetry in disastrously wrong directions’, and influenced the ‘“Poetic” rhetoric [that] has been the curse of Australian poetry’ (3); Vincent Buckley: ‘His example was one to be envied and shunned’ (xvii); Elizabeth Perkins: ‘Although Brennan was almost immediately recognised as an important poet, many found his poetry obscure and un-Australian’ (58); Chris Wallace-Crabbe: ‘The history of both poetry and scholarship in this country has been remarkably indebted to Brennan’; a ‘lofty, pure aesthetic’ (220, 230); Vivian Smith: ‘[Brennan] will not go away, and he cannot be tamed into perfection’ (Kirkpatrick 210). Dutton was writing before the *Musicopoematographoscope*’s publication, but none of the others, writing afterwards, mention it. The page size alone, its handwritten form, and the length of its full title would present problems for editors, but presumably most critics have taken Brennan at his word in considering the poem a novelty.

Katherine Barnes, in her 2007 article ‘With a smile barely wrinkling the surface’, is an exception. She points to the diversity of what she terms the Mallarméan ‘spoof’ that is the central work of the assemblage, writing of ‘the quite remarkable variety of calligraphic styles that Brennan employed to imitate the typographical variety of [Mallarmé’s] the *Coup de dés*’ (44) Barnes also writes of the work that it ‘can be thought of as a handmade book’ (53). With the poster-poem of the title page we have an explicit contradiction of the received image of Brennan’s work. Brian Elliott writes of Brennan’s poetry that it contains ‘no poster art of any kind’. Elliott’s use of the term ‘poster art’ is metaphorical: he refers to the kitsch nationalism of those with a penchant for ‘wattle blossom’ and ‘kangaroos’ (265). That the notion of ‘poster art’ is referred to only in metaphoric terms is typical of the conventions of formalist criticism. Yet Brennan’s poster poem does, I think, deserve further examination.

That the published version includes Clark’s preceding typographical version—of title only, without Brennan’s embellishments—suggests that Clark also thought of Brennan’s title page as a work in its own right. It is here that we are first introduced to Brennan’s ‘remarkable variety of calligraphic styles’, getting a sense of the poem as a page and as a visual work, referring back to the ornate title pages of earlier centuries (a gesture that Pound also makes in *The Cantos*, as Jerome McGann points out in *The Textual Condition* 107), while also proclaiming ‘THE ART OF THE FUTURE!!!’. The title page seems to embody a spoof

portrait-in-words of Mallarmé, Brennan's '*Hieratico-byzantaegyptic-Obscurantist*': complete with party hat, moustaches and his own converted name ('MALAHRMAY') as teeth. The phrases 'THE PERFECTION OF THE PAST!' and 'THE ART OF THE FUTURE!!!' float to the left and right like doves or Mr Squiggle balloons. It is an advertisement for what follows, the invention from 'Paree': the Prose-Verse-Poster-Algebraic-Symbolico-Riddle Musicopoematographoscope. What follows is not quite Mallarmé's invention, however, but Brennan's: as Brennan adds, 'With many improvements/freer use of counterpoint/&c. &c. &c. &c.'

Posters do not, of course, evoke fields: other than as vertical, static, metaphoric reductions of a field such as a playing field, which may be scored but is limited dimensionally. They block the possibility of 'projecting' language as a wall does graffiti or spit, freezing the action like a screen. Yet the rhetoric and tone of a poster's announcements and the dynamic of its page design leaves horizontal forms looking a bit flat. Perloff writes, in the context of postmodern poetry's multiplicity, that '... a new poetry is emerging that wants to open the field so as to make contact with the *world* as well as the *word*'. Her return explicitly refers to the openness of 'posters and newspapers' (181). It is here that we can say that Brennan, like the later Futurists and Surrealists, diverges from Mallarmé: explicitly incorporating a poster into the *Musicopoematographoscope* and parodying Mallarmé in the process.

The conceptual verticality of Brennan's title page is enhanced by his use of exclamation marks: 'THE PERFECTION OF THE PAST! [one exclamation mark] THE RAGE OF THE PRESENT!! [two] THE ART OF THE FUTURE!!! [three]'. Here Brennan opposes the future against 'PERFECTION', which is consigned to the 'PAST'. He admits the wildness of the 'PRESENT' moment (in 'THE RAGE'), and yet combines these in temporal assemblage with the 'ART OF THE FUTURE!!!' – each 'time' respectively symbolised by its own number of exclamation marks. This formulation is mocked, however, by being consigned to the 'LATEST NOVELTY'. The novelty is both imported and local, incorporating 'MANY IMPROVEMENTS ... &c. &c. &c. &c.' The repetition of the '&c' implies a differentiated abundance—'MANY IMPROVEMENTS' can't be measured purely in numerousness, they must be *different* improvements. It is here, in the notion of the poem as ecosystem, that we find a use for Bate's 'illusory excess'—perfectly conveyed by the '&c.'s. These are excessive only in semantic terms; they can be justified prosodically both in visual and sound terms, and as evocation of the carnivalesque tone of voice appropriate to that of an advertising poster.

Before reading Brennan's work further, I want to elaborate on the 'field' as a critical term within late twentieth century poetry. In contemporary American (and American-informed) poetics, 'field' as a term has another, less settled and more dynamic connotation than that of the page as a paddock: deriving from Olson's theory of 'composition by field' and his concept of 'projective verse'. Olson refigures the definition of poetry as a field of operations into the writing of a poem. In this scenario, the poet becomes an object within the field, speaking (projecting). Olson's conception brings physical and 'processural' elements into writing poetry, rejecting systemic approaches (Bollobas 58, 62). It is a practice of ethical awareness and attention (65): a poetry both unsettled and unsettling, alive and breathing. As Jed Rasula writes of Robert Duncan's use of the expanded term 'the opening of the field': 'chaos is the opening' (43).

A recent critical anthology *Towards the Open Field* (2004), edited by Melissa Kwasny, attempts to construct a history of Western poetry—largely North American but beginning

with Wordsworth—under an open field schema. To do so requires some broadening of terms. Kwasny writes that she

propose[s] to use it as a general term for a range of modern poetic forms that, from the romantic period on, have been variously designated as organic form, free verse, open form, the prose poem, and the scored page ... a kind of patterning (at the level of line, syntax, rhythm, diction, even punctuation) shaped not by inherited conventions but rather by the specific demands of the individual poem, or poet, or subject'. (xi)

She adds that the intention of the anthology is 'to trace a movement *from conventional form to exploratory field*' (xi; Kwasny's italics). The anthology culminates with Olson's 'Projective Verse' essay, and in a sense recasts the history of poetry in English as retrospectively (progressively) Olsonian. As provocative as this is for literary history, in contemporary terms Kwasny's redefinition of 'open field' despecifies Olson's project to the extent that it becomes an uncritical one, a generalisation: that 'anything goes'. Brennan's poem fits into Kwasny's schema easily. But to say so is not that very meaningful—at best, it is a form of cataloguing. It does, however, make it apparent that the *Musicapoematographoscopes* have a 'meta' quality, in being combinations of different forms of what Kwasny would call 'open field' poems. We can call the poster 'open form'; the Mallarméan central poem is explicitly 'scored'; while the final section of the *Musicapoematographoscope* proper is a prose collage. It is perhaps then, in contemporary terms, closer to conceptual poetry. What Kwasny does, despite her claims for the individual poet, is to shift the concept of open field from its relation to the individual poem or model of practice to that of the field of poetry itself. If I follow Kwasny with the analogy of biodiversity then, I would apply it to contemporary American poetry, or English or Western poetry in general: the open field of poetry as biodiverse ecosystem.

While, again in contemporary terms, this would tend to render distinctions between poetry practices irrelevant, the notion of a biodiverse 19th century Australian poetry is a provocative one that—if it has any basis—is not easily discerned from anthologies, nor from histories. In his 'Projective Verse' essay, Olson speaks of the poem as energy, negating the reflective or representational. The poet is 'in the open', hunter and hunted. Olson draws on the image of being in the field, like a hunter or anthropologist, but also draws on the notion of a force field. His influential essay provided an escape route from formalist verse, but it was constricted in its inability to consider the limit of the page and the relation of the form of the poem to this limit – as if there were two kinds of field assembled together but ignorant of each other. It also emphasises linearity. If we compare Brennan's poem we see the energy; we also see the potential for a more diverse, decentred poem that has no issuing locatable ego. A poem that is able to move, being untied to the metrical line, can be read 'radially' rather than progressively (McGann 120). While Olson attempts to combine a conceptual poetics with one of the body, specifically the breath, a poetics of the breath could not create a poem like this of Brennan's, that, while following Mallarmé in terms of using the field of the page, is heavily reliant on pastiche—and in the case of the collage of critical notices, on appropriation; and, I argue, its merits are far from exhausted.

Olson's associates Robert Creeley and Duncan were more visually oriented and went on to a poetic practice more concerned with the page as such (Dewey 81-87). Anne Day Dewey writes that Creeley and Duncan 'developed a sort of Romanticism without nature that renders the blank page rather than the natural landscape the ground against which the poet articulates

ideas' (81). The page is compared to a canvas (87); both page and canvas are therefore conflated with the ground, the field. Or, as summarised by Rasula, 'topographic space is coextensive with a topographic dimension' (60).

To think of the field in terms of ground is to think of *changed* ground. Ground prepared and perhaps shared. A field like a page is defined, bordered. The production of either is rarely that of one person, but rather that of a community. Yet the fact cannot be allayed that a field is cleared ground, cleared of its original plants, animals and people. The settled field is predominantly the agricultural field. Keats and Bate's Romantic vision notwithstanding, it is not biodiverse. Perloff in fact characterises the move towards a more diverse poetry as a move away from the Romantic, framed in terms of the postmodern:

Postmodernism in poetry, ... begins in the urge to return the material so rigidly excluded—political, ethical, historical, philosophical—to the domain of poetry, which is to say that the Romantic lyric, the poem as expression of a moment of absolute insight, of emotion crystallized into timeless patterns, gives way to a poetry that can, once again, accommodate narrative and didacticism, the serious and the comic, verse *and* prose ... a new poetry is emerging that wants to open the field so as to make contact with the *world* as well as the *word*. (181)

Of course the English and Australian contexts are different. In Australia, current ecological trauma resonates with the effects of Indigenous dispossession. The notion of a settled Romantic agriculture is not one of easy enjoyment: the clearing of the land is not a distant memory here. In a poem that is generally considered—if it is considered at all—to be a 'side project', Brennan fulfills the 'accommodations' that Perloff refers to. The 'political, ethical, historical, philosophical' elements are there also, although in this paper I am largely interested to see how these elements are manifest in terms of poetic form rather than expressed semantically: how, for example, the poem fits in with the ethic of the 'open field', how it may be read as 'ecopoetic' in terms of biodiversity—and how it may be read against a vision of settlement, that is, as a text of unsettlement.

In the central section of the poem—what Barnes refers to as a Mallarméan spoof—Brennan's use of handwriting styles that parody typographic fonts suggests a closeness and care of the poet for the field of the page. This is a care that does not extend to the reader. Brennan disdains the claims the 'press' or the 'public' have on 'the poet' (11-25). Here we have the agency of the text resisting (fielding) the poem's addressee Dowell O'Reilly's claims for the public's reading requirements: 'I DON'T GIVE A TINKER'S DAMN FOR THE PUBLIC AND THEY RETURN THE COMPLIMENT'. This claim follows the poem's performance instruction that calls 'for eight Voices ... & no Audience' (10). Brennan's audience rejection goes beyond both Jonson's Elizabethan desire for an audience of 'a select few' (Stallybrass and White 69) as well as the Dadaist desire to shock. It suggests instead a field cleared for the work: preparing us for the stark Satanic negation of page nine. A tinker (in Mallarmé a *thinker*, Barnes 50) is a mender—but what is broken? O'Reilly might say the patience of the public. Brennan expresses carelessness in this regard. He doesn't give a (tinker's) damn. It is not his job to mend the (illusory?) gap between public discourse and poetry, or poetry and money. His job is that of the artist, the punctuator, mending the arts into a whole assemblage: PROSE-VERSE-POSTER-ALGEBRAIC-SYMBOLICO-RIDDLE-MUSICOPOEMATOGRAFOSCOPE. The title enacts its journey to wholeness, in that the hyphens fall away at 'MUSICO ...' As ecopoetic or Indigenous figure, then, a tinker cares for a wholeness of culture: a biodiverse culture.

I would like to conclude with a reading of page nine of Brennan's poem. It features the single word 'DAMN' in large capitals. Read as a pun, it becomes a 'DAM'—the 'N' its own negation. (In another watery scenario, Pound concludes his parody 'Ancient Music' by abbreviating 'Goddamm' as a capitalised 'DAMM', *Selected* 38). A dam is a constructed waterhole and, as presented by Brennan, it supports no life: no 'hawklike' critics (17) or foxing (ii, 5) or 'streams of text' (Barnes 52). It is an ironic, caustic representation of ecosystem: a damned field. It follows the French symbolists in equating the inorganic with the Satanic (Payne 63). Page nine, despite its 'waste' of space, is clearly not blank, not empty: clearly, more could be made of this page as an image of colonial Australia—of the quasi-anagrammatical MAD MAN colonialist (or outsider) who 'refus[es] to come to the party'; of the activist 'enunciating the space of disappearance, where things refuse to quieten or settle down' (Carter 6). Quotes from the central poem readily adapt themselves to ironic anti-colonialist interpretation, to the extent that the audience (Brennan's instructions preceding the poem call for a range of voices and 'no audience', 10) becomes identified with settlers: that is, no settlers ('immemorial/inexistent/desert isle' (20); 'eternal nothingness/had more prestige'; 'the phantom treasure' (24); 'that by which they think they're something/their nothing' (25)). The ambiguous page nine, unlike pages eight and ten, is unnumbered. Nine is negated by its anagram and punning German homophone of 'Nein'. (Barnes refers to the significance of punning in Brennan's work—following Mallarméan practice, 47-49.) This page is the cursed alternative option, the place of quietude opposed to the activity and multiform life of the rest of the poem: 'the Voice/that must/for aye/be/silent' (25). Yet again—as with Brennan. it seems ever the case—there is the irony of the quietness of a page surrounding the loudest swearing: perhaps paradoxically embodying the reaction of the 'no audience' (Brennan 10).

Bate writes that 'The poet of biodiversity will also celebrate cultural diversity' (233). This is an appeal to the reactionary semantic, of the cure of society's ills through endless festivals, and suggests an ahistorical diverse present. What of the critic of biodiversity? Is their role also to celebrate the diversity of the culture? This is something Bate fails to do. Although he appears to open up English poetry to ecological approaches, in doing this he also uses the concept of ecopoetics to further solidify a narrow canon of, as he says, the 'chief "Romantics"', and a 'small but powerfully representative selection' of the 'geographically widespread' poets of the twentieth century (vii). This is Bate's assemblage—but of course it requires no assembling at all. I have argued that a biodiverse system requires 'constituting that which has fallen outside the realms of discourse', and 'making present that which has become absent from the history of the recent past'. The Australian case must be different to the English: our 'recent past' is implicated in theirs but is not theirs. Although Bate attempts to acknowledge this difference, he uses the 'representative' sources of Bruce Chatwin and Les Murray. There are no references to Aboriginal writers themselves, and though he warns against idealising 'Australian Aboriginals' (74), they are separated from the 'we' of the book: 'Where did we begin to go wrong?' (24). He imagines an Aboriginal reading of [John] Clare, and is confident in speaking that reading himself; he refers to songlines, but doesn't refer to a contemporary Aboriginal poet (165-66). For Bate the representational Australian is Murray, termed by Bate an 'aboriginal' (241). To what extent Chatwin and Murray can be considered representative of Australia (and they cannot be of Aboriginal Australia) is beside the point: the representational model is opposed to that of the biodiverse. Arguably, then, despite the use of the term 'ecopoetics' ('a making (Greek *poiesis*) of the dwelling-place—the prefix *eco* is derived from Greek *oikos*, "the home or place of dwelling"', Bate 75), Bate's book is a continuing of what *ecopoetics* journal editor Jonathan Skinner refers to as the:

‘Environmentalist’ culture [that] has ignored most developments in poetics since Ezra Pound. The literature of this largely Anglo-american may be ‘eco’ ... but it certainly comes up short in ‘poetics’—demonstrating overall, for a movement whose scientific mantra is ‘biodiversity,’ an astonishing lack of diversity in approaches to culture, to the written and spoken word (7).

Bate’s version of the ecopoetic has also been criticised by Harriet Tarlo, who writes in *How2* (2011) that *Song of the Earth* is ‘a critical work which uses the term [ecopoetics] to describe a rather exclusive club of neo-romantic, male poets (with one or two modernists among them, but no contemporary innovative poets)’ (n.pag.)

Perhaps I have committed the same error in this presentation of Brennan, a white canonical poet. However, I suggest that Brennan is a starting point—that may go in any direction—rather than an arrival. Brennan’s *Musicopoematographoscope* goes further than Bate’s notion of celebration; rather it attempts to *enact* cultural diversity: it does not have a ‘pure aesthetic’. It is an assemblage that desires further assemblage, creative and critical. I have argued that a *formal* diversity is required in beginning a shared history of poetry, rather than finding—or celebrating—examples of one kind of poetic form across cultural groups. Recovering the diversity and energy of the field of Australian poetry requires an openness to form and willingness to read texts beyond their immediate contexts—to not just take poets at their word. Though Brennan’s symbolist verse continues to unsettle critics, the agency of the *Musicopoematographoscope* is just beginning its unsettling work.

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