

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

CATHERINE NOSKE  
Monash University

## 1.

Ross Gibson's *26 Views of the Starburst World* (2012) offers, as the title suggests, multiple versions of the landscape it focuses on.<sup>1</sup> 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 27<sup>th</sup> 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-

narrative meshing over time to hold his emergent understanding.’ (26 Views 78) Dawes’s comprehension of the language depended entirely on his experience of the world it connected to. This, Gibson suggests, is a feature of the Eora language as well—it ‘actively shapes and partakes of the world even as the voice tries to model existence with wrought breath. . . . Every breathed act of speech is thus a forceful event in a mighty system of urges.’ (26 Views 92–93) Language, in this view, becomes an experience of the world—an idea which reflects on the language act of reading the text itself. The interaction of the multiple views constructs a subtle empiricism, in that it is the continued experience of both Dawes as a character and Sydney Cove as a place in new ways across different moments which carries their existence for the reader.

But the language of the gaze implicates simultaneously a seeing subject, a concept central to anthropological notions of place. Barbara Bender makes this clear in opening her seminal *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*. She contends that in ‘the contemporary Western world we “perceive” landscapes, we are the point from which the “seeing” occurs. It is thus an ego-centred landscape, a perspectival landscape, a landscape of views and vistas’ (Bender 1). Landscape in this context is the product of a subject-object relation, defined entirely by the act of viewing which constructs it for the subject. While Gibson recognises the limitations of his perspective—an aspect of the text I will return to—he also challenges the centrality of it in reduplicating each view. The viewing ‘point’ is shifted with each new chapter, at least in so far as new ways of seeing the ‘object’ are invoked. The seeing subject is thus also obliged to shift, to alter the act of seeing. The singularity of the subject-object relation is undone. Chapter Four, entitled ‘Naa—To See,’ describes the manner in which permutations of the verb for seeing occupies the first full page of Dawes’s writing in the journals. Here, Gibson underlines the investigative aspect of Dawes’s act of seeing, the project in acquisition and regulation made clear by the neat list of declensions and conjugations. But Gibson also notes how this shifts, how seeing as a verb is returned to and recast through narrative, made messy, perhaps as Dawes learns to see differently. ‘We see him step away from his old scientific convictions, his old nominalist solidness, as he starts to understand some of the prevailing contingencies. He starts to understand that this world does not always get measured as if it is made of solid and permanent components’ (26 Views 44). It is not difficult to align Bender’s ‘perspectival landscape’ with Dawes’s early viewing of Sydney Cove. But in illustrating the transformation in Dawes’s vision, Gibson opens the way for acts of seeing more generally to be reconsidered, ultimately challenging Bender’s insistence on the subject-object relationship.

Gibson picks up similar ideas in other works. The broader views constructed through his own experiences of a space in *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* (2002) intimate the impossibility of place existing as absolutely known. There is a hint again of an empiricism here, in that rational thought is subsumed by sensations both physical and emotional in comprehending the space encountered. Myth dominates. Gibson illustrates the deployment of the space as zone of cultural liminality—‘a place where evil can be banished so that goodness can be credited, by contrast, in the regions all around. . . . a place set aside for the type of story that we still seem to need’ (*Badland* 17). While the multiple representations of this space are referred to in the text as ‘versions’ rather than ‘views,’ they integrate national and personal histories to exist in the same open temporality, asking the reader to think ‘more boldly about how the past produces the present’ (*Badland* 2–3). Their reduplication functions in the same way to subtly shift the subjective position before the space, within as well as across each version through the use of imaginative passages which take up a variety of perspectives beyond Gibson’s own. More recently, the article ‘Narrative Hunger: GIS Mapping, Google

Street View and the Colonial Prospectus' (2014) expands specifically on the idea of seeing spaces. There is little trace of the perspectival subject here—instead, Gibson invokes the 'stumble cam' of the Google Maps camera to explore the manner in which technology opens up a multiplicity of perspectives which can be filled by the human subject ('Narrative Hunger' 264). Gibson's wider work thus contextualises his approach in *26 Views*. The act of 'envisioning' in which we as readers are invited to participate, becomes a response to the challenge inherent to Paul Carter's question: 'How did our representations of the world become hard and dry?' (Carter 8). The 'representations' Gibson offers play on the prefix 're-.' It is their interaction in multiplicity which creates the mutability and fluidity in the sense of space invoked.

### 3.

It is essential to understand the manner in which Gibson's views interact. We can begin in the manner in which he refers to his text as a 'shape-shifting device' (*26 Views* 15). The word 'device,' with all its implications of purpose, is important here. Gibson would leave us in no doubt that the structure he employs is deliberate, the product of design, and is intended to achieve an effect. This is a highly conscious critical practice. The views are numbered and ordered, but not in the sense that each is dependent on the last. They also differ in approach. As Gibson says early in the text, 'each mode [of engagement employed in responding to the notebooks] will occlude as well as reveal a different set of insights and feelings' (*26 Views* 15). They overlap, but are each capable of standing alone. They vary in size and detail—some engage extensively with critical sources and related scholarly contexts, others focus on Dawes's writings, others again offer brief points of conjecture or a simple idea before moving on. Chapter 10, 'Erotics,' for example, is just over two pages long, and deals exclusively with the suffix 'kara' in its multiple appearances in Dawes's journals. The suffix is referred to generally in the previous chapter as part of a discussion on the function of repetition in Eora language and culture. In that discussion, 'kara' is illustrated as signifying a '*sense of increase*' (*26 Views* 119), a point of linguistic energy which 'seems to carry the world's force' (*26 Views* 119). But in Chapter 10, the focus shifts, and the subject of repetition and reprise is acted out in the very relation between chapters. Now, the discussion of 'kara' focuses on the insistence on vitality the Eora language carried,<sup>2</sup> and the manner in which this vitality was transferred through the language—how Dawes himself seemed to feel it in tracing the very idea of 'kara':

it seems the force moved through every aspect of the Eora world—through people, tools, plants, animals, actions, ideas and emotions. Not an abstract noun, not a thing, this force must have been a suffusing influence, a *potentiality* always moving and changing. (*26 Views* 126)

Gibson is highly aware in his writing of the forces in the world, pushing and pulling at the characters he focuses on. He is aware too of the manner in which these forces constructed a world in motion, a place which was not static but dynamic and agential. In his discussion 'Event Grammar,' Chapter 7, he recognises the manner in which, for the Eora at least, 'the world is always ready to alter, to recalibrate, depending on how the elements are assembled, relative to one another, in any specific place at any particular moment' (*26 Views* 92). The Eora language, he suggests, actively participated in facilitating a world of movement, through grammatical structures which shift according to context. He illustrates Dawes's growing awareness that Eora grammar was 'relationally motile in its operation' (*26 Views* 92), and

suggests that as ‘he spent more and more time with the Eora, everything that Dawes must have once presumed to be solid seemed ready, before long, to waft like the air’ (26 Views 95).

This is the manner in which Gibson’s text functions as well. His re-envisionings meet with the traces of Dawes’s revisions in his diaries—the constant corrections, alterations, the references between pages. Gibson describes his work as ‘a simultaneous living map of what Dawes encountered’ (26 Views 17). It raises a concept in order to shift it, challenge, move along with it a moment later. No idea is allowed to become fixed, but must alter itself, recalibrate with what follows. This is the version of place which comes forth—one that is vital and fluid, written in a constant shifting relation to itself—a map with no reference but the capacity to come alive.

#### 4.

Through self-reference, the text simultaneously develops a complex self-awareness, felt across two distinct modes. Primarily, there is the sensation of ‘intratextuality’ in reading, the manner in which the text invites the reader to engage in non-linear reading, incites a reckless flipping between sections as the views come to be re-read and rearranged. But it also manifests within the writing as an ongoing discussion of process in research and response. Gibson’s act of engaging with the journals is made explicit, and the reader’s engagement with the journals as mediated by Gibson’s writing is thus inherently called into question. As texts, they become reduplicated—both physically in the continual reproduction of pages, some featuring more than once, highlighted in different ways; and conceptually in the altered state of existence this creates. In reading, the journals no longer seem to function as physical objects, but something more ephemeral—with the result that the reader’s status as subject before them also becomes more fluid. This awareness of process in the text is heightened by the notion that Gibson is in some ways attempting to follow through with the transformation he witnesses in Dawes. The gradual shift in Dawes’s thinking goes further than his growing grasp of the language/power systems that existed within the landscape. His character also appears to Gibson to shift. ‘Dawes,’ he suggests, ‘was amplified and illuminated when he was with the Eora, even as he succumbed in time to anguish, out there on his observatory bluff, weather-beaten and engulfed by language, stars and country’ (26 Views viii). The act of entering into a new understanding, a new way of thinking, is what Gibson in turn attempts to communicate through his unusual practice. Although as readers we are not engulfed by language to the same degree as Dawes, we are engulfed in a practice which is unexpected and which challenges our expectations for a text. We are also placed in the role of observing in the same way Dawes was, to the effect that our perspectives are challenged, even reshaped.

This process is overtly speculative. As Gibson describes himself, ‘I have to generate my own model from his model of the edgy world that was the colonial frontier’ (26 Views 151). This is occasionally an anxiety in the text. Chapter 13, ‘Said and Unsaid,’ is devoted to underlining the manner in which ‘these pages in front of you are just my personal divination about the slivered clues that Dawes was glimpsing and conveying to the future’ (26 Views 151). While this anxiety is at times frustrating, seeming to signal a hesitancy on Gibson’s part, it powerfully invokes the sensation of entering an unfamiliar culture. The putting aside of assumptions that this engenders is moreover productive—the reader is forced into an openness towards all which is unfamiliar in the text, a position from which normative critical practice can indeed be made new. For example, Gibson’s reminder in Chapter 13 that that his work necessarily ‘leaves a good deal unsaid’ (26 Views 152), that there is only so much which can be gleaned from the records surrounding Dawes’s life in Sydney Cove, calls the blank

spaces in the text to our attention. But just as the ambiguities in Dawes's journals leaves them open to speculative readings, so too the gaps here are fertile. The anxiety they give rise to drives the readerly engagement with the text, makes the relationship of text and reader one which is unsettled, dynamic, even exciting. Nothing in this space can be taken for granted.

## 5.

Gibson's writing is ultimately open-ended. These ambiguities are not only a readerly experience, they are inscribed in the writing practice. Nothing in the text resolves itself—neither in the vision presented nor against other versions of Dawes's life. Indeed, Gibson recognises two other versions of Dawes put forward in novel form, Jane Roger's *Promised Lands* (1997) and Kate Grenville's *The Lieutenant* (2008) and allows these alternative versions to stand alongside his own. Gibson's representation of Dawes is in this way left open to other readings and contributions. It allows the views to continue beyond the text as new perspectives are found. In one sense, Gibson is conceding thus to the limitations of his vision, acknowledging what Alison Ravenscroft has termed the 'aporias' in white Australian sight: 'There is no position in which one can stand and see all; there is no position from which one can know all. Likewise, there is no reading practice that enables one to see all there is to see in a text' (Ravenscroft 45). Specifically, Ravenscroft applies this to race, suggesting that 'white writers will use "we" and "us" in ways that suggest there is no one else in the conversation; an assumed "we" talking about "them." At the very moment that whiteness is critiqued, it is newly centralised and naturalised' (45). But in a slightly different way, Gibson is also recognising Dawes's continuation as a figure in Australian literature and culture. There is no attempt to contain or encapsulate Dawes's narrative. And it is indeed an ongoing narrative—most recently, we have seen the production *Patyegarang* from Bangarra Dance Theatre, which toured Sydney, Canberra, Perth, Brisbane and Melbourne in its 2014 run. Bangarra re-envisioned the journals in presenting a reading of them centred on the indigenous perspective, focalised through the character of Patyegarang as a medium between cultures.

In his own approach to Dawes, Gibson deliberately moves away from the literary mode as limited by the manner in which it demands a narrative arc, a storyline which rewards with resolution. There are, he argues, 'aspects of consciousness and the cosmos—many of which Dawes witnessed—[which] are not susceptible to representation through novelistic empathy and narrative conclusiveness' (*26 Views* 17–18). Gibson assumes limitations to fiction writing practices here which might well be challenged, but at the same time again situates his approach as deliberately and even forcefully speculative. He seeks instead a mode of engagement which '*works with* rather than *works away*' (*26 Views* 17) the contractions and estrangements that the notebooks show, 'not only between two cultures but also between the present and the past' (*26 Views* 17). Simultaneously, Gibson pulls the journals into relation with the contemporary moment of writing, both reminding the reader of Sydney Cove as a temporally located space and challenging the linearity of these markers of time. The invocation and even recreation of the historical space through Dawes's journals gives a sense of time as fluid—the direct progression of past to present is made to feel too restrictive to encapsulate the relations between Dawes's world and our own. Most interestingly, these shifts and slippages in time mark the future as similarly open. Gibson describes his practice as requiring, in this sense, 'a mode of writing—roundabout, relational, a tad restless and unruly—that can bring us towards some states of mind that are not biographical, psychologically focused or conclusive' (*26 Views* 18). The openness in Gibson's writing of time in place, an openness inscribed in the written form of the text, invites us to engage with not only a point of focus but also with a way of focusing. It deliberately constructs a writing

practice which might be taken forward in a variety of applications. Understood as such, the localised elements of his text open outwards to engage with a more global imaginary, a wider world of relations supported by the fluid and speculative movements of Gibson's thought. What he is ultimately putting forward is a way—in the sense of pathway, an avenue—by which we might understand the individual in connection with the world.

This is not the first time Gibson has considered specifically subjective involvement in space and place. His chapter 'Changescapes' introduces a conceptualisation of landscape as a potentially mutable system, 'dynamic, tendency-governed, ever reactive' ('Changescapes' 24). A landscape-system emerges as a fluid point of balance when 'several simultaneous modes of action, information, remembrance and alteration are moderating each other for the purpose of its survival within the host environment' ('Changescapes' 26). The subject is necessarily involved, simultaneously *in* the space and *within* the system. There is a desire for movement, both hermeneutic and temporal—Gibson describes the need 'to be able to zoom back and forth instantaneously connecting the past with the present, connecting received momentum with whatever is immanent so that one can perceive historical continuities operating in concert with chance and change' ('Changescapes' 32). The understanding of the space which emerges functions necessarily through the system, is 'not constituted merely by the sum of its components, but also by the intricate *relationships* between those components' ('Changescapes' 29). The similarities between this work and that in *26 Views* are notable. What has shifted is the approach—while in 'Changescapes' Gibson describes a theory of a space, how we might understand or enter it, in *26 Views* he illustrates a practice by which this understanding might be achieved.

## 6.

Gibson is joining, in this way, a movement towards speculative practices in Australian critical studies. In 'Captain Cook Chased a Chook.' Katrina Schlunk asks likewise how we might 'make new kinds of interpretative spaces within well circulated and official histories' (43). Her purpose, like Gibson's, is to challenge the consensus-building narratives of history which construct nation according to specific values. She uses her own proximity to nursery rhymes about Cook to achieve this. Slightly differently, Stephen Muecke both considers and explores potential avenues in speculative thinking, in 'Motorcycles, Snails, Latour: Criticism without Judgement.' Muecke puts forward a multimodal practice which allows a multiplicity of beings to enter into relationships, 'a network of shifting relations sustaining a range of delicate existences' (47), to ask how literary texts are keeping themselves alive. This is a practice designed to challenge accepted understandings of how criticism should work, eliminating judgement and instead casting it as a practice which should contribute creatively to our understanding of the world. This is work I have followed in exploring the vitalist philosophy of Etienne Souriau as relevant to both Latour's and Muecke's writing, (see Noske 2015). Souriau's radical empiricism underpins Latour's most recent work, *An Inquiry into Modes of Existence* (2013), where he, like Muecke and Gibson, plays with possibilities of relation beyond subject-object.

But these speculative studies, and Gibson's work in *26 Views*, might also be productively read alongside concepts of network which have emerged in the theory of world literature. Vilashini Cooppan notes the potential for texts as world literature to 'transcend temporal and geographic boundaries to resonate in contexts other than their own' (Cooppan, 'World Literature' 194). Just as Gibson's criticism examines a practice as much as a text, Cooppan seeks out not only the networks through which a text circulates but how we might

comprehend these networks, how we might know them. The problematic of world literature for Cooppan, (and as she notes for many others as well), is that ‘there is no singular “world” per se but only a changing assemblage of localities that coalesce into globalities of many kinds, each striated by the transverse networks of language, region, area and moment that simultaneously shape a single text and link it to others’ (‘World Literature’ 194). In response to this multiplicity, Cooppan has developed a theory of ‘double consciousness,’ originally in response to the writing of W.E.B. Du Bois. Cooppan takes Du Bois’s use of the phrase, which she reads as ‘enlist[ing] certain strategies of narration, especially literary allegory, in order to create a contrapuntal or dialectical formalism that yokes opposites together at the scene of psychopolitical desire’ (*Worlds Within* 302), to express the position of the subject in reading world literature, reading through literary networks. ‘Divided within itself, linked outside itself, endlessly moving between the space and time of the self and the other . . . double consciousness expresses an idea of the psyche—divided within, connected without—that maps not just racial and national consciousness but global consciousness too’ (Cooppan *Worlds Within* 114). Double consciousness provokes a response to world literature which would navigate rather than elide multiplicity. She calls for an approach which is ‘not spoken so much as mapped, through assemblages, linkages and lines across which there can flow a range of forms and entities’ (‘World Literature’ 195).

This might be one way to understand what it is Gibson is trying to achieve through the speculative practice he constructs. His positioning before Dawes’s journals as a text does not restrict their significance to their cultural or even temporal location, but examines the way they ‘resonate’ within the here and now. He encourages his reader to do likewise, so that the context in which they are understood shifts slightly with each new reading. The views are ‘purposefully fractal’ (*26 Views* vii). The linkages and assemblages they offer are diverse and dynamic, as well as ongoing. Simultaneously, there is no reason that the concept of double consciousness as applied by Cooppan should not describe subjective involvement in a space with as much power as it does a text. The moment of experience, supported by the conditions surrounding the event, coalesce in the same way to create the locality—the place—that larger narratives of language, society, region and time integrate into a wider existence. These narratives form the network which supports the concept of the global in the same way in reference to place as Cooppan sees them linking one text to another. This is akin to the way in which Bill Ashcroft, Frances Devlin-Glass and Lyn McCredden conceptualise place as an event, in Saussurian terms: ‘the equivalent of *parole*—utterance itself—rather than the potentiality of utterance that is space’ (324). The double consciousness of the subject in a space or place is to feel simultaneously the pull of the moment, the event as it defines the world, and the push of time and language insinuating its much broader implication in the global networks which surround it. This is once again to move away from a linear temporality in place. Double consciousness requires a sense of time which can encompass past, present and potentially even future within the movement of a text. ‘Movement, in the uneven, discontinuous sense I want to consider it, exists at odds with the larger modality of disciplinary history, with its cumulative story [and] filling in of historical and geographical absences’ (Cooppan ‘World Literature’ 195). In looking for an alternative version of time, Cooppan seeks a way to engage with texts in their networks of world literature which undermines this ‘flattening out’ of the world (‘World Literature’ 194), avoids historical narrative which would cement texts in a specific time and place. Certain concepts of memory, she suggests, ‘with their breaks, disjunctures and slippages, might productively interrupt’ (‘World Literature’ 195). This is, in a sense, what Gibson achieves. The modulation he introduces into the ‘official’ history of Sydney Cove, with the implication that he is offering a

form of history-making relevant to the future as much as the past, all arises through the breaks and slippages of his writing, the relations it produces.

Cooppan suggests that history of this kind can offer discourse(s) of nationalism and globalism which do not designate centre or periphery. It would instead ‘stratify and destratify, turn dominant and just as readily turn “minor”’ (‘World Literature’ 196). Through the work of Manuel de Landa, Cooppan theorises history as moving in flows, travelling through mutable pathways to make and remake connections and associations as it continues. The notion of flowing importantly emphasises a mode of movement rather than any point of departure or destination. She thus both allows for linear narratives of history and simultaneously challenges them. Flows can

be homogenized into hierarchies and strata or pass through more heterogeneous interactions, aggregations and mixtures, and so become destratified. A non-linear history captures both these processes, as well as the interactive energy operating between the various planes and across the network as a whole. In a network, different phases don’t take the form of a sequence or rise; instead, they coexist. (‘World Literature’ 196)

In this, Cooppan approaches Wai-Chee Dimock’s concept of ‘deep time—work which again questions the idea that time is measurable through linear relation. ‘Deep time’ conceptualises time as ‘a set of longitudinal frames, at once projective and recessional, with input going both ways, and binding continents and millennia into many loops of relations, a densely interactive fabric’ (Dimock 3–4). The ‘depth’ Dimock creates is not down through time, but across and within as well, functioning as a third dimension to undermine linearity. Understanding time in a linear fashion, she suggests, allows us to delineate rigid borders for the classification of national literatures, invoking ‘a seamless correspondence between the temporal and spatial boundaries of the nation’ (3). In such constructions of genre, ‘we limit ourselves, with or without explicit acknowledgement, to an analytical domain foreclosed by definition, a kind of scholarly unilateralism’ (3). Gibson’s rejection of linear narrative progression, both in his interaction with Dawes’s journals and in his construction of the text, can be read through this theory as a challenge to the definition of the Australian nation as well as to the history of Sydney Cove. In taking up a discourse of modulation and movement, he is making porous the boundary of nation, opening it first and foremost to relation with the philosophy of the Indigenous people that the history of Dawes’s era writes against. He is bursting open the tendency to narrative resolution of the historical novels he writes against. The text is a ‘living map’ for a world of more multitudinous and mutable connections. The world Gibson offers is composed through a system which might be imagined as resembling ‘a crisscrossing set of pathways, open-ended and ever multiplying, weaving in and out of other geographies, other languages and cultures.’ (Dimock 3) That he centres his work on a single place serves to comment on practices of place-making in this context.

## 7.

Can I read my own place like this? Can I enter into it as a network of texts and existences, challenge linear time, experience it as an event? I am not alone in trying—others are making similar attempts. Kim Mahood’s memoir *Craft for a Dry Lake* (2000) and John Kinsella’s writing in his blog (see ‘Further Jam Tree Gully Concretions’ March 2015) are both examples. This must be a different self-awareness to that Gibson shows in his text, but also one which attempts to apply his practice. I am riding through the forest of my home, and



involved in this moment with me are my horse and my dog, as well as other beings, easier to overlook—the wildlife, the flora, other humans absent from the space but who have left their traces, the DSE, local farmers, other recreational users, and—should you know how and where to look—the traditional owners, the Gunditjmarra people. To limit existence to the biological, though, would be to ignore what Dawes learnt in ‘kara,’ to ignore the forces in the world. So to this list of beings involved in this network, I must add futher: the weather, the air and the rain; sounds, noises; my movement through the space and the movement of others—that wallaby, my dog in hot pursuit, my horse’s pricked ears acknowledging their passing; my clothing and the narratives it brings—an English saddle and an Australian Drizabone, narratives of colonial Australian nationalism contrasted with an English tradition of ‘hacking out,’ I am living out my childhood reading, ‘The Man from Snowy River’ and my mother’s ‘British Pony Annual of 1964’ simultaneously. Other narratives are involved in slightly more complex ways. I am aware of—awed by—the beauty of the place, and beneath that, the knowledge that this is a cultural construct invoking a specific way of seeing. I rely on an intimate knowledge of the space, invoking a personal history of movement here, of amateur map-making and shared narrativisation with my family. It would be easy also to trace the ecological damage white Australian farming practices have caused, to discuss postcolonial guilt and feel that emotion as a force here. Doing so might lead me to recognition of Gothic sensations, a certain hauntedness, alongside the power inherent to this space, the potential for danger which can arise, the risk one takes in entering given its unpredictability. But it might also elide a multitude of fruitful relations in the space in insisting on a racial divide which incorporates a fixed temporality, white Australian present versus Indigenous history. Again, I would be forgetting Gibson in Sydney Cove. These existences needn’t be placed in opposition in order to function. They are autonomous, they have their own power, and they all exist in constant, fluctuating relation when I enter the space.

This network involves texts as well as narratives. There are several texts I am aware of which actively engage with this place, and many more I do not know. The area is rich with Indigenous history, and would have been known by a multitude of stories which are now lost or obscured, or not available to public knowledge. The network serves at moments to point towards these absences. Edward Henty’s colonial diaries describe a relation to place based within a financial discourse, breaking down the elements of the place in their relation to his farming venture. The two versions of this text, the original document at the State Library of Victoria and the edited version produced by Lynette Peel (1996), are both reduplicated by a third text, David Mence’s play ‘Convincing Ground’ (2010), which actively writes against the journal to depict a massacre which took place during the time of Henty’s writing.<sup>3</sup> Where texts are available, they can therefore potentially be read through this network. Paul Burman’s *The Snowing and Greening of Thomas Passmore* (2008), for example, uses a form of imaginative writing which takes up the some of the restlessness and fluidity of *26 Views*. It is not primarily set in the area, but refers to it and is written by a local man. Burman uses the structural device of an explosion to allow his characterisation to move through a dream-like state for most of the novel. Thomas is supposedly comatose, living out both remembered and imagined experience in a world of fluidity and flux. But the reader only becomes aware of Thomas’s accident and coma in the final pages of the book. In this way, the dream-state of Thomas’s coma becomes the primary reality in the reading experience, and the world is subject to strange shifts and disconnections. Time and place are open for negotiation in this dream-state. Thomas is caught between his English youth and his Australian adulthood. The novel opens with Thomas waking from an Australian beach to find himself landing on a flight at Heathrow. ‘This beach is a place beyond me . . . Let me flow into numbness and dissolve here, as rocks are ground to sand, and let me drift’ (Burman 5–6). This scene is reprised in the

very final pages as Thomas slowly comes to resolve the tensions of defining self which emerge through the English part of the narrative. He ends in placelessness, but at the same time is mapped onto an Australian locality in allowing his crisis of self to resolve in returning to the opening beach scene. The physical embodiment of the place here speaks to the evolution of a deeper sense of belonging. ‘I look at the sea and see it rise and fall, rise and fall, and its rhythm is the rhythm of breathing. A wave rolls in towards me and I watch it lift as the ocean takes a breath, and then, as it breaks and crashes, it exhales that breath in a long sigh. Breath after breath after breath. . . . “Hello,” the flight attendant says. “Welcome back”’ (Burman 283–84). Subtextually, Burman presents a version of the landscape which illustrates a tension between English past and Australian present/future, re-envisioned as a subconscious struggle of the self. The final passages of the novel open this tension up to be reconsidered, allowing connection to emerge within it. Burman thus uses form in a way similar to Gibson, relying on shifting points of connection to create an understanding of place as complex, capable of movement across past and present.

## 8.

What can be done to continue this work? *26 Views of the Starburst World* is an attempt to ‘negotiate and constructively redefine’ (Dixon, Rooney xv) the relation between past and future within the experience of place. Quite literally, in some ways—with the journals, Gibson is working with physical representations of the past which will continue to provoke interpretation and reinterpretation into the future. The ‘starburst world’ of his title, stars we are still looking at today, holds all the energy of an explosion, characterised by endless movement and shifting relations which deny linear progression. Connections here, in Dimock’s words, are active at both ends, an endless threading which ‘thickens time, lengthens it, shadowing in its midst the abiding traces of the planet’s multitudinous life’ (3). This is a world which opens to a cosmos, which encapsulates the current era as readily as 1788. Given the emphasis on practice which emerges in Gibson’s writing, continuing this effort is about adopting approaches to texts which aim to actively produce, which would seek to offer multiple points of relation between reader and text, moment and time, local and global. Producing texts, too, in the knowledge that as they enter the world, they enter into this network, and attempting through them to create new relations. This is a writing which can never be finished, by its very nature never come to a close. This is perhaps why Gibson ends his text with a question. To resolve anything would go against everything that his practice has to this point achieved.

## NOTES

1 This is a paper written in place. I would like to acknowledge the Eora people as the traditional custodians of the land this paper discusses, and pay respect to their Elders and families. I would also like to recognise the traditional custodians of my home in South-West Victoria, the Gunditjmarra people, and likewise pay my respects.

2 The Eora language is considered extinct in the oral tradition, although efforts are being made to revive it using sources such as Dawes’s journals.

3 Thanks to David Mence for providing access to his unpublished manuscript, ‘Convincing Ground.’

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