

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

CROSSING THE LINE: SPACE AS COLONIALISM

Paul Carter

...we live in a world of ghosts...
Henrik Ibsen

Man can stretch himself as he may with his knowledge...in
the last analysis, he gives nothing but his own biography.
Friedrich Nietzsche

I find myself in an odd position today, not least in relation to the title of this talk, crossing the line. I would like to be able to stand on one side of the line or the other; it would make the task of exposition easier, if I could, say, look back over travelled roads; or, on the other hand, look forward confidently, chart in hand. Instead I find myself betwixt and between in a number of ways. I have recently finished a book, *The Lie of the Land*, shortly to be published: it is tempting but it is premature to talk about it. I am in the crepuscular realm between transmission and reception, and it would be a mistake to interfere with that process, to foreshorten a road no one has yet been able to travel. Why seek to rationalise what has not as yet even entered the wider unconscious?

I find myself betwixt and between in another way: *The Lie of the Land* has been something of a breakthrough for me. I found in it a way of synthesising a number of ideas that had appeared piecemeal in earlier books. I suppose you could say, rather formally, that it makes good the argument of the title essay of 'Living In A New Country', that there is no reason why the migratory *qua* colonial experience itself, the complex historical experience of being betwixt and between, might not generate a critical stance with theoretical applicability elsewhere. I think my conception of the 'ground' may do this: we shall see. Less formally, it's my impression that the experience of writing a book at once so localised in its topics, so generalised in its implications, has been stylistically liberating; perhaps it's my way of writing autobiography in Australia.

Having broken through, or at least threaded a narrow gap, I feel no desire to look back. At the same time, the radiating prospects ahead lack definition: I am among them but they are inadequately known, and perhaps the brighter for being unnamed. It must be a modest case of what the historian of psychiatry, Henri Ellenberger, calls *la maladie creatrice*: if the latest book is the 'illness', then the sense I have of worlds opening up or beginning to cohere must

correspond to that 'euphoria' associated with the cure. There is an expectation, in a gathering such as this, to define points of departure and arrival, to nominate landmarks, to identify promising directions. This is the logic of the path taken thus far: this is the logic of the path that opens before us. But I have no heart for that model of enquiry; I do not find that personal knowledge can be acquired in that way; and the strait-jacket of formal exposition, the construction of a mythic narrative recapitulating the chief stages leading to one's discovery, have always struck me as of little more than diplomatic value.

Evidently these remarks are ambiguously betwixt and between in yet another way: they border awkwardly on the confessions of a writer. Am I one of you, writing about the cultural producers? Or am I one of them, offering myself up to hypnosis, keen to have your suggestions as to what might be going on in my mind? What is the cure for 'enthusiasm', that obsession with one idea at the expense of another, which Kant called '*vesania*', and likened to a man 'crossing the line' (i.e. the Equator) for the first time. Many of you yourselves have a foot in both camps; sometimes you agree to be the somnambulist; sometimes you pretend to be awake. This morning you are in another position: waiting to be hypnotised, you have to pretend to be awake.

These are not entirely idle remarks. They touch for example on the sociology of knowledge. Feyerabend's characterisation of shifts of scientific paradigm as periods of epistemological anarchy may be exaggerated, but it is the case that new ideas, perhaps by definition, are felt as marking a decisive discontinuity with what has gone before. Later they may be fitted out with a genealogy, and the rent in the historical narrative sewn up, but at the time they seem to break with the past. They do this not so much because they explain more of what is already known, but because they seem to announce an entirely different field of interest. I think that in a small way this was the case with my book *The Road to Botany Bay*: there was nothing factually new in it, indeed, in its selection of historical data, it was obtrusively old-fashioned. Its appeal lay in its appearing to open up an entirely different field of enquiry.

Why this should have been belongs to the sociology of knowledge, but it has little to do with the 'author'; and attempts to explain these kinds of event genealogically, in terms of a progression of ideas from one point to another, are bound to fail. They fail because they do not accord epistemological value to that period of 'anarchy', that fertile experience of being betwixt and between, at sea. This is not an absolute truth; it may be no more than a temperamental rationalisation. Two different kinds of knowledge may be described. Prefacing his *Meditations*, Descartes explained how he had thought that once in his life 'Everything must be thoroughly overthrown', and he likened the resulting loss of certainty to the experience of a swimmer out of his depth, being pulled this way and that by strong currents. His master in scepticism, Michel de Montaigne, would have understood this perfectly—with the difference that he felt none of Descartes' anxiety to reach the shore; his bedrock was mobile, shifting; he identified self-knowledge not with a well-grounded position, but with the twisting and turning phenomenon of always partially-occluded self-consciousness itself. Two temperaments producing entirely different knowledges.

These knowledges had different topographies associated with them. Descartes' monocular planarism found its fictional counterpart in the utopian narrative of his contemporary Gabriel de Foigny. On arriving in the Southern Land, he asks his hosts where the mountains are, only to be told that they have all been flattened. It finds its historical sequel in the arrival of Phillip at Sydney Cove: 'The Governor marked out the Lines for the Encampment, and to prevent the Convicts straggling into the Woods, he appointed a Provost Martial, a Constable and a part of ye Soldiers to take all Men up, that were found out of Boundaries'. The idea that order was cognate with clearing the ground, with the eradication of local differences leaving only absolute oppositions between inside and outside, also entailed a psychology: de Foigny's Southlanders were hermaphrodites; Phillip's division of his men into line-crossers and line-holders created two races of half-men. But ultimately the half-men and the double-men suffer from the same paranoia: they cannot contemplate dialogue with the other. Locked up in

themselves, they are surrounded by abysses.

Montaigne's topography is different, and insofar as it embodies a conception of knowledge as a dialogue across differences—the differences giving knowledge its object of study—is a distinctively anti-colonial environment. Not only did Montaigne imagine his essays as a dialogue with his deceased friend Le Beotie, describing himself in a way his reader might understand, if he were his interlocutor's other: to glimpse himself at all, he had to creep up on his thoughts unnoticed and capture them on the wing. Montaigne's *Essays* are, among many other things, pre-Freudian assaults on the unconscious, but instead of being conceived as a crossing of the line—between waking and sleeping, say (which, incidentally, Freud, following Fechner, seemed to imagine as the passage from one 'scene' to another, rather like going from the city to the country)—they are located non-metaphorically in a peripeteia of uneven ground. The back-trackings and zig-zags of country roads, and not the high road to Rome, model Montaigne's approach to the problem of knowledge.

Montaigne leads a double-life: this is the condition of his self-knowledge. You could say that he sets up camp in 'debatable land', where the rhetoric of 'crossing the line', with its obsession for clearing away cloudy doubt, is not recognised. This interests me: it interests me personally. It expresses my own temperamental preference for occupying spaces in-between, and for hearing in them not one but two or more voices, not one narrative but two or more which in some way implicate each other. I lead a double life. I enjoy masks and foreign voices. In *Baroque Memories* doubling-up is a psychological principle, a vehicle for the expression of desire: it also determines the narrative form of the book. The figures—they are hardly rounded characters—are not severed halves contemplating a Platonic reunion; the desire that draws them to one another is not nostalgic, but stems from the experience of occupying a historical ground that is doubled, grooved and folded, of living in two places at once.

The phrase 'debatable land' recalls the chapter of that name in *The Road to Botany Bay*. It also conjures up the spaces in-between I have written about elsewhere. It has a definite topography, this terrain, one intimated by Colonel Light when he pointed out that in surveying the Adelaide plains, he had no convenient church spires to guide him, and generally could rarely see more than a few yards ahead of him. Before the clearing, the way ahead appears exactly as that, as a manifold of gaps, of criss-crossing pathways: a perception uncannily captured in the Port Jackson Painter's depiction of Phillip's spearing, where the sinuous woods to which the attackers retreat is not grasped and framed, tamed as a picturesque backdrop, but appears as active agent, assisting in their dispersal and radiating concealment. And not only before clearing: afterwards too. Perhaps cities secondarily nurture and concentrate space: their primary appeal is to multiply differences, constructing barriers, mazes, and to fit out their inhabitants with a double-identity, known and unknown.

The appeal of these debatable zones—zones that are non-linear, lying neither inside nor outside the line, is that they suggest different histories, and also different narratives. 'As for me', my mythical Australian genius, Vincenzo Volentieri, remarks in *The Sound In-Between*, 'I would like to have a history of gaps'. And it may be that *The Lie of the Land*, with its focus on flightpaths, its assertion of a connection between a poetics of the ground and the science of ballistics, is an answer to his prayer. Narrowing and widening gaps may have an erotic appeal—they certainly have an epistemological appeal, not merely crossing the line but breaking it in two. Doubles gather about gaps, as does two-faced Janus; two points of view are simultaneously glimpsed, and it is difficult to say which frames which. Nevertheless, the frame is a necessary condition of their coming into contact.

Gaps can of course harden into doorways and doors: a transitional zone can shrink and petrify, so that an environment where many views circulate fluidly turns into its frozen relic, the mirror state of mutual suspicion and deepening hatred, a metamorphosis I have tried to describe in my speculative reconstructions of the early history of European-Aboriginal contact and conflict along the Yarra. On the other hand gaps may simply be the way in which we inhabit the world: they may not be conceptual vizors imposed upon us, they may simply describe how, as oriented creatures, binocularly and binaurally navigating our way about, we

actually experience our surroundings. This is J.J. Gibson's persuasive argument; and it follows that the denial of gaps, their subjugation to the linear continuity principle, is an act of colonial barbarity as much perceptual as political and military. Thinking of linear history's self-fulfilling prophecies, Benjamin reflected, it is things just going on that is the catastrophe. Thinking of colonial space, he might have said the same.

Evidently I attribute a therapeutic value to the realm of the betwixt and between; nevertheless, and to stay with the psychiatric metaphor, I find that it is in general discourse rigidly repressed. Cultural criticism of a poststructuralist persuasion might be expected to take a professional interest in the dynamics of the gap. But in my experience this is not the case. There is, it is true, an eagerness to cross the line, to explore issues of difference, and in the process to cross-out the authority of the continuous line; but a paranoia about the gap remains. The flight from one side to the other remains linear, however physiological the metaphors used to describe it. Any science of intervals is repressed, any idea that knowledge might be grounded exactly in the double life of keeping open a communication across difference, is largely treated as poetic excess, if not an infantile regression.

Instead the gap only comes into view as an aporia, an ideologically-symptomatic oversight that it is our task to remedy. And the remedy consists in filling it in; in rebuilding the fabric of our knowledge in such a way that it is incorporated, taken account of. There is an odd sleight of hand in this; for in identifying the gap in this way, a light from outside is usually needed; but the light is no sooner permitted entrance, than it is used to illuminate the task of filling in the gaps. Once the gap is filled in, the origin of the light is forgotten, and it appears to have been generated locally. These remarks thinly allegorise what seems to me to be the prevailing habit in Australian cultural studies today: there can be, or should be, no quarrel about our dialogue with the centres of European thought; what is less defensible, it seems to me, is the way in which theoretical insights are used adventitiously to identify and fill in the gaps in Australia's narrative of itself.

The nationalist and insularist trend of much research in the humanities and social sciences in this country may or may not be politically expedient but it contributes to the very paranoia about them and us which, internally, it seeks to break down. Its apparently liberating assumption that Australia is, culturally speaking, debatable land depends on internalising the culture as territory nexus that that research might be expected to question. The debates may appear to ground us more locally; in reality they are ever more ungrounded, mystifying the sources of meaning production, suppressing the processes whereby ideas circulate, and rendering next to impossible the other half of knowledge, which is its return to the other. To repeat, these returns do occur internally, and often beneficially; but they occur theatrically within the uncontested terrain of the nation-state. And remain in this sense symptoms rather than cures.

If a geographical fundamentalism informs research, it may be because geography, notwithstanding the recent spate of interest in the historical culture of space, remains largely untheorised, another 'last frontier' perhaps. Take the primary expression of the discourse of earth-writing, the chart: historical geographers interested in the earliest representations of the Australian coastline, rarely if ever question the historical status of the coastline itself. Different vessels, surveying techniques and interests, produce different outlines; the outlines themselves articulate changing cultural expectations. If they are reliable at all it is as graphic representations of the boundaries of geographical discourse. More telling are the indefinite endings, the gaps, the provisional production of islands. But instead of pondering this debatable land, the scholars recapitulate the history of colonisation, mounting a narrative in which the open figures are progressively nuclearised and enclosed. In the process it is forgotten that the earlier charts represented places no-one could inhabit: they represent cultural spaces no longer available to us. Just as we, with our internalised political maps, may have girded ourselves round with an exclusion zone.

Oddly, the reception of social and critical theory here rarely seems to provoke a 'critical

stance'. Said has suggested that theories are what critical stances become when they travel away from their historical point of origin. This may explain the cellular self-confidence that characterises the reception and circulation of (mainly) European ideas here: if critical stances can only gain admission here as theories, it is only as theories that they are likely to circulate. Evidently a form of colonialism is at work: thinking technologies are imported to cultivate a generally barren terrain. It is an interesting question what is exported in return. But obviously this model of a cultural economy does not seem to me either desirable or indeed practicable as a *modus operandi*. Unless there is a dialogue, a recognition of the provisional nature of appearances, no valuable exchange is possible. The object of this scepticism is not to hold the line. On the contrary, it is to resist the rhetoric of equators, and the paranoia of boundaries which, being continuous, are bound to be violated.

There is more pressing reason why the betwixt and the between, with its propensity for attending to what has been left out, and its equally developed interests in the arts of mimicry, may adumbrate a critical stance worth respect. And it turns on that question of repression mentioned before. Consider the following scenario: our modern empires depend for their wealth on the possession of colonies. The colonies not only provide cheap labour and cheap raw materials; they not only provide a useful social safety valve and a potent international bargaining chip, but they are also a source of ideas. Intellectual leadership is directly associated with access to 'facts': the greater the abundance of ethnographic, zoological, botanical and geographic data, the greater the likelihood that the nation possessing these will enjoy scientific and even artistic pre-eminence. At the same time it is a matter of pride, of national self-respect, to pretend that the cultural capital thus accumulated has been generated at home: the colonial experience is repressed, in compensation a genealogical narrative is elaborated. This not only 'covers the facts': it preserves the historical illusion of continuity, of a society evolving its own future out of itself, the principle of auto-genesis critical to patriarchy's self-legitimation.

This scenario is easily illustrated: Wallace, Darwin, Frazer, Nietzsche, Flaubert, Marx, Tolstoy—in each and every case the experience of colonialism can be shown to have played a decisive role in the evolution of their ideas. It might be more truthful to say that it was the pervasive fact of slave societies and an apparently inexhaustible nature, and the mystification of the relationship between the high culture enjoyed in St Petersburg, Vienna or Boston and the low culture (and nature) of the colonies, that provided the nineteenth-century mind with its object: how to rationalise and organise these vast, apparently incommensurable human and natural phenomena? And the answer generally was: by inventing a new narrative, one that extended Europe's own genealogy yet further backwards. In neither Darwin nor Wallace, nor even in Lyell, is the spatial localisation of phenomena accorded any significance except a temporal one. So far as their theories of evolution go, it is as if Wallace and Darwin never stirred beyond the Home Counties. The testimony of Spencer and Gillen has no methodological impact on the organisation of *The Golden Bough* or *Totem and Taboo*: the Aranda are simply relocated as Europe's own primitives.

With the work associated with *The Lie of the Land* behind me, I felt myself facing towards a radiating prospect, the brighter for being unnamed. Whether or not they are brighter remains to be seen; they certainly lack definition. But with that proviso in mind, let me make the scenario I have sketched out a little more specific. The discourses of geology, biology, psychology and history that we are heir to, which took their modern form in the nineteenth century, were, as I have said, above all systems of chronology. (They were also repressions of the spatial.) Further, and the two facts are related, they conceived of chronology in terms of stratification: the remotest past was the most deeply buried; the most recent events lay closest to the surface. This was not only a principle for recovering the history of fossils and civilisations: it provided Freud with his conception of the psyche as a many-layered archaeological site. Knowledge, it is no exaggeration to say, became the art of cryptography. The modern science of signs, semiotics, we might say aphoristically, was the technique for

displacing the spatial to the temporal and fitting it out with an unconscious.

Indeed, we might say summarily that the great discovery of that century was the unconscious, or what Matthew Arnold called 'the buried life'. The unconscious was something of a moving feast. Treated metaphysically by philosophers like Schelling or von Hartmann, it could be assimilated to the Schopenhaurian Will; neo-Kantians could invoke it to save Darwin's evolutionism from unleashing anarchy on the world. Psychologically, it explained the phenomenon of hypnosis and the diaspora of 'mental deficiencies' associated with dreams, delusions, possession, hysteria, and other forms of neurasthenia. The unconscious surfaced conspicuously in the revised and amplified narratives of other areas of cultural and natural study: in ethnography, classical studies, embryology, ethology and, of course, it supplied the tacit dimension of Symbolism, and the explicit *mise en scene* of writers from Mary Shelley to Proust and Schnitzler.

The unconscious was, in short, a necessary hypothesis: but why necessary? Why was it necessary to posit a buried life, a previous or other existence locked away in the cellars of the European imaginary, always there but formerly ignored? What was the urgency for bringing it to the surface, repatriating it and handsomely acknowledging its historical role? Why was it a golden fleece, an exiled property whose homecoming was essential for the restoration of order? Obviously it was needed to complete the backward narrative, but why? The answer I would like to suggest sounds paradoxical, but I would like you at least to entertain it: it is that the cultivation of the unconscious amounted to an ideologically-driven act of repression. And what was repressed by being displaced to the unconscious was the pervasive historical experience of colonialism. Scientific recognition of the role of the unconscious in human affairs seemed to be a liberatory step; its repression, Freud taught, was a primary cause of neurosis. Yet the theatrical unconscious, and the many dramas it provoked, whether it was the demonic Heinrich Schliemann at Troy having a vision of Pallas Athene or the modern wizard Jean-Martin Charcot at Salpêtrière deducing madness from his patients' mimicry of their own photographs, represented a collective diversion, a perhaps unconscious repression of a fact not at all dream-like or infantile or primitive: that the delicious, not to say erotic, investigation of the sources of pleasure and pain depended economically and historically on the repressed other of colonialism.

This thesis is not advanced as a 'theory'; it is put forward in an exploratory way in the context of what was said before about developing a 'critical stance' towards the heritage of modern European thought, against which, customarily, cultural studies in this country unfold. If these discourses generally, and the psychoanalytic literature particularly, whether with a clinical or a linguistic inflection, raise up their sophisticated theoretical structures on a forgetfulness about their own empirical origins and perpetuate an amnesia regarding the external, historical conditions that provide their essential context; if they suppress that painful because usually violent exchange across cultural difference constitutional of colonising societies (whether in Europe or outside it), which was always the basis of the knowledge they sought to internalise and re-represent as another manifestation of the European *telos*, then an uncritical adoption of their tools of analysis here may only duplicate an act of historical repression.

In an odd way, by one of those sinuous side paths of the kind that Montaigne so liked to explore, these global remarks bring us back to that rather more local debatable land where we were before. If the European unconscious unconsciously represses the colonial other, then we might expect it to be inhabited by a variety of figures whose origin lies less in the doubtfully visitable backward abysses of the mythic and its cast of archetypes than in the less solemn burlesques of colonial life. This was certainly the experience of those who took an interest in the most conspicuous collective manifestation of the unconscious, Spiritualism; and indeed, to a remarkable degree, the rituals associated with the seance seemed to mimic those associated with the colonial encounter.

Those summoned to materialise themselves could be various: departed relatives, historical figures; and, more libidinally appealing, instances of the primitive—carelessly arranged

nursing mothers, diamante-bedecked Indian slaves, ebony-burnished warriors. These pre-televsual domestic charades, with their repertoire of disembodied hands, overturning goblets and discarded garments, gave the participants a sensation of getting in contact with what was missing from their lives, the unconscious, say, but they also recalled the mysterious exchange of magically-charged mirrors, jade beads and macaw feathers characteristic of first contact. Also, as in the next phase of colonisation, the protocols of spirit communication were decidedly dictatorial. The medium and his suggestible allies put the questions, as did conquistadors, missionaries and government officials: spirits, like natives, were endlessly being asked their names, as if their existence were in doubt. Those who were credible were those who knew best how to act the role assigned to them, and could discover amazing coincidences between their experiences, their memories, interests and range of acquaintance, and those of their questioners. If called upon to materialise themselves, they had to imitate other expectations: to know how to slip through curtains, how to trim the lamp, how to throw a shadow on a frosted pane. Circus performers, conjured to occupy the debatable land between being and non-being, they had to mimic the spiritualists' melodramatic imaginariy if they were to ring true.

But that is the point: despite the pseudo-scientific objectivity of the proceedings, they offered a legitimate outlet for a desire of sympathetic identification. The transference that occurred collectively between those taking part in the seance seemed to model a different way of getting knowledge; obviously, it also produced a different kind of knowledge. To judge from the serious interest that men like Wallace and even the writer of imperial romances, Rider Haggard, took in Spiritualism, it answered to a kind of loneliness they felt, a sense that the efficiency with which they internalised and rationalised their passionate experiences, reordering them into biographical trajectories, narratives and over-arching theories, prevented them from ever getting into contact with the material they studied so minutely, and which they sought with their taxonomies to fit out with families. But this breach in the myth of intellectual auto-genesis could hardly be admitted: publicly at least an interest in mimic doubles, in strangely familiar voices and the cinematic dress-ups of dreams had to be tempered, the repressed, even as it mesmerised had to be resisted.

In a chapter of his life-story called 'Psychical', the author of *King Solomon's Mines*, Rider Haggard, records a number of 'dream-pictures' that seem to him to have had telepathic origins. Among these is a series of 'tableaux' apparently recapitulating the history of humankind from its humblest beginnings 'in the mouth of a cavern' to the pomp and decadence of an Egyptian palace. Rider Haggard wonders whether these are proof of 'Racial memories of events that had happened to others' —an instance, it seems, of ontogeny recapitulating phylogeny in the psychic realm. These dioramic dream tableaux have a suggestive bearing on Rider Haggard's 'fictions of empire' as his romances have been called, but their interest here lies in the sequel: when Rider Haggard described them to Sir Oliver Lodge, a man who regarded the 'etheric medium' as equally amenable to radio and spirit communication, Lodge remarked disappointingly, that he could make nothing of them as 'he lacked imagination'.

The men who, in the second half of the nineteenth century, interested themselves in mesmerism, in Spiritualism, in the occult, in table-turning telepathy and telephones, prided themselves on their lack of imagination. They stood firmly on the parquet floor of Positivism, interested in obtaining the indisputable facts. They declined to be taken in, made it a point of honour not to be overtaken by any form of sympathetic identification. Their position was not even fully 'scientific' in the sense of implying the furnishing of provisional theories. They peered to see with a child's eyes, without prejudice or the blinkers of premature rationalisation. The puppet others thus conjured up, with their hidden wires, their sub-vocal clatter, their dismal repertoire of circus-tricks, reflected—were the mimics—of this emotional (and spiritual) infantilism. These men so keen to cross the line into the country of the unconscious seemed indifferent to the emotional and aesthetic poverty of the environment they normally inhabited. Edmund Gosse reports that his father, a member of the Plymouth Brethren

and a marine biologist, took the Bible in its literal sense. His faith might have been 'fanatical' but there was nothing 'mystical' about it; it displayed 'a rigid and iconoclastic literalness'. He was, his son writes, 'devoid of sympathetic imagination'.

But to return to that sinuous path: it may be that these socially-licensed encounters with ghosts were cathartic because they confronted, and for a while at least seemed to exorcise, a profounder devil—the devil that beset Positivist science's attempt to make contact with the necessary other of its own study; and the type of this blocked communication was, of course, the difficulty that the coloniser found in entering into the mind of the peoples he colonised. At the very least the scientific acknowledgement of psychic phenomena seemed to offer a basis for sympathetic identification. Commenting on the Kumai belief that their sorcerer or Birraark could communicate with ghosts, that his own ancestral ghosts visited him in dreams, Howitt, in 1880, commented, 'We should be loth to reproach him with superstition when we reflect upon the extraordinary resemblance between the proceedings of the Birraark and the proceedings even now taking place in the midst of our highest civilization at "spirit seances"'.¹

Generally, though, the ideology of the continuous line, which saw crossing the line as a kind of equatorial madness—Phillip's hastily-appointed janitors were in the same business as Charcot's white-coated assistants hauling off fainting women to the *chambre de crises*—rendered it impossible to dwell respectably in the marches of the betwixt and between inhabited by doubles, where mimetically-elaborated symbolic gestures had yet to coagulate into unilateral signs. This was the appeal of the seance: vicariously at least, it allowed access to that world. Two books published around 1870, which, according to Wallace, were among the most convincing in showing the objective existence of psychic phenomena, rejoiced in the titles, 'Footfalls on the Boundary of Another World' and 'The Debatable Land between this World and the Next'.

It may be that the late Victorian interior symbolically represented this drama to encompass the debatable land between this world and the next. The furniture of those parlours was also indispensable furniture of the unconscious: not by chance did the spirit visitants to the seance first make their presence known by rapping the underside of the table. The mournful sideboards and wardrobes of those times were the medium's essential decor: but for their gloomy box camera recesses, their locks and sliding doors, their false bottoms and surprising mirrors, where would the 'Aladdins' and 'Gypsies' be summoned from, where disappear to?

One has the feeling that the penumbral gloom of late Victorian interiors was inhabited by unspoken desires and was cultivated in response to the yearning for greater intimacy, for a way out of the bare light of the Oedipus complex. The table by the window on which resided specimens neatly labelled, letters and magnifying glass, might come into its own when the light screamed in. But in the evening, with the curtains drawn, another light dawned. In the underworld of night, whether electrically-illuminated or protoplasmically punctuated by gas lamps, vestal flames cultured in alb-shaped columns of dusky glass, study could take place: one could read reports from the colony; or bring one's correspondence up to date. But between these two realms, which technology had made mimics of each other, the piano, the writing-desk, the bell-jar with its feathered relics of Paradise, the Japanese screen—these belonged to debatable land. They could go either way: into the light or into the dark.

That the debatable land of the psyche might resemble the crepuscular hour of a middle-class Victorian household would not have seemed odd to Schopenhauer, who glossed the processes of falling asleep and dreaming thus: as the brain draws the curtain on external sensations, so it becomes aware of the 'inner nerve-centre of organic life'—a transition comparable to a 'candle that begins to shine when the evening twilight comes'. The mind is not a *tabula rasa*; it receives external impressions, but it also projects its own images; organic images and external impressions may bear some relationship to each other but, as the nature of dreams demonstrates, the organic life of the mind is a magic lantern capable of generating and projecting its own wonderful worlds: 'we see ourselves in strange and even impossible

situations'. Only when the subject dies to the external world 'can the dream occur, just as the pictures of a magic lantern can appear only after the lights of the room have been extinguished'. And the power of projection on to that mental screen is nothing other than what the Scots call 'second sight'.

In this setting the seance might make sense; after all there was something seance-like about the Positivist eye floating balloon-like about the world, myopically peering into the incommunicable depths. Gosse, anxious to emulate his father's marine studies, recalls that one of his earliest dreams of knowledge took the form of a desire 'to walk out over the sea as far as I could, and then lie flat on it, face downwards, and peer into its depths'—a fantasy that displays the death-wish concealed within science's wish to see without being seen: to look down is also to drown. If nothing else the group suggestion required to turn tables offered a welcome relief from the solipsism of the motionless and glassy stare. To animate the table it was necessary to resign the philosophy of auto-genesis; in an oddly Marxian way it was to embrace the goal of changing things; and only the hypothesis of a group-mind, and the participatory immersion of the one in the many, could bring this about.

This was the usefulness of holding hands: the chain of touching people seated round the table signified the resolution of this paradox. Puzzled by Plato's concept of the Forms, Parmenides wanted to know whether they were One or Many; was a Form present in the class of objects formed in its likeness? If so, had it suffered self-division? If not, was it really transcendent? The concept of *methexis* or participation proposed by Plato was intriguing but mystical rather than logical. But in north London parlours *methexis* was regularly achieved as the players round the table became simultaneously one and many, in the process achieving a breakthrough into a higher, or perhaps lower, realm of knowledge, one that had previously been confined to the underworld of the unconscious.

Again these scientifically-licensed excursions into a realm where the intangible became tangible—not perhaps without a certain erotic frisson—had a context: they seemed to gloss, if not anticipate, late Victorian speculations about the origins of religion. The rings of studious, nervously perspiring men and women crouched about the percussive table were a slowed-down parody of those chains of dancing maenads, the handmaidens of Dionysus, whose erotic figures beat the ground, making physically present the primitive 'group soul'. In the name of science they took part in a group-experience which not only recapitulated the beginnings of Western art and drama before the autochthonous *genii loci* were colonised, Olympianised and individuated as migratory cult-heroes: it found its contemporary counterpart in the totemic ceremonies of the Aranda. Or, better, they engaged in a thoroughly postmodern pastiche of these things—with this rider: that the pastiche was probably unconscious.

These domestic interiors with their antic spirits were like scaled-up versions of old Pierre de Louthembourg's *eidophusikon*: they were miniature theatres, miraculous illusions, where the other 'scene' of colonialism was darkly represented. An enlarged account along these lines might be a useful corrective to Bachelard's wonderfully poetic evocations of similar spaces in France: for the histories these rooms contained were not only cosmic but colonial, fateful in a more than individual sense. If they raised the solitary dreamer up, so that he could seem to be a visitor to a distant planet, they also dragged him down with their collection of lengthening shadows and airless retreats. Their physical enclosure mirrored—doubled and legitimated—his own ideological and historical enclosure. But these facts did not find their significance in the unconscious; they were not to be grounded in a new pseudo-archaeology of the mind. They had entirely historical provenances, in the economy of imperialism, an economy that shared with capitalism a mystification of its own ground, the roots of its authority and power in colonialism.

Wherever the colonisers went, they were mainly interested in hearing themselves speak; the mirrors they handed over were a deception, beguiling the time until reinforcements landed. Even in the bush the newcomers looked through windows and imagined doors. The pioneer ethnographer no sooner collected his native informants than he quickly put up his other camera, the collapsible writing table, and began writing. Sheet by sheet, surface after surface,

be covered and removed—but the table, magically, did not seem sensibly diminished. The colonial explorers and writers had, from the point of view of the colonised, no need to indulge in facile trickery: it was not necessary to make tables leap and tremble. The tables were turned merely by the act of writing all this down, substituting another ground for the one they one-sidedly occupied—and, in the process, pretending the square of light did not cast a shadow—and that the shadow, the soul of the shadow, needed that native ground in which to dwell.

By one route or another I seem to have circulated, like Montaigne's topographer, managing, the further I go, not to delimit but, if anything, to unfold further the extent of debatable land. In any case, in illustrating the value of adopting a critical stance towards the explanatory models invoked in a culture like ours which, unlike those it has spasmodically mimicked, has never been able fully to deny its colonial constitution, I have also found myself coming back again to themes that permeate *The Lie of the Land*, and in particular to the question of how would-be postcolonial polities may have to ground their knowledges, their master-narratives, differently, not least in a reconceptualisation of the ground; one where, as I have hinted, the betwixt and between of debatable land may turn out to intimate a rather different dynamic of social relations and psychic economies.

In his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*, reviewing what he calls 'mental deficiencies in the Cognitive Power', Immanuel Kant remarks, 'We also say of someone whose mind has stepped over the border: 'He has crossed the line', just as if a man who crosses the equator for the first time were in danger of losing his understanding'. Lyotard, critical of Kant, suggests that what Kant took as signs of psychic disorder are from a phenomenological perspective symptoms of sanity. The sufferer from *vesania*, or deranged reason, 'is', Kant writes, 'transferred to a quite different standpoint...and from it sees all objects differently...just as a mountainous landscape sketched from an aerial perspective calls forth a quite different judgement about the region than when it is viewed from the plain'. From a bird's point of view, Lyotard remarks, it is the plains-dweller who seems to be the victim of systematic madness; he notes correctly that alienation or estrangement is a 'precondition for landscape'—a point supported by the fact that the modern concept of landscape emerges as a key rhetorical term in the vocabulary of unprecedented internal as well as external colonisation.

But even Lyotard's meditation remains, metaphysically-speaking, European: his 'landscape' is less historical than psychic, internalised rather than externalised. It is not the site of history; it more resembles a cinema screen. To escape its blank estrangement is to give it a 'face', as the lover gives the countenance of his and her beloved a face. Only in this way, he suggests, can we avoid the estrangement the townsman feels in viewing the countryside, the alienation the farmer experiences in the city. But the movement itself, between different places, the ground of that exchange of views, never surfaces in his meditation. The embodiment of Lyotard's roving eye remains the *flâneur*. Even the opposition between town and country is characteristically European or symbolic. It recalls Gustav Fechner's remark that the difference between the waking and the dream state might be aptly compared to the different kinds of life a man leads in town and in the country—a suggestion taken up in Freud's distinction between the different 'scenes of action' of the Conscious and the Unconscious.

Lyotard diagnoses the paranoia at the heart of Kant's spatial metaphors of mental illness. If Kant associates 'crossing the line' with obsessiveness, an irrational attention to one line of reasoning at the expense of taking a comprehensive view of things, it is because he finds mimicked there the linear cast of his own reason. Kant may appear to occupy the *agora* of reason, may appear to ground his conception of the world in the levelled clearing of common understanding, but he forgets the destruction of other viewpoints—what I have referred to as 'the lie of the land'—integral to the construction of his pan-optic enclosure. Kant cannot imagine, for example, a logic that is curvilinear, discontinuous, even, in the technical sense, chaotic and local. But Lyotard, although he makes effective rhetorical use of Kant's psychospacial metaphor, does not try to map it to any environment we might inhabit. What is the

equivalent in our experience of the 'aerialist' or the bird's-eye view? Redon's monocular balloons perhaps, floating listlessly over Paris? As Lefebvre has pointed out, the spatialisation of discourse characteristic of both the psychoanalytic and poststructuralist literature remains rhetorical or, in my terms, ungrounded: and when it is 'grounded', when a city, say, is modelled in terms of its vocabulary of abysses, cul-de-sacs, attics and cellars, it turns out to be a ruin, an abandoned site where memories may linger but hardly men and women.

What would it be like for our collective knowledge of ourselves to take the lie of the land seriously as the 'ground' of our knowledge? What kinds of experience would become available to study and historical interpretation if, instead of equating a well-founded historical narrative with an artificially cleared and flattened space, we constructed it with respect to the character of the environment we inhabit? What would happen to concepts like 'crossing the line', and indeed to the entire colonialist rhetoric of linear advance masquerading as an Odyssean return and a different way of staying at home, if we paid attention to the history and dynamics of human movement, construed less in terms of an effortless, frictionless exchange of one site of reverie for another, and more as a process of walking, a physical dialogue with one's surroundings punctuated by breath-patterns and metrically shadowed by continuously revised horizons.

One consequence of giving back to movement a critical value is that we could abandon the special-pleading inherent in the current fashion for in-betweenness, as in betweenness usually presumes a binary opposition played out on conceptually level ground. As for the old 'ground' or *Grund* of Romantic speculation, it would cease to be a given; its oddly unresolved association with the physical ground beneath our feet would be questioned. We might find that Heidegger's identification of the clearing of knowledge with a transcendental groundlessness becomes gratuitous, and arises from an impoverished concept of ground, which is implicitly imperialist and assimilates it to ideas of land and territory. More immediately germane to our conference, in *The Lie of the Land* I have suggested that this conceptual shifting of the ground is important if debate surrounding the definition of postcolonial politics and communities is not to recapitulate, and remobilise, whether or not unconsciously, the linearist and centralist ideological frames of reference that characterise colonialist thought.

There might be other implications too: inhabiting debatable land where critical stances were construed not as theoretical border-posts but as vehicles of exchange across difference would certainly seem to imply different shapes of writing corresponding to the differently revealed topography. Said made the point in *Culture and Imperialism* that the emergence of self-consciously postcolonial cultures depended not only on a complex set of political negotiations across difference, entailing perhaps the institution of contrapuntal perspectives: it meant evolving new literary (and by extension artistic) forms appropriate to this new condition, and he praised the Peruvian novelist Llosa for producing books that employ 'a particular sort of nomadic, migratory and anti-narrative energy'.

That may not be very precise, and I would want to emphasise the migratory rather than the nomadic; but still in a more modest arena, this was exactly the object of *Living in a New Country*, to create an anti-narrative history, centring in this case on a mythic nationalist hero, against whose paradoxically progressive biography the book could emerge contrapuntally, in fugal arrangements producing transformations as much generic as thematic. Implicitly critical of the cryptographic visualism that understands cultural analysis as a more or less ingenious interpretation of signs, the book's central point was made in the remark, 'To explore is not to clear away uncertainties, but to add to them'.

In *The Sound In-Between* the critical dialogue between fictive and non-fictive modes was made visually explicit: an image designed for the installation of my 'Mirror States', a work for four voices designed as a renaming of the Yarra River, marked the place in the book where the outward narrative of the first half started to reflect on itself and, as Borges found when he looked deep into the mirror, instead of repeating itself back to front, began to evolve shapes

that, although approaching little by little seemed to differ from their originals; or which, always coming from the other side were themselves also originals.

Baroque Memories treats the formal question of the self-differing double narrative as a psychological mechanism, mirroring the migrant condition. Martin Magellan, the ocean-going short-story writer, realises that from a land-lubber's point of view, his stories, fragmentary, beginning in the middle, going off at a tangent, must appear neurotic, or infantile, as if he had crossed the line, was all at sea, ungrounded. From a different perspective, alive to the rise and fall of the ocean's surface, which responds to winds and currents, an obsession with history's mythic lines of latitude and longitude was the clearest sign of *vesania*. To be well grounded, according to Magellan, was to know how to move, to incorporate the lie of the land (and sea) emotionally: it was to live in the gaps, to study beginnings without a nostalgia for endings.

It is a fear of gaps that precipitates the crisis in the life of Magellan's historical, and fictional alter-ego, Christopher Column. Internalising his culture's linear paranoia, its deep fear of intervals, discontinuities and redoubling folds, Christopher can only envisage the ending in terms of a return to his point of origin; any other form of arrival he associates with death:

His sea was always rising to meet him. No matter how skilfully he navigated towards its upper rim he would never reach it. He knew that the nearer he drew to the edge, the more tightly it would coil above his head. He knew that if he ever glimpsed the beyond, the horizon would rise up and break over him like a wave.

It seems to me that I have returned to the realm of the betwixt and between, or at least to the twilight realm of the author. And perhaps this was intentional. When I reflected on the flattering invitation to deliver this lecture, I was aware of the difficulty of finding a voice, a single position or persona I could, in the interests of presenting an authoritative presence, comfortably inhabit. I wanted to find a way of talking about recent work in a way that did not betray its double-nature. Naturally I hope that this has not been a solipsistic exercise but suggests a dialogue with themes of the conference. I have indicated that I think it constitutes a critical stance, not least with regard to the conduct of cultural studies here. And you should have no illusion that these forays into debatable land are made from somewhere else: they are not poetic figures on well-tenured ground. A distinct politics attaches to them, reflected perhaps not altogether trivially in the fact that it remains impossible to find Australian publishers prepared to release my books here.

This has a very odd effect, not without its critical and psychological value: it reinforces a sense of operating within the culture as a double. What is the authority of such a figure? Vernant maintains that in archaic Greece the double represented a 'true psychological category': 'A double', he writes,

is not at all the same thing as an image. It is not a 'natural' object, but nor is it simply a product of the mind. It is not an imitation of a real object or an illusion of the mind or a creation of thought. The double is something separate from the person who sees it, something whose peculiar characters sets it in opposition, even in appearance, to familiar objects in life's ordinary setting. It exists on two contrasting planes at the same time: at the very moment that it shows itself to be present it also reveals itself to be not of this world and as belonging to some inaccessible, other, sphere.

Which is all very well for doubles; but in preparing this talk I was guided by two epigraphs. One was Ibsen's well-known, and thoroughly Oedipal, formulation, 'We live in a world of ghosts'. But the other came from his near contemporary Friedrich Nietzsche, to the effect that whatever knowledge we lay claim to, we give nothing but our own biography. The question of how ghosts acquire biographies here interests me, but as I hope I have indicated, it embodies a much larger issue about the direction and motivation of cultural research.