

In/On/Of—The Mixed Poetics of Australian Spaces, or How I Found the Cubby: A Fictocritical Essay on White Australian (Un)Belonging

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The tree came down in the storm, but it was the bulldozer that caused it. They had been clearing scrub for the new road all morning. The storm was big, intense—wind and rain and black clouds; the lightning rode in front of it and blew away again before it really reached us. To my seven-year-old eyes it seemed as if the sky was drowning, fighting and clawing its way up out of the water and back to clear air. Hiding in the living room, even the windows were quivering, struggling for breath. The trees outside broke apart, flew in pieces through the sky.

I watched that storm from under the coffee table in the ‘good’ lounge room. It smelt of beeswax and leather dressing. In reality, I cannot be certain that storm was the one that brought the tree down. Weakened as it was—its roots cut away from under it as the bulldozer cleared—it wouldn’t have taken a big storm for it to fall. I suspect too that the memory of the big storm is in fact a conglomeration of storms, the mental synthesis of all into one. I remember details, but not dates; my own presence, but not my family’s. Many memories turn around minute details: the pattern in the grain of a piece of timber, or the smell of wax. They shift outside time, become hyper-real. The storm, like so many things from my childhood, has taken on an existence for me that has very little to do with reality. It has been instaured and re-imagined as something other than a physical event, it has taken on a greater significance.

When I found the tree the following day, it lay on its back alongside the new road. Desperate arms reached up towards its fellows above and fell spreadeagled and exhausted along the ground in right angles to its body. It was a giant, the trunk alone was as tall as me and the root structure reached up above my head. The base, where the bulldozer had run against it, was scarred and mutilated. There was a stump, too, hidden behind it—another, smaller tree which had already been cut up for firewood. I climbed over the trunk, and found myself in a room of branches, the stump before me as a table. And this was how I found the cubby.

I grew up on the land. We chose to live on it. We didn’t need to, nor did we farm it—both my parents worked in the local township. Our tiny 27 acres backed onto the state forest, and what was cleared was scrubby, weed-ridden and poorly grassed. Attempts to re-seed it invariably failed. We kept it clear for the horses, bar the thicket of forest which we left for their shelter. The thicket was my playground. We were on the land; there, I was in the forest. *On* and *in*: they marked a difference in place. Still now these two prepositions intrigue me, in relation to land. We had all learnt, as children, to be easy in the forest, to regard it as a place to be entered, explored. *In* the forest means being *within*, *inside*. It means the forest opening to you, taking you in. It means being surrounded by the trees and the undergrowth, being held tight by their density and weight. Direction is signalled: moving *in*, penetrating and *invading*, a sign of your own agency and intent. But it also means a sort of respect, an understanding—because here you are on the forest’s territory, and it is *in* control.

On, by contrast, points to cleared land, land you can stand *on* top of. It gives the mental image of steel-capped boots across a paddock, crunching over dry ground, tamping down grass and raising light puffs of dust as they go. It means owning, holding, being entitled to. It holds a history of work and sweat to lay claim. It means land you control, you use; it suggests manipulation, domination (or manipulation, domination). Except that the land itself gave the lie to that, because ours couldn't be controlled or dominated, wouldn't grow what we wanted it to. *On* the land was a compromised state; just as the respect inherent to being *in* the forest was compromised by the bulldozer, when it smashed through the edge of my own little forest and cleared away the ground for the new road.

So neither of these prepositions really tells the truth about our relationship with the spaces they are attached to, and yet the power relationships they indicate are both strong and ongoing. The fence-line which divided our home paddock from the thicket was an important boundary in this way. It defined the two territories. The storm and the bulldozer disturbed this truce between the forest and the cleared land on our property. They disrupted the clarity of the relationship, brought forth the complexities in each preposition, and forced me to question my pre-existing notions of each space. Physically, the two sites which still existed as my home, forest and cleared land, remained balanced. The boundary had shifted, but not the physical reality of either, and it was this which had until this point shaped my understanding of each. But the bulldozer had, in a way, joined them; it illustrated just how easily forest *could* be cleared. In making visible the action of clearing, the already-present cleared land gained a pre-history, became a product of clearing just as the new road was. Paul Carter describes this as a politics of place, 'the forest stands in a critical relationship to the clearing, physically, historically and symbolically' ('Forest' 144). The two spaces, previously so clearly defined, ran into each other; cleared land held the memory of forest, while the forest saw a premonition of clearing. *On* and *in* became interchangeable, and the poetics of each space gained a political edge.

Finding the cubby was a moment of reassessment in this confusion. It redefined the wanton damage of the bulldozer as productive of space. The land which had been forest was now in that first movement inwards recreated as habitable cleared land. The previous relationship between *in* and *on* could resume. It is perhaps ironic that this was signified in an act of occupation and 'colonisation'; but in a sense also understandable, given that this tradition has defined white Australian constructions of belonging since the arrival of the First Fleet. With the notion of home attached to cleared land, the symbolic appropriation of the cubby was a return to the status-quo. It was an act of homogenisation (home-ogenisation, even?) which was also a moment of relief, in reconfirming normality and allowing the rules which previously had guided my child-self's relationship with the landscape to stand. The sense of belonging with which the landscape for me was indeed invested, returned. I could once more be sure of myself in relation to the space. That tree, lying there with its arms spread open, invited me in and offered me an entry-point to understanding the changes that had occurred. That which is cleared, we live on; and so I occupied my cubby.

Understanding the cubby as a space, however, is very different to understanding the relation I felt to it. Daniel Armstrong seems to appreciate the 'act of self-realisation' (105) a bush cubby can represent for a child. They offer, for Armstrong, 'a profoundly symbolic shelter, a refuge, an internalising space, a separation from the outside world of adults and parental control' (105). It is, he suggests, a space of self-definition, a manifestation of individuality in the solitude and distance it offers, particularly as combined with the act of construction as emanating from the self. It is constructed by the child as the child's own domain, 'a space

where children can have their own thoughts, sharing, playing and dreaming' (Armstrong 105). This is the sense in which the cubby was important to me. My relationship with it was highly imaginative and deeply personal. The act of building a cubby, Armstrong continues, is an innate desire, and the cubby itself 'an archetypal structure' (99). He describes this 'practice' building as 'analogous' (Armstrong 99) to language formation, the attempt to develop a relationship with space that echoes that demonstrated constantly in the architecture the child is surrounded by. 'The building of cubby huts goes beyond the pragmatism of just building structures for it is a syntax which includes the environment, culture and the development of a sense of self' (Armstrong 99). I would add too that the construction of a cubby offers an agency within the landscape that is gratifying for a child—it is the visible product of the child's effect. My cubby, by this estimation, was part of an on-going process of developing a relationship with the mixed space that was my home, and key to the sense of belonging I felt within it.

And yet, entering the reality of that mixed space, the cubby transgressed boundaries in the same way the clearing of the road had. The cubby was a representation of living *on*—it mimicked the relationship my family had with the cleared land on our property, but it was part of the forest as well. In one way, as Armstrong makes clear, this was a 'valuable and enriching experience' (105), bringing me into closer contact with the landscape, and encouraging the same relation of respect for the forest that had existed prior to the clearing of the road. But underneath was the vague unease that I was living *in* the forest. The notion of domesticity directly runs against the reputation of the bush as 'uncultivated, wild and dangerous; a wilderness of venomous creatures and a geography with designs for disorienting and entrapping the unsuspecting child' (Armstrong 100). The branches of the cubby-tree that reached up at right-angles from its body shielded the cubby from the cleared road. Simultaneously, they ensured that once you were within the cubby, you were constantly facing the forest, touching its edge. There was no shield there, save the forest itself. Even while I was familiar with this area of forest, and at ease within it, the conflict of the two prepositions *in* and *on* was made raw by close contact.

David Malouf seems to appreciate this sensation, or at least something similar, in several of his short stories. His writing of the Australian landscape is marked by a duality of emotion—the sense of alienation combined with a deep and often overwhelming connection. Psychological conflict in this way is often marked by physical conflict: Stuart shooting himself in 'The Valley of Lagoons,' for example, or the murders in 'Lone Pine' and 'Blacksoil Country.' In 'Jacko's Reach,' it is the disappearance of Valmay Mitchell. This violence and these mixed emotions come together to create a childhood space that is formative and definitive in the same way Armstrong sees a cubby. In the narrator's description of the place as a childhood haunt, it become analogous to adolescent development, morphing from a place 'to play Cops and Robbers' (Malouf 121) to 'a code-word for something as secret as what you had in your pants: which was familiar and close, yet forbidden, and put you in touch with all other mysteries.' Malouf like Armstrong underlines thus the significance of such a play-space to the development of a young person; but he does so in a manner which brings home heavily the nature of the place as wild, dangerous, uncontrollable. Like the bush cubby, Jacko's Reach is inherently 'other,' even in occupation.

In this, as a space that combines both a mixed physical reality and a complex array of emotions, the cubby approaches Foucault's notion of the heterotopia. It is, for the child, charged with reference to the outside world—remembering the manner in which Armstrong

describes it as an archetype ('Spaces' 99)—and exists as both physically real and highly imaginative. Heterotopias function with a fluidity of meaning, they 'are capable of juxtaposing in a single real place several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible' (Foucault, 'Spaces' 25). In this, they 'presuppose a system of opening and closing that both isolates them and makes them penetrable' (Foucault, 'Spaces' 26). They are also heterochronic, as per Foucault's fourth condition, simultaneously linked directly to 'slices of time' ('Spaces' 26) and concerned with the 'quasi-eternity' ('Spaces' 26) of 'indefinitely accumulating time' ('Spaces' 26). These concepts combined give expression to the more volatile elements of the cubby, its half-state as a 'proxy' dwelling, not entirely inhabitable, more symbol than stable structure. They also describe its temporality as somewhat flexible, existing in 'real time' for the child, and as a part of childhood in general for the adult, detached from time by memory and made eternal.

Understanding the cubby as a heterotopia reconfigures it as a place rather than a space, regardless of location. Foucault delineates the difference between external and internal spaces; the former, 'the space in which we live, which draws us out of ourselves, . . . the space that claws and gnaws at us, [which] is also, in itself, a heterogeneous space' ('Spaces' 23). Combined with the 'space of our primary perception, the space of our dreams and that of our passions' (Foucault, 'Spaces' 23)—the internal elements of space—we come to understand the heterotopia as a physical and loaded site within our world. It rises above other physical locations in taking on the power of that internal space, becomes marked as special or confronting, and as demanding a certain behaviour or etiquette from those who would occupy it. It also takes on an edge, related to its nature as a marked 'topia,' of being both real and unreal, physical and yet existing in its own way entirely outside normal notions of physical space. It takes on its own life. We might regard the cubby, by these terms, in the same way we would see other external, loaded places (Foucault lists the cemetery, the colony, the cinema or theatre, the garden and the home): as complex sites with strong social associations. It suggests, of course, the manner in which the space is fluid, subject to the child's constant re-imagining and re-designing of it, and yet simultaneously fixed within the physical world. But it also allows us to draw out the cubby as comparable to these other sites, to examine it in relation, both as a microcosm of the home it mimics, and as functional in its own right within this wider context.

A heterotopia is not, however, inherently stable. As Foucault makes quite clear, heterotopias are constructed by and are specific to their society ('Spaces' 24). They enlist the response of the occupant in order to function, and are therefore shaped by social narrative: 'each heterotopia has a precise and determined function within a society' (Foucault, 'Spaces' 25). The cubby, as a heterotopia, is marked by this characteristic. It requires the imaginative involvement of the child(ren) in order to hold its form as an inhabited space. In the bush cubby, this effect is doubled over, as the definition of the space as inhabited vs. uninhabitable depends entirely on the child's occupation. For me, compounding this notion was the fact that my inhabitation was simultaneously one of appropriation. In a postcolonial context, appropriation as an action can never be 'finished.' It is continued not only in the ongoing use and possession of lands previously held by Indigenous peoples, but also in that it requires an unceasing process of regeneration and thus 're-appropriation' in maintaining that possession. As a notion this has been suggested by various critics (Gelder; Carter, 'Forest'; Carter, *Botany Bay*; Collingwood-Whittick), all of whom move towards an idea of appropriation as a concerted, continued effort reactionary to alienation within landscape. My cubby, more specifically, in demanding my ongoing presence and continued imaginative involvement, can be read as expanding referentially outwards through the heterotopic to meet the act of

appropriation which instated me within the land in the first place. My occupation both physically and imaginatively was inherently appropriative in possession, and reactive as I shaped the space around me according to my unease within the newly-cleared site. Both the heterotopic nature of the space and its origins as a forest space demanded my constant attention.

This unease was fought off by a concerted effort to domesticate—a second heterotopic expansion, if you like, this time towards the external referent of the home. Plywood sheeting was brought in as a door and a table-top, two plastic cups and a broken tea-pot were procured as crockery, and a stash of food, mostly lunchbox snacks pilfered from the larder at home, was buried in a box beneath the trunk. A conveniently slung branch made an excellent seat. An attempt was made to construct a roof, but eventually abandoned. Friends were invited over, and various games of ‘home’ were played. This effort, eventually, exacerbated rather than diminished the sensation of the forest and its proximity. At a certain point, the house I constructed became overtly foreign to the space. It was weakened further by this realisation—my house slowly lost its solidity in my imagination. Components of the cubby began to fail in balancing the conversely natural and domestic aspects of the space: the trunk was no longer a ‘real’ wall; the branch was sometimes a seat, but sometimes just a branch I happened to be sitting on. Compromised in this way, it began to resemble those nightmare-houses of Australian literature, places of danger in dwelling, open to the penetration of that which is frightening outside. Jennifer Rutherford points to the houses in the writing of Rosa Praed, for example, or Annie’s house in Christina Stead’s *Seven Poor Men of Sydney* (‘Undwelling’ 114). To those might be added the hut of ‘Squeaker’s Mate’ in Barbara Baynton’s short story of the same name, or the more contemporary house of Winton’s *Cloudstreet*. ‘Images proliferate: of houses with porous walls, of an unbound enormity of space, of unhoused characters and of their desolate unhoused authors’ (Rutherford, ‘Undwelling’ 114). Definable as neither forest nor domestic space, the homeliness of my little cubby began to weaken, and the unease which I had felt on first witnessing the clearing of the road returned.

In this sense, the cubby as a space came to meet Rutherford’s concept of the house in Australian Literature. Indeed, the house at Cloud Street sometimes feels like a cubby in its construction—‘weatherboards peeled away from the walls... some floors sloped, and others were lumpy and singsong as you walked on them’ (Winton 39)—and can similarly be read as a metaphor for the colony. But for Rutherford, the Australian literary house is a compromised site in a conflicted space, in that ‘every act of housing is coterminously an act of unhousing’ (‘Undwelling’ 114), and subject to a complex ‘politics of place’ (‘Undwelling’ 115). The house is made unsteady by these shifting foundations: it ‘never simply contains, nor is it simply present in the world of things. Its materiality is brought into question and its existence hinges on exile and displacement’ (Rutherford, ‘Undwelling’ 114). My cubby became a microcosm, in this sense, of the larger house I lived in, and the attempt to echo that house in form and function pulled forth these unsettling notions in a space that lacked the more positive and overwhelming connotations of home. I was incapable, (to an extent I still am), of seeing my parents’ house as anything but a space of comfort, love and ease; but this smaller version lacked that context, and thus was open to all the unsettling ideas which would not have otherwise occurred. I began to recognise, as Rutherford does, that ‘in the Australian context, space and its poetics cannot assume [any] innocence . . . Australian settler spatial poetics rides on a complex raft of intersubjectivity and intercultural dialogue and conflict’ (‘Undwelling’ 114).

The cubby had been created and laid open by an act of violence which mirrored the colonial violence, mentally and emotionally as well as physically. I had become witness to this localised violence and by extension also to that greater violence, buried and suppressed in a vague social past. This association constructed for me a memory of violence, which rose to haunt the space, changing dramatically my appreciation of the poetics at play. The ‘intercultural dialogue and conflict’ to which Rutherford refers was between my present/future self as occupant of the space, and the past, the Indigenous ghosts of that violence who were connected (and could never be exorcised) in the sense that they were inherent to its creation. As Carter suggests, ‘In Australia, any poetics is bound to be political; it will have to take into account the prior acts of clearance, both human and environmental, that have made possible the *stabilitas loci*’ (‘Forest’ 135). While as a seven-year-old these sensations were manifest only as a vague discomfort in the proximity of the forest to my new place of dwelling, in returning to consider my cubby as an adult, the uneasiness of my occupation is overwhelming. I was, in constructing my cubby, re-enacting the colonial violence which had produced the home in which I was so comfortable. Armstrong’s archetype held inherent the violence of appropriation. Realising this compromised both spaces—cubby and home—as marked by ‘sinister acts, not of domicile, but domicide’ (Rutherford, ‘Undwelling’ 114), expanded further to affect all houses, all the architecture in the country. The constructs of power which had previously defined my relationship to the land were seen not only in terms of what they had produced for me, but also in their effects on the silent, suppressed other existing as a ghost underneath.

Foucault describes the colony too as heterotopic. The cubby as a space, on reflection from an adult perspective, has therefore become a microcosm not only for a compromised understanding of and sense of belonging within home, but within Australia as a country in general. (It is possible to even go one further, to understand the cubby as metonymic for the colony. It suggests a personal relationship with the landscape which can be expanded in understanding that of wider society). We can see the heterotopia as generative of emotion. This suggests the manner in which it can be desired for the space it creates—either one, according to Foucault, of illusion or ‘of compensation’ (‘Spaces’ 27). This latter is how Foucault approaches the colony, as ‘a space that is other, another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled’ (‘Spaces’ 27). This desire is constituted as a concerted ‘general organisation of terrestrial space’ (Foucault, ‘Spaces’ 27), and as such functions both internally and externally, marking space both physically and mentally. In this sense, the colony takes on a hint of the utopic, they ‘afford consolation... a fantastic, untroubled region’ (Foucault, *Things* xix), compensating for the reality of the messy space from which they emerge. But the emphasis here must be placed on fantastic, and we must recognise that ‘Heterotopias are disturbing, probably because they secretly undermine language... they dissolve our myths’ (Foucault, *Things* xix). They are generative thus simultaneously of anxiety, a notion peculiarly applicable to both the cubby and the colony. Australian colonial attitudes of appropriation would certainly suggest a desire for organisation and control. Living within the Australian colonial space, however, two-hundred-plus years after, this heterotopic duality has shifted somewhat. The colony now is ‘post-colonial,’ and yet enfolds that colonial history, and the colonial desire for arrangement and mastery. The heterotopia now originates less in the direct relation to the mother-country, and more in the ‘heterochronic’ (Foucault, ‘Spaces’ 26), in the uneasiness of this simultaneously fixed and fluid temporality, just as we see in the cubby.

Australian fiction seems to have become more sensitive to this heterochronicity as our literature has developed deeper postcolonial concerns. Understanding the colony as a

heterotopia could offer expansive readings of works such as Kate Grenville's *The Secret River* or Kim Scott's *That Deadman Dance*. Writing for a postcolonial audience in a colonial setting illustrates performatively the tension inherent to the enfolding of time, and the manner in which the colony functions actively within contemporary thought. But even within a text set in the contemporary era, this heterochronicity can function to outline the significance of the colony/coloniser. 'Jacko's Reach,' both in actively referencing memory and more widely in allusion, operates within such a heterochronic state. From the first, the space opens out into time, notably through a physical sensation: 'Just crossing it . . . gave you some idea, at the back of your knees, of the three hundred million square miles and of Burke and Wills' (Malouf 121). The square miles are of course the space of the country (or colony) as a whole; existing as solid through colonial exploration. The boy's entry into the bush play-space becomes the foolish explorer's entry into the wilderness, and the literary space opens up to hold reference within the reader's own world. It is recognisable; familiar in a heterotopic sense, rather than in its form or proportions as described by Malouf. And as such, it comes to reflect, contest and invert the past within the present world, demanding our engagement as a *topia*—a space recognizable as both internal and external—and encouraging our contemplation of its social reality, 'simultaneously mythic and a real contestation of the space in which we live' (Foucault, 'Spaces' 24).

Writing heterotopias, then, could in fact be one way of expressing and working through these conflicting sensations of belonging and 'unbelonging' (Collingwood-Whittick xl) that mark white Australian relations with space. In giving form to the duality of this conflict, and simultaneously entering a discourse of space which recognises the internal and external elements of space as linked, it might offer a language which allows white Australians to express that sense of connection which is contentious given our status as descended from the colonising force. In this, heterotopias might in fact offer a postcolonial writing practice which 'makes room for heterogeneous and multiple stories of belonging' (Slater 150), as Lisa Slater puts it. *In* and *on*, those definitive prepositions, become less important in shaping an understanding of space and place once the fluidity of time and meaning within that space become clear. Slater explores Margaret Somerville's *Body/Landscape Journals* as a movement in this direction, based in a 'desire to write an embodied sense of belonging in Australia' (150). Somerville's writing conveys both the physicality of her connection to place, particularly her home, but also the manner in which layers of narrative present in the landscape challenge and unsettle this. The space is internalised, as well as existing externally, and hence subject to narrative: 'the site generates alternate subjectivities' (Slater 154). In embracing rather than denying this multiplicity, Somerville's writing of place takes on heterotopic qualities, recreating her home as a loaded site 'representative of one's entanglement in otherness' (Slater 161). The heterotopia specifically might not, of course, always and invariably be applicable to the Australian landscape, but in understanding certain sites such as the cubby, (other possibilities including the forest, the homestead or the paddock), as reflecting or involving a significance within the quotidian, we might find in heterotopias the capacity to generate a conversation of belonging which does not depend on the either/or.

There is a third preposition, which floats somewhere close by: I am *of* the place. This one defines me in locating me both socially and spatially. It refers to a place more personal than social, and is directly self-referential. Endless images flow from memory: a letter requesting details of our family tree, describing my grandmother as Joan Miller of 'Windrush'; a newspaper interview with my father, Mike Noske 'of Narrawong'; a loudspeaker announcing

Kate Noske of South-West Victoria, riding for Wannon Zone. Being of Mt. Clay made me *of* the forest as well as the farm-land, and as an adult I have traded freely on a knowledge of both. It attaches me to place, openly, without discretion, but also in a specific manner, cementing the confusions of the power relationship that so easily disturbed between *in* and *on*. ‘Of’ suggests I have grown from, been developed or coloured by the land. It holds connotations of being made unique, definable by an organic relationship to place. But in another way, it holds connotations of ownership, of possession and of title; of responsibility for. Just as Lords and Ladies are *of* their titles and estates, I am *of* my home, and *of* my memories of it. Being of Mt. Clay, I felt (and still feel) concurrently both the unbelonging and unease of a colonial history, and a deep connection to the place that is my home—the place I have grown up in, learnt from, been shaped by.

Malouf, too, knows how one is of a place. The closing lines of ‘Jacko’s Reach’ offer a declaration of connection that is almost warlike. ‘If there is only one wild acre somewhere we will make that the place. If they take it away we will preserve it in our head. If there is no such place we will invent it. That’s the way we are’ (Malouf 126). The connection to the landscape described by the narrator asserts the place as a hyper-reality, no longer dependant on physicality to exist. The space is them, they are of the space, and hence it cannot be destroyed. And yet the militant feel of the syntax—the repeated ‘if’ barring all alternate consequences, the lack of commas denoting assurance and aggression—holds as subtext the difficulty of this connection, the manner in which it is compromised both in the physical sense by the impending clearing of the land, and in the emotional sense by the remembered violence of the space. This violence, and the ‘wilderness that by fits and starts, in patches here and great swathes of darkness there, still lies like a shadow over even the most settled land’ (Malouf 118-9), hides within the preposition ‘of’ as a metaphor for colonial violence and a representation of the complexity of white Australian connection to the landscape. The space as a whole, with all these associations, is what the narrator feels as formative. Even when it is cleared, it will be ‘[l]ike everything else. Under. Where its darkness will never quite be dispelled’ (Malouf 126), but will live on in him and his compatriots.

These prepositions can therefore be seen to define our relationships to space in general, and describe the unique and specific attachment of emotion to place. Belonging comes with its own range of prepositions—with, within, to—each with their conflicting connotations. I belong to the cleared land as a space, that is my comfort zone. But I feel a sense of belonging within the forest as well, I respect and accept it, and am constantly astonished and elevated by its beauty in return. Unease emerges not so much in the relationship each preposition demonstrates, but in the multiplicity of these prepositions, these relationships. In examining that which is heterotopic of each space, capable of juxtaposing that which might otherwise seem incompatible (Foucault, ‘Spaces’ 24), we understand too the manner in which these spaces can become strongly referential of postcolonial confusion. Somerville’s work illustrates this complexity as a potentially generative site, ‘whereby identity can be predicated on connection, rather than separation’ (Slater 161). Being *of* place offers a more fluid conceptualisation of this relationship, leads us towards the heterotopia as a manifestation of place open to multiple narratives. In this sense, belonging and unbelonging emerge as coterminous partners in complex relation, neither excluding the other.

Nevertheless, there came a breaking point for my cubby, on a windy afternoon in early summer. The table-top, never fixed down, had blown off into the centre of the ‘room.’ Underneath, no doubt enjoying his warm little hidey hole, was a large tiger snake. Bustling about my cubby, ‘housekeeping,’ I picked the table-top up with both hands to find him there,

sleepy, grumpy and standing up ready to strike. This encounter disturbed me more than I can describe. I had, of course, come across snakes before out in the bush, but in every instance noticing them had been part of a wary eye keeping watch for them, it had been in their territory. This encounter was in mine, in my ‘house.’ I forgot everything I had ever been taught, dropped the table-top and ran. My fear was based both in the unexpected nature of the encounter—the cubby in that respect becoming a true microcosm of the house, and taking on the supposed safety of home—and the manner in which it signalled my failure in negotiating a relationship with the newly cleared space. I had not managed, as I had thought, to convert the land, the forest seemed to be expanding out into cleared territory. The assumption that my knowledge of the space was fixed and complete was undermined, and the illusion of control given by the preposition *on* was destroyed.

I abandoned the cubby after the snake. But it is still a space I remember and one I hold close within memory, a space I am *of*. I think perhaps in hindsight that if I hadn’t attempted to base my relationship with the space so definitively on separation, (cleared land from forest), and instead embraced it as a space of multiplicity, heterogeneity, then I could have lived comfortably in my cubby for many years. The experience points out to me the manner in which belonging to a space emerges from a fluid rather than fixed connection. And it is the fluidity of the connection that I did achieve with that space that endures in my memory. Its ongoing manifestations are the questions it raises for me regarding the sensation of belonging in this country. It has in this form become a true heterotopia, insisting I resituate myself and my concept of self in relation to it. Cemented within this one symbol lies the essence of my understanding of the vague and complex concepts and emotions associated with landscape. Just as I remember one storm, remembering that one cubby has come to define my notion of (un)belonging within the rural Australian space I know as home.

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