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## Section I: The Research Project

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# INTRODUCTION

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In 1997, a year after I started work in what was to be the first of many museum jobs throughout the UK, the newly elected Government under Prime Minister Tony Blair established the Social Exclusion Unit. A 'New Labour' initiative, the Unit was set up to tackle social exclusion by ensuring that 'mainstream services' were provided for everyone. Its aim was to reintegrate into society those people who had 'fallen through the net' (ODPM 2004). It defined social exclusion as:

what can happen when people or areas suffer from a combination of linked problems such as unemployment, poor skills, low incomes, poor housing, high crime, bad health and family breakdown (ODPM 2004).

As with conditions today, this was a time of rapid social and economic change. Such transformations, brought about by globalisation, highly mobile and culturally diverse populations, declining social trust and growing inequality, impacted significantly on 'traditional' notions of connectedness, social cohesion and citizenship (Scott 2006).

The term 'social exclusion', together with a subsequent raft of inclusive, evidence-based Government policies, was to have a significant impact on British museology. Following a right wing government focused primarily on 'the economic, rather than the social [...] impact' of the sector (Sandell 1998: 402), New Labour's belief that museums might be used to contribute to social cohesion and to pride in one's identity and community, quickly gained momentum in the discourse of social policy. For the museum sector, a new political agenda shaped by disadvantage and inequality, focused attention on the concept of 'the inclusive museum' (Sandell 1998: 410). Predicated on a strong sense of social awareness, this was an institution committed to the inclusion of multiple cultures, and to increased access to its services. The concept of the inclusive museum was to become widely discussed – and contested (for example, Appleton 2001) – within museum studies research and practice. From a personal perspective, the inclusive museum was significant because it offered the

potential to engage diverse audiences in the context of representation, participation and access. As a new employee in a transforming sector, tackling social exclusion from a cultural dimension within the parameters of an inclusive museology, posed an interesting challenge.

In May 2000, the year I graduated from Leicester University with a Master of Arts in Museum Studies, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) introduced policy guidance on social inclusion. Aimed at the local authority museums, galleries and archives it funded, the Report, *'Centres for Social Change: Museums Galleries and Archives for All'*, stated that:

museums, galleries and archives have a significant role to play in helping [to combat social exclusion]. They are often the focal point for cultural activity in the community, interpreting its history and heritage. This gives people a sense of their own identity, and that of their community. But the evidence is that museums, galleries and archives can do more than this, and act as agents of social change in the community, improving the quality of people's lives through their outreach activities (DCMS 2000: 3).

Work towards social inclusion at the museum involved promoting participation in cultural activities to those at risk of 'social disadvantage or marginalisation' (DCMS 1999), particularly by virtue of the places they lived, their age and racial or ethnic origin, and whether they had a disability. To help combat social exclusion, the Report identified policies for collecting institutions to adopt. For example: 'where appropriate, collections and exhibitions should reflect the cultural and social diversity of the organisation's actual and potential audiences' (DCMS 1999: 5). The DCMS warned the sector that many barriers to a socially inclusive use of museums were institutional. For example, museums may 'discourage or restrict usage by certain people or sections of the community' by adopting 'acquisition, exhibition and cataloguing policies which do not reflect the needs or interests of the actual or potential audiences' (9).

In October that year, the Group for Large Local Authority Museums (GLLAM) responded to the DCMS, noting that many regional museums 'with their ready

access to marginalised communities' (GLLAM 2000: 5) were already at the forefront of social inclusion work. In fact, they showed that in some local authorities, museums at Southampton, Stoke-on-Trent and Nottingham, for example, were leading the way forward in this type work. Using activities designed to increase self esteem and engage new audiences, such museums placed contemporary issues at the heart of interpretive display and public programming. This meant working in partnerships – with citizens' panels, with focus groups and non-users – to plan collaborative projects that made the museum, and its collections, relevant to diverse audiences. The belief that 'the museum should be seen as one of many organisations/spaces/venues which are part of a *process*' (GLLAM 2000: 16, my emphasis) was crucial to achieving a socially inclusive working practice. The idea of *process* – of the museum working together with stakeholders towards a shared goal and the prospect of a positive outcome – was important. In the UK, the GLLAM Report helped to shape Government thinking re local authority museums and their positive contribution to the social inclusion agenda. Inclusive museums became one of the many agencies and services that the Government would call upon to work together as part of its strategy for 'joined-up thinking' (16) to deal with disconnect and disadvantage.

My formative training in museum studies took place at a time of considerable transformation in Britain's museum sector, and particularly its regional museums. It was a time when museum work became widely recognised by both national and local government, and crucially, government funding bodies, as having a positive social impact, especially with non-traditional audiences. The start of the twenty-first century, therefore, marked the beginning of an active campaign by the sector to promote the 'significant role that museums can and have played in combating social exclusion' (GLLAM 2000: 5). Of course, one might also argue that a combination of politics and competition for funding drove some museums to adopt socially inclusive policies as a survival mechanism (Scott 2006). However, a far reaching consequence of the sector's shift in attitude is that a vast majority of museums now aspire to an approach of 'total inclusion, that is of all the public, not just a narrow sector' (Fleming 2005).

Six years after *Centres for Social Change*, the DCMS published '*Understanding the Future: priorities for England's museum*' (2006). This paper marked my first decade

working in Britain's local authority history museums, in both voluntary and professional capacities. With the power of hindsight, *Understanding the Future* sowed the seed of this research project. Or rather, it consolidated ideas that had been building for a number of years around the overarching themes of **identity** and **place**. That is to say, how to acknowledge and interpret the multiple identities of those with attachment to a number of places; and how to understand their 'sense of place' as mobile, global citizens?

Within this document, under the heading '*Finding our place in the world: the building blocks of belonging*', the DCMS outlined how museums could contribute further to society by 'building and sustaining community and identity' (DCMS 2006: 3). It focused on the decade ahead, with the aim of challenging the museum to not only broaden audiences, but to enable:

more people to become involved in what museums do: continuing the process of democratising collecting and interpretation, blending curatorial expertise with public participation in museum decision making [...] so that museums can develop their own role as community spaces, as mediators between the past and the present, and as agents in a dialogue about who we are and what we might become or achieve (DCMS 2006: 2).

This Paper resonated with the work I sought to do at 'the inclusive museum' (Sandell 1998). '*Finding our place in the world*' challenged – in fact, it *expected* – museums to build the concept of social inclusion work into all working practices, thus extending their role as institutions capable of 'nurturing senses of identity' (DCMS 2006: 6). As modern identities become increasingly mutable, so the DCMS urged the sector to help people find their place in the world through practice engaged with the assertion or implication of 'who we are'. There was an expectation for museums to embrace the complexity of the lived experience, and to embody and celebrate the intricacy of a 'dynamic' and 'plural' society (DCMS 2006: 11).

I was drawn to their challenge: how might the museum begin to construct the personal and plural identities that make up a modern society – a society 'more complex than it was 50 years ago and changing ever more rapidly' (DCMS 2006:

12)? I was keen to experiment with the idea of the history museum as a space in which to express 'multiple, contemporary and cross-cutting senses of identity'; and to articulate 'a multitude of "horizontal" stories' that attach us 'to the here and now' (DCMS 2006: 12).

However, with this challenge came a warning:

This work can be difficult. There is a risk of pigeonholing people in a tokenistic way. In choosing which identities to explore, museums are making an implicit statement that these are the identities that matter. We risk replacing a single dominant story with a series of stories that fail to connect with one another – the 'Muslim' story or the 'working class' story. We risk creating the sense that society sees the identity of Muslims or working class people as defined by those terms alone (DCMS 2006: 13).

I welcomed this shift of focus from 'communities' (a problematic term which is discussed further in Chapter 1) characterised exclusively by their racial or ethnic origin, towards a celebration of a more complex and plural society. Museums were now encouraged to be:

aware of the increasingly multiple identities around them, not just the obvious ethnicities or religions or sexualities, and of the infinitely complex relations between them (DCMS 2006: 13).

Previous curatorial jobs had often involved working solely with the 'X Community' and the 'Y Community' on projects that conceptually almost always failed to be aware of the subtle complexity of modern, cross-cutting identities as described by the DCMS. As a person born in the UK with both Nigerian and German heritage, I had often wondered, with a wry smile, about the 'community' of which I would be part in a museum display, and the story I would be asked to tell if I were ever to be engaged by the inclusive museum.

The Museums Association, the independent membership organisation representing UK museums and galleries, responded favourably to *Understanding the Future*. Yet,

at the same time, it admitted that 'few museums have people with the right kind of skills to address these issues successfully' (Museums Association 2007: online). For me, the Report became the catalyst for research into how the socially inclusive museum might become more receptive to the construction of contemporary cultural diversity (Edmunson et al 2009). Such a project, focused on research, collecting and interpretation, had the potential to contribute to sector development in terms of both theory and practice.

Since moving to the Southern Hemisphere, I have noted socially inclusive trends in Australian museums to mirror those in Britain. As with the UK, there is much interest amongst those working in Australian collecting institutions to provide public programs committed to making a social difference. Here, the sector's capacity to 'foster participation and social networks' (Scott 2006: 48) is actively encouraged in the policies of local, federal and state governments. In New South Wales, for example, in state government policy objectives that focus on building 'stronger communities' by contributing to 'health, wellbeing, self-esteem and social cohesion' (NSW Government 2010: 123, 132).

I also note conversations similar to those between UK museums, their representative bodies and national government, as to how best represent the complexity of modern identities in a contemporary society. For example, a timely and thought provoking set of papers '*Compelling Cultures: Representing Cultural Diversity and Cohesion in Multicultural Australia*' (2009) outlines snapshots of many such discussions. These papers consider models of representation in the context of how to define complex identities within the space of the museum. In a parallel situation to the UK, Australia's collecting institutions are also being challenged to:

Imagine a model of identity that recognises that individuals and groups can have several identities simultaneously. Such a model of identity as multiple, diverse and incommensurable questions the lingering essentialist assumptions in current museum display practices, social issues debated in the media and existing governmental policies, that each individual or collective identity has to be singular (Farago and Preziosi 2009).



The above statement carries particular resonance in light of issues concerning refugees and immigration to Australia, topics that have occupied news media at the time of writing this thesis (May 2011). As a response from the collecting sector to negative coverage of detention centres and the arrival of potential new migrants, the president of Museums Australia, Darryl McIntyre, urged ‘federal, state and regional museums to act affirmatively in undertaking (or extending) oral histories of Australia’s culturally diverse communities’ (McIntyre 2011: 9). McIntyre’s statement underlines the potential of Australia’s regional museums as ‘agents of social change in the community’ (DCMS 2000: 3). In this instance, the museum becomes a catalyst to increase local knowledge of ‘the cultural identities and values [that refugees and asylum seekers] pass onto the next generation’ (McIntyre 2011: 9).

McIntyre’s statement not only positions the role and value of the regional museum in wider ‘inclusive museum’ philosophy (Sandell 1998), but it also helps to situate this research amid contemporary identity-themed practice. However, within such a framework, this research project takes an interesting tangent. That is, it moves beyond ‘the cultural politics of “race” and “ethnicity”’, and beyond ‘difference’ as ‘a social and political given’ (Ang & St Louis 2005: 293). In doing so, it presents an alternative model to cultural identity that eschews ‘migration’ as ‘the primary means of representing cultural diversity in Australia’ (Edmunson et al 2009: 13). Returning briefly to the work of the DCMS, the rationale behind this idea is simple: to encourage a proliferation of multiple identities in the museum; to generate ‘dialogue across cultural diversity’ amongst visitors (Witcomb 2009c: online); and to position people ‘in-place’, in the here-and-now, whether globally, locally, spiritually or emotionally. I argue that to do so is to celebrate and explore meaningful places and multiple identities, to encourage dialogue with local people beyond essentialist ideas of identity, to represent changing local populations, and to advance a richer and more nuanced contemporary understanding of place and local identity.

## *The research project: Local Histories, Global Cultures: Contemporary Collecting in Transnational Space*

This thesis describes research at the Museum of the Riverina, a regional history museum serving the city of Wagga Wagga in New South Wales. Inspired by theory and practice from human geography, this project looks at how such a museum might capture contemporary identities in regional Australia. Contextualised within the administrative borders of Wagga Wagga and Riverina, the project challenges the history museum to reconsider longstanding conventions of **research, collecting and interpretation**. By exploring issues associated with the mutability and complexity of identity, the project deliberately provokes the museum to rethink *how* and *what* it collects. Interest lies in how these issues have the potential to inform new ontologies of contemporary collecting practice and interpretation.

The main focus for this research is the interaction between the four themes that underpin this thesis: **identity, place, space and movement**. The regional history museum works to construct identity – identity of a local place and of the people who live in that place. These concepts are complex, and exacerbated by the dynamics of globalisation, they are also changing. This research explores themes of identity and place by looking toward **the body**. This thesis works from the premise that bodies *incorporate* place (Ingold 2000). Therefore, as research unfolds, chapters consider how the ‘doing, feeling and thinking’ body encounters multiple places within the body’s own world of ‘spaces, practices and times’ (Crouch 2010: 63). The research project investigates how people construct their identities in relation to notions of being ‘in-place’, or being ‘attached to place’ in a global age.

Geographical theory conceptualises space as a ‘socially produced set of manifolds’ (Crang & Thrift 2000: 2). Through this research, space is embodied as ‘an active presence in social practice’ (Murdoch 2006: 15) as the body moves within spaces and through physical and virtual boundaries. The idea of the moving body beyond the container spaces of region and city enables the project to explore a concept of

spatiality new to the history museum: **transnational social space**.

**Transnationalisation** is a term to which I will refer throughout this thesis. The idea of transnationalisation is used as a backdrop against which to consider how the history museum might acknowledge the emergence of 'pluri-local and transnational social relations, networks and practices' (Pries 2009: 595) within a regional setting.

Movement, or **mobility**, is crucial to understanding these new relations. Studying the movement of 'people, objects, information and ideas' (Büscher et al 2011: 1) can serve to highlight, and also identify, contemporary social phenomena. This research, therefore, focuses on the concept of 'mobile lives' to better understand the spatial dynamics involved in the myriad instances of cross cultural contact that exemplify Australia in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Büscher et al 2011: 2).

### *The primary research question*

Progressing the work of the inclusive museum, this research continues to be about people; that is, making people visible in 'the mainstream cultural arena' (Sandell 1998: 410). The project looks to understand the complexity and diversity of local place-based identities, and how these facets of social life might be captured by the social history museum. In doing so, the research seeks to address issues of **participation** and **representation**. Building on the idea of stakeholders working in partnership with the museum, this project considers contemporary processes for capturing place-based identities, and how the museum might develop these processes to aid future research, collecting and interpretive practice. Research converges on the body, 'a crucial site of sociospatial relations, representation, and identities' (Johnston 2009: 326). Here, the body becomes a template, or focal point, to consider the construction of contemporary place and place-based identities. Being attentive to the body means that interactions between identity, place, space and movement can be internalised, or *embodied*. Thus, the project constructs identity by focusing on how the body moves within, and senses and experiences concepts of place and space. The project hinges on the following question:

## How might knowledge of socio-spatial reality beyond regional boundaries help history museums continue to support and define regional identity?

In our globalised society, the idea of cultures as stable and clearly definable entities becomes increasingly outdated and problematic. Dynamic, mobile populations and 'multiple technologies of travel and communications' (Büscher et al 2011: 5), enable numerous cultures to mix and change and become ever more complex. At the same time, relationships between societal space and territorial space are changing. It is commonplace to live life on relational spatial scales that move between global, transnational, national and local. However, museology lacks a robust strategy to validate new identities and practices that routinely cross borders and distance. Implications for the history museum, and the collection and interpretation of Australian identity in light of new socio-spatial realities are largely unexplored and under theorized. Therefore, this innovative project looks at how the history museum might identify and respond to 'new and unexpected geographical and temporal units and identities' (Kratz & Karp 2006: 6) emerging from cultural flows and globalising and localising processes.

Social and cultural theorist, Tony Bennett refers to the idea of 'museums as laboratories' (2005: 523). Like the laboratory, Bennett sees the museum as a place 'in which new forces and realities are constructed' (525). Bennett studies how the museum treats objects by 'detaching them from where they "naturally" occur' and manipulating them 'on their own terms in ways that make new realities perceptible' (527). Like Bennett, I draw upon the analogy of the museum as laboratory. For this research, the regional museum becomes a **museum/laboratory**, an 'experimental space'.

This research makes the intangible – social space – palpable. *Contemporary Collecting in Transnational Space* endeavours to grasp 'the forces that [...] are shaping the world now' (Gibson 2008: 179). This thesis is an experiment that uses the idea of 'the lived body' (Johnston 2009: 328) to conceptualise and document circumstances that capture who we are 'in-place'. Through stories, memories, senses and emotions, through the material and the immaterial, and across multiple

temporalities and multiple spaces and places, this research sets out to construct a locality through traces of events enacted as embodied experience.

### *Thesis structure: knowledge production as a critical process*

This thesis is structured around four categories: **identity**, **place**, **space** and **movement**. The theme of **the body** connects the sections together. It is the body's affective engagement with, and movement between, spaces and places that help to make sense, not only of 'local place', but also of 'self'. The concept of **performance** (or *performativity* and *enactment*) is important in this context. This is because the project considers how identity and place are *enacted*, or *performed* into being by the body (Johnston 2009). Such work may at first seem detached from a museological construct. However, I would argue that it signifies a logical progression from my work as a social history curator within the inclusive museum.

To explain this statement further, it is first important to acknowledge that history curators are working more and more with the *ideas*, *thoughts* and *feelings* of individuals and groups than ever before. Therefore, when the curator considers how to acknowledge a contemporary concern, or capture the cultural or social identities of museum stakeholders, it is commonplace for *ideas* to take the place of *objects*. These ideas might lead to the development of interpretive strategies that focus on performance (for example, music, film, poetry or theatre) as a way to construct meaning in the gallery. This research has developed from the shift away from material culture – from the curator as collector, researcher and interpreter of the physical properties of an object – towards a way of working that brings the curator into proximity with more intangible, or immaterial, factors that spring from social engagement with local people (Marstine et al 2011).

Having experienced the ideas-based work and performative outcomes of the contemporary curator, this research has coalesced around notions of the subject as the raw material for a study. The idea for this particular project gained momentum

when I began to explore geographical ways of thinking about how people – or bodies – experience places and spaces. Although familiar with museological projects that locate the body in a specific, and fixed, location for the purpose of exploring identity, place and ‘local distinctiveness’ (Davis 1999, cited in Watson 2007: 70), the concept of *thinking geographically* has presented an opportunity to approach these themes differently. For example, it has allowed me to consider what might happen if place-based museological research were to move away from studying the experiences of locally situated bodies within a local place, to exploring how multiple (and potentially global) places and spaces might be experienced within locally situated bodies. However, the overarching goal of this work still upholds the philosophy of the inclusive museum: to ensure that people or issues previously overlooked or avoided by the institution might gain recognition in contemporary displays and public programs.

Geographer David Crouch notes how ‘both the performative and embodied practice are characterized in *doing*’ (2010: 48, my emphasis). The idea of *doing* is key to realising this research; it is a critical process. An exploration into socio-spatial reality to better understand regional identity means actively working with people to make knowledge together. For this project, I worked collaboratively with a group of eight employees from Wagga Wagga’s Riverina Community College, and a contemporary artist, Annie Edney. It follows, therefore, that this is a project about knowledge production, and the processes and negotiations involved in enacting *realities* – actions that ‘bring into being’ certain truths about local identity and local place (Law & Urry 2004: 393).

The thesis is in three sections. *SECTION 1: THE RESEARCH PROJECT* introduces the work undertaken. Chapter 1, the literature review, brings museum studies and human geography together through a reflection on meaning-making and the ‘cultural turn’. Particular attention is paid to the instability of the concept of ‘knowledge’ and the questioning of a given reality. Posthumanist concerns are outlined to consider how a contemporary history museum might make meaning in a complex world. This emergent mode of critical enquiry offers a lively new perspective on the interactions between body and place, and poses interesting questions as to how and what the

museum might collect. The collaborative nature of new museology, and the sector's enthusiasm for the inclusion of 'many voices and many perspectives' (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 81) in contemporary exhibitions is acknowledged. The idea of 'The Participatory Museum' (Simon 2010) is introduced to embed this collaborative project in current museological practice. How might the experimental nature of this research interact with established sectoral paradigms? Here, reflection turns to how the project utilises 'the body' to research, collect and interpret notions of 'local place' and 'local identity' *differently*. The latter half of this chapter returns to human geography to critically reflect on a geographical understanding of space and place.

Transnationalism, social space and mobility are discussed in regards to their importance to the regional history museum. Particular attention is paid to the idea of the mobile body, and how it makes sense of the world through complex visceral reactions. This leads to an engagement with approaches, ideas and vocabularies to capture the complexity of such interactions. Here, the idea of contemporary collecting in transnational space is discussed in terms of **embodiment**, **emotional** and **affective geographies**, **rhizomatics** and **actor-network theory**.

Chapter 2 moves to the site of the research project: to the Museum of the Riverina, the city of Wagga Wagga and the Riverina region. It outlines how the research was constructed and what this project set out to achieve. Prompted by a new 'geographical vocabulary' gleaned from the literature review, three secondary questions are outlined to guide the investigation of the thesis. This chapter explores the idea of the **museum/laboratory** in detail, and significantly, its ability to 'produce [...] its realities as well as describing them' (Law 2004: 13). A critical observation of current interpretive and collecting practice at the Museum follows, focusing on themes of identity and place. The colonial construct of the Australian region, and how a postcolonial museum operates in regional space, is considered. Focus then turns to Wagga Wagga and how the city is defined by its cultural heritage. How do current cultural conventions interact with, and challenge, this research? The chapter concludes by considering a research methodology attuned, not only to identity, place, space and movement, but also to the body, and the idea that bodies *incorporate* place (Ingold 2000).

In *SECTION II* the research narrative turns to the theme of *PROCESS*, *PERFORMANCE* and *BECOMING*. This section, which covers Chapters 3, 4 and 5, critically analyses the performative processes, ethical considerations and multiple negotiations, involved a collaborative enactment of *the social* (Law & Urry 2004). It begins with Chapter 3, the methodology, and a reflection on knowledge production. How to devise an appropriate methodology to understand the fluid relationships between body, place and space? This chapter has four sections. The first critically reflects upon the meaning of engagement and participation at the participatory museum. The second focuses on participatory and performative methods, and how these approaches inspire the research. Following this discussion, section three tells of the development of **MAP:me** – a participatory, performative methodology designed to explore the myriad ways in which people experience and are shaped by place. Section four looks beyond participatory, performative methods to broader issues around the construction of knowledge. Here, focus turns to how MAP:me relates to the wider processes of reality-making in social science research. In the context of participatory museology, the methodology for this project is considered as part of an ‘ontological process’ (Law 2004: 152) – a process that both *enacts* realities pertaining to the social world, and significantly, a process that also has the power to *omit* some realities and ‘erode’ others (Law & Urry 2004: 396).

Chapters 4 and 5 are primarily concerned with data analysis. Chapter 4 opens with a reflection on the nature of **engagement, collaboration, negotiation and co-creation** – the key processes shaping knowledge construction for this thesis. The selection of the research participants is used to illustrate these processes in action. Both chapters narrate data analysis as a performative process of collaboration, co-construction, diplomacy, relationship-building and understanding, negotiated between texts, objects, people, ideas, practices and agendas. The first half of Chapter 4 considers the research participants and *what they did* as part of MAP:me. Though participant observation, the section presents an overview of the kinds of knowledge participatory, performative methods have brought to this research. Particular attention is paid to theories that engage with emotion, affect and embodiment introduced in Chapter 1. The second half of Chapter 4 moves from participant observation to analysis of *what was made*. It focuses on **identity** – specifically, how



identities of research participants are *enacted* through the participatory, performative methodology, MAP:me. Discussions are framed by issues that currently preoccupy new museology, such as belonging, cultural diversity and citizenship.

Chapter 5 moves from identity to **place**, to critically reflect upon the concept of capturing, or 'collecting', and interpreting the myriad local-global connections shaping Wagga Wagga. What happens when Wagga Wagga is filtered through multiple, embodied perspectives? It is in two sections. The first focuses on *dimension* and *mobility* to study how place is spatially understood through the body. The second explores the *composition* and *representation* of place when enacted by affective and emotional bodies. It considers the theoretical knowledge and vocabulary available to describe such a phenomena. Data is analysed in the context of theories introduced in Chapter 1, that deal with rhizomes, actor networks and representation. How might this new way to imagine place complement a growing museological interest in materiality, intangibility, emotion and affect? Chapter 5 concludes by considering the lasting effects of this research. Three overarching ideas stemming from the data analysis are put forward for discussion in Chapter 6.

Chapter 6 marks the start of *SECTION III – ACQUISITIONS AND INTERACTIONS*; so called because this research has lead to a series of acquisitions (knowledge of identity and place), shaped by ongoing interactions (between people, ideas, agendas, theories and practices). This critical chapter is framed by the concept of **more-than-institutional thinking** (ways of *thinking* and *doing* beyond current museological paradigms). Here, the research narrative considers the changes required in museological theory and practice to both recognise and accommodate these processes. This project has lead to the emergence of a **viscero-spatial curatorship**. Reflexive, collaborative, responsive and ethical, viscero-spatial curatorship has developed out of an understanding of the body as 'an affective vehicle through which we sense place and movement, and construct emotional geographies' (Sheller & Urry 2006: 216). This is a new term for museum studies.

Through instances of viscero-spatial curatorship, this chapter explores the concept of more-than-institutional thinking in the context of the following statements:

1. The museum as a site of production
2. Emotional engagement with multiple worlds
3. The mobile body enacts global space

Stepping outside conventional, institutional ways of thinking, this chapter aims to inspire further spatially-themed research to capture contemporary realities of 'the social' and 'local place'. The **MAP:me exhibition** is offered as a practical demonstration of more-than-institutional thinking to illustrate how similar research might be applied to the wider sector. The chapter is in four sections. The first three are devoted to each of the statements above; the fourth presents a diagram illustrative of the points raised by this thesis to ignite more-than-institutional ways of thinking about the research, collection and interpretation of contemporary place-based identities.

Chapter 7 concludes this narrative by considering the wider implications of this research for new museology. By exploring, testing and pushing the conceptual boundaries of the participatory museum, this project has advanced a reflective and collaborative working practice to learn from the social present. In doing so, it has operationalised a *performative* approach to research and interpretation, and encouraged the history museum to critically rethink key strands of collecting practice. To finish, the narrative considers how this research might be of use beyond the collecting sector. With reference to human geography, focus turns to 'the language of museum space' (Hillier & Tzortzi 2006: online). While human geography has been the primary source of spatial knowledge for this project, here it is of import to consider the value of museological expertise to the geographer. In other words, to look at how the geographer might benefit from a curatorial understanding of the 'affective potential' of the exhibition gallery (Baker 2008: 23).

## *A note on narrative style*

The chapters mentioned above cohere through the ‘voice’, or narrative style, used to communicate this research and its methods. The narrative style is shaped by Law and Urry’s assertion that ‘in a complex world there are no innocent “methods”’ (2004: 402). This research moves beyond the ‘methodological inheritance’ of 19<sup>th</sup> century social science, and the researcher’s pursuit of ‘fixing’, ‘demarcating’ and ‘separating’ (403). In practice, this has meant adopting a more performative and deliberative research narrative. This has developed from a deliberate engagement with myself as both ‘researcher’ and ‘curator’. Moving between researcher-as-curator and curator-as-researcher is to enact a performance between two sides of the same persona. Knowledge is shaped by these two congruent processes, and has been articulated as such.

For example, as ‘researcher’, I am not separate from the research and its narrative. Instead I am part of the ‘performative sense of social enquiry’ (Law & Urry 2004: 403) that produces the multiple realities described in this thesis. Knowledge is generated by many parties, including myself, actively *doing* – working, talking, deliberately and overtly negotiating with ‘pre-existing social and material realities’ (Law 2004: 13), and making subjective (and perhaps unconscious) decisions about what is included and what is left out of ‘identity’ and ‘place’. My role as ‘curator’ intersects with these processes. Curatorship is also highly performative, establishing and negotiating relationships between different parties and generating creative situations. Yet, curatorship brings different skills to the table. For example, it is foregrounded in theories of material culture, interpretation and audience engagement, and shaped by organisational vision, mission, policy and practice. Throughout this thesis, I consider how these roles interact; the reflexive implications, the limitations and opportunities. How this synthesis of roles might change the working practice of the contemporary curator is an issue to which I return as this work comes to an end.

Rather than reporting back in a conventional format, the thesis is characterised by the use of the first person, a device that distances my work from more ‘objective,

faceless and impersonal' forms of discourse that seek to represent 'external reality' (Hyland 2005: 173). By using the first person, I am able to suggest agency. That is, I am able to discuss who is doing what within the project, and how ideas have built from the process and performativity of research. I am also able to reflect clearly on how the entangled roles of both curator and researcher have shaped the project; and importantly, I can show how my research outcomes augment, challenge or diverge from the work of others. Moreover, the use of the first person suggests that research outcomes would not have been the same if a different researcher/curator, group of research participants and contemporary artist were conducting this project in a parallel museum/laboratory. In addition to the first person, I have also used *hedges* when commenting on statements made about identity and place. Hedges, for example, terms like 'might', 'perhaps' and 'possibly', enable me to remark on realities, or worlds, made during this research (Hyland 2005). This device allows for a discursive space wherein readers may dispute these interpretations with alternative worlds, or versions of reality. By adopting these measures, this thesis has sought to be a more engaging and less abstract piece of text. In signalling my presence to the reader, I have situated my argument in a research narrative that endeavours to engage both writer and reader as participants in an ever developing conversation.

# CHAPTER ONE

## Refreshing the Modern Museum

### Towards a New Vocabulary of Identity and Place

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*Up until this century, 90% of the world's population died within a ten-mile radius of the home where they were born and raised. While this now might be difficult for us to imagine, our sense of place is still the basis of many profound stories (Lambert 2010: 6).*

I became a social history curator because I love to tell stories. At the museum, this work has involved engaging with people to help them create and share accounts of their rich life experiences, along with all the attendant idiosyncrasies. As an interpretive strategy, storytelling is a powerful tool for the museum to connect with people, and for giving people the means to understand others.

The modern history museum uses narrative – stories – as an effective means to engage visitors and help people to make sense of their world (Bedford 2001; Rounds 2002). Stories are the building blocks of social history. As the curator, my role is to enrich these stories with context, or knowledge of wider events in space and time that have shaped both individual and multiple experiences. As a way to interpret social history in the gallery, my work has positioned people within larger cultural and social narratives to explore how they participate in these narratives. What is the individual experience in a particular social context? How do people react to situations with surprising, life changing or inspiring consequences?

Over the last decade, I have delivered a number of exhibitions to highlight stories of identity and place. These displays have layered plural identities onto a physical location – a specific place or site – to configure 'sense of place'. They have involved

constructions of the self with a focus on the lived experience 'in place'. Yet, it has become increasingly hard to apply this template to modern culturally diverse identities. Today, ever mobile populations serve to augment cultural and ethnic diversity on a global scale. This has led to increasing numbers of people 'who do not unequivocally "belong" to the countries where they live' (Auliciems 2011: online). Nowadays a person's sense of self can be attached to more than one place, or to a changing array of disparate places extending beyond the physical. Concomitant with this trend is a move towards 'more reflexivity and the individualisation of lifestyles and identities' (Auliciems 2011: online). This in turn has created 'more fragmentary' identities that are 'more a matter of individual choice than ascription' (Auliciems 2011: online). Until now, there has been little research to help the curator piece together these complex spatial narratives. This has stemmed from a knowledge gap in the field of museum studies regarding how to theorize the fluidity of modern identities experienced through place and space.

By focusing on four key themes: **identity**, **place**, **space** and **movement**, this research project considers how knowledge of socio-spatial reality beyond regional boundaries might help the history museum continue to support and define a regional identity. This chapter begins to construct a line of theory for the museum to address the pluralities of 'who we are' in a world of complex and shifting spatialities. The term 'spatialities' is used to refer to a series of entities, or *productions*, brought into being by the actions, or *performances*, of diverse assortments of people and things. Here, individuals might experience markedly different spatialities depending on the nature and composition of their socio-spatial relations (Kitchin 2009). Throughout this chapter, attention is focused on the two disciplines that drive this research: museum studies and human geography.

This chapter divides into two main sections. The first looks to establish a common ground between the disciplines to present a museological and geographical basis from which this project can shape new knowledge. The starting point is the 'cultural turn' of the late 1970s, and its subsequent effect on both fields in the late 1980s, gaining momentum in the 1990s. This section looks at how ideas stemming from cultural theory influenced how both subjects perceived the relationship between

language, power and knowledge, and the effect this was to have on the construction of meaning. As a focal point, the emergence of posthumanism is discussed as a key conceptual tool to help the history museum make meaning in a complex world. Turning to new museology, the collaborative nature of 'The Participatory Museum' (Simon 2010) is introduced to embed this research in current museological practice. How might the experimental nature of this project interact with established sectoral paradigms?

The second section deals with the concept of spatialisation – 'the use of spatial metaphors to make sense of an abstract concept' (Skupin & Fabrikant 2008: 2). This section considers how ideas of space and place are theorised within each discipline. It outlines the importance of mobility, and explores how this project resonates with geographical research on meaningful encounters between the body, place and space. This chapter concludes with the acquisition of a new vocabulary for museum studies, and a set of conceptual tools with which to tackle the project.

I will start with a truth about collecting institutions: to the casual observer, museums may seem static, especially on the surface, but in reality they are constantly changing. This dynamism is widely accepted by today's museum scholars, who acknowledge that 'museums are constantly in flux, complex and messy. Museums have never conformed to single paradigms, and they never will' (Knell et al 2007: xxv). The very fact that museums, or the ways in which museums understand the world, are so sensitive to transformation facilitates the conceptual development of this research project. As mentioned earlier, museums have been equated to laboratories (Bennett 2005), places to transform and experiment, to recast and reconfigure. Bennett uses this analogy to explore how museums operate within programs of social and civic governance. I take the concept of the museum/laboratory along a different path. For this research, the museum/laboratory becomes an environment in which to experiment with contemporary spatial theories and trial innovative interpretive techniques. Here, I deconstruct existing practice, graft new ideas onto longstanding values, introduce new variables and chart the reactions that occur when disciplines coalesce.

## Human Geography and Museology: Language, Power, Knowledge and the Construction of Meaning

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Essentially, this research is shaped by two factors: the ways in which geographers have come to understand people and their environments and the ways in which museums have come to regard themselves and their audiences. Both disciplines share a similar preoccupation with people, their cultural worlds and their interactions with the environment. In the late 1980s, cultural theory, an interdisciplinary way of thinking about culture, began to have a wide reaching influence on museum studies and human geography (for example, Barnett 1998; Bennett 1998; Mason 2006b; Oakes & Price 2008). Today, the changes attributed to this 'cultural turn' continue to inform the kinds of knowledge captured for this project.

Cultural theory resonates strongly with the museum sector and its legacy of 'accessing, ignoring, confronting, re-affirming and forging identities' (McLean 2008: 283). Cultural theory involves the analysis of culture in its broadest sense. It is a field of study offering a conceptual toolkit to explore how 'divergent traditions' understand culture – for example, 'as values, codes, narratives, ideologies, pathologies [and], discourses' (Smith 2001: 5) – and how such understandings have changed over time. Theorists become involved in the 'social implications' of culture by explaining the role that culture plays in 'providing stability [and] solidarity', or in 'sustaining conflict, power, and inequality' (5). The relationship between culture and the individual is central:

the most critical issue concerns the ways in which culture shapes human action. Some thinkers stress the constraining nature of culture, while others point to its ability to enable action. Issues relating to the cultural construction of the self, motivation, and identity are fundamental to both sets of arguments (Smith 2001: 5).

Influential cultural theorist, Stuart Hall, views culture as a 'critical site of social action and intervention, where power relations are both established and potentially unsettled' (Procter 2004: 2). For museologists and geographers, the effect of the



cultural turn has been profound. For example, by emphasising the instability of concepts such as 'truth' and 'objectivity', cultural theory highlighted the thorny relationship between language, power and knowledge. In doing so, it questioned the idea of an inalienable 'reality'. The cultural turn began to destabilize the notion of the museum as an institution established to capture ideas and objects and hold them in perpetuity, unchanged and unchallenged. It made human geographers think about people as active participants in the production and shaping of their environments; and it focused attention on lived experiences.

### *Poststructuralism, postmodernism, posthumanism: meaning and identity*

In the 1970s and 1980s, poststructural thinking lead to a new understanding of culture. Originally emerging in France in the 1960s, poststructuralism emphasised plurality, changing meanings and the 'constructedness of norms and values' (Mason 2006: online). Derrida and Foucault are two key thinkers in the equation between language, power and knowledge. Both questioned the idea that meaning and knowledge were fixed and stable. According to Foucault, for example, knowledge is 'always the result of a construction the rules of which must be known, and the justification of which must be scrutinised' (Foucault 1972: 28).

Foucault observed the workings of power in society to present 'official or dominant knowledges which impart power to those who know and speak them' (Green & Troup 1999, cited in Watson 2007b: 9). Derrida worked on relationships between language and text to show the difficulties inherent in knowing and representing the empirical world (Johnston 2008; Mason 2006). The idea of discourse, a key Foucauldian term, became a popular way for scholars to interrogate 'biases and assumptions embedded in dominant ideological structures and forms of practice' (Kreps 2003: 7). As a result, activities such as writing, map making and interpreting landscapes and objects, when undertaken from the perspective of Western geography and

museology, became increasingly problematic. It became apparent that representations of social reality were just as likely to reflect the positionality of the author or curator, concretising certain ways of thinking at the expense of alternative models for knowing the world.

It was the idea that meaning is never fully present, only constructed through the involvement of other competing meanings, and significantly, always dependant on context, that made scholars from both fields start to question the ways in which they constructed knowledge (Porter 1996). For human geography, this brought the subjectivity of individuals to the fore. Thus, explorations of geographical structures, such as places and regions, as products of linear causality were now superseded by explorations of the ways in which places and spaces were interpreted by people (Harrison 2006). For museum studies, the idea that meanings changed over time – and importantly, that meaning also changed with different contexts and the interpretation of different peoples and cultures – was a key driver of change in the sector, because it highlighted the ‘polysemic quality’ (Mason 2006: online) of the museum object, and thus the museum itself. Moreover, in both fields, the ‘cultural artefact’ began to represent a much broader political discussion about ‘whose version of history is recorded as the official one’ and whose version of history is marginalised or excluded (Mason 2006: online).

Cultural studies opened up museum studies and human geography to critical debate. Questions of culture and identity, and identity construction, were at the forefront of these discussions. For both disciplines, theories of colonial discourse and postcolonialism began to shape the construction of shared pasts and inclusive contemporary identities. Geographer, Clive Barnett, noted that this brought, ‘an ever-greater sophistication in understandings of the construction of social relations of gender and race as well as class [and] a focus upon cultural constructions of environment and nature (Barnett 1998: 381)’. Poststructuralism initiated new ways to think about ‘the individual’. As a concept, it moved beyond Enlightenment ideas of ‘the subject’ as ‘a free and rational agent who adjudicates competing claims for action’ (Berlin 1992: 18), to emphasise instead, ‘the ways that subjectivities and agency are constructed by arbitrary but powerful cultural and historical forces’ (Smith

2001: 119). Particular attention was given to the idea that individuals were 'constrained rather than free'; and to the notion that 'aspects of the self' were considered to be 'often contradictory, fragmentary, or incomplete' (119). The individual, therefore, became a 'construction of the various signifying practices, the uses of language, of a given historical moment' (Berlin 1992: 18).

The arrival of postmodernism in the late 1980s and 1990s has been a major contributor to the socially inclusive work now undertaken by the social history curator. The term postmodernism describes a broad cultural and social shift in Western societies that has encompassed specific ideas of key poststructuralist philosophies. The condition or framework of postmodernism stresses imagination and ambiguity over knowledge and reason (Aitken & Valentine 2006); it rejects the notion of hierarchy and single truths. Postmodern culture has resulted in 'a new cultural politics of difference and identity' (Soja 1996: 84). Lyotard, a key thinker in the postmodernist movement, explored how knowledge gained legitimacy in a postmodern age. Noting how 'the grand narrative has lost its credibility' (Lyotard 1984: 37), Lyotard saw 'knowledge (and society) fragment [...] into local and multiple fields, with grand humanistic visions falling by the wayside' (Smith 2001: 219). He argued that:

what we come to accept as the truth receives its authority when it conforms to larger stories of the human place in the world, that govern a given society in a given stage of its development. What is important is not whether something can be absolutely and objectively verified. Instead, facts, ideas, theories and knowledges are said to be true if they match or develop the fundamental visions of the world that societies use to define themselves (Mansfield 2000: 165).

At the social history museum, postcolonial critics of 'metanarratives', or 'big stories' (Aitken & Valentine 2006: 17) of nation, identity and experience, noted how these concepts tended to marginalize certain peoples, by race, class, gender or ethnicity. Such totalising accounts could sanction particular power relations and favour certain groups over others in historical struggles. For contemporary museum display, the concept of the 'grand narrative' became problematic (Berlin 1992: 19). As history museums started to question the ethics of collecting and interpretation under the narrow gaze of colonialism (Witcomb 2003), they began to reject singular narratives

for knowing and representing the world. Instead, they turned their gaze inwards in a bid to critically analyse what they were and who they served. Significantly, this was to lead to a review of what to collect and how this material might be (re)interpreted. Today, this has resulted in an interesting dilemma – namely, that museums are still ‘representational spaces’ (Message 2006: 42), yet they operate in a postmodern society of smaller, more localised and often competing narratives, where ideas about reality and its representation have become particularly challenging. Thus, the question of what and how to collect still persists.

The question of what and how to collect occupies this thesis. What types of object might be representative of contemporary identity and place? How this might be achieved by the history museum is discussed in the context of an emerging mode of critical enquiry – posthumanism. Posthumanism offers a lively new perspective on contemporary life, prompted by divisions between nature and society in the West, and wide-ranging events spanning genetic modification to climate science, that render the separation between the human and the non-human problematic (Lorimer 2009). A number of human geographers and visual artists have turned to posthumanism to explore ‘the creation and expression of hybrid and fluid identities’ (Lorimer 2009: 346; Robinson-Cseke 2008). This work builds on work of feminist, poststructuralist and postcolonial theorists to break down humanistic notions of ‘self’ and ‘other’. Recently, scholars have begun to use posthumanism as a means to explore embodied practices to learn how the blending of human and the non-human might inform the performance of everyday life. Visual studies has been particularly drawn to posthumanism because it champions new media technologies and the concept of performance to explore social transformation and relationships beyond normativity (for example, Gomoll 2011; Robinson-Cseke 2008).

This research explores how posthumanist ideas might be of use to social history curatorship, and the collection of micro-histories that spotlight the interconnected and often disjointed nature of everyday experience. How might posthumanism help the social history curator to understand the social? As a result of the postmodern condition, identities in the history museum have become more diverse; they are regarded as ‘multiple and open to change’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 371; Barnett

2006). This research considers how these instances of change and diversity might be explored from a posthuman perspective; that is, by combining the body with ‘the materialities and affective forces that flow between humans, organisms, and objects’ (Lorimer 2009: 345). This approach is new to the history museum, for it cuts across existing ontological and taxonomic divides. The outcomes of such research are also new to the sector. Theorists (for example, Deleuze, Latour and Law) have noted how the results of posthumanist study call ‘for an ontology of intensities [capable of] producing forms that are in a constant and unstable state of becoming’ (Lorimer 2009: 348). This research argues that here is much inspiration to take from these ideas – from notions of ‘hybrid ontologies of the nonhuman realm’ (348). As this thesis progresses, the museum/laboratory experiments with ideas of collecting that blur the boundaries of human and non-human, of people and place, and material and immaterial. Of particular interest to this project are the *processes* at work in configuring contemporary posthuman places and identities – and how such outcomes might be *negotiated* and *represented* in the history museum. This is an exciting time for the history curator.

## *New Museology and participation*

It is no coincidence that the activities shaping this project – engagement, collaboration, negotiation and co-creation – find a place within postmodern, contemporary museology. As described earlier, postmodern ideas have challenged traditional museological practices, particularly collecting and interpretation. In the modernist museum, the curator constructed universal, objective truths through material culture and display. Subject disciplines were clearly differentiated; objects were presented in disciplinary taxonomies, and humanity was measured against singular, Western, models of human identity. Here, the visitor experience adhered to the idea that ‘to look was to learn’ (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 370). The advent of postmodernism – a time of political activism, environmentalism and social unrest – saw scholars re-thinking how collecting institutions might re-approach ideas of meaning, control, interpretation and authority. It was (and still is) a time when many

practitioners turned to their collections to reconsider issues of authenticity, value, significance, rarity and representativeness. This period of re-evaluation became known as the 'new museology' – a term that gained recognition with Vergo's anthology: *The New Museology* (1989).

This research takes place within the framework of new museology – a shift that has sought to move collecting institutions from sites of singular accounts to sites of 'different kinds of educational engagements' (Boast 2011: 58) between visitors, and between visitors and museum practitioners. New museology has encouraged people to make meaning by interacting with, and contributing to, displays that integrate multiple disciplines. This is a more people-centred museology – a practice that understands knowledge as 'perspectival rather than universal' (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 370). Inspired by new museology, Hooper-Greenhill (2000) later used the expression 'post-museum' to describe a museum concept for the 21st century. Hooper-Greenhill saw the post-museum as an active place housing 'many voices and many perspectives' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000b: 81). Here:

knowledge is no longer unified and monolithic; it becomes fragmented and multi-vocal. There is no necessary unified perspective – rather a cacophony of voices may be heard that present a range of views, experiences, and values. The voice of the museum is one among many (Hooper-Greenhill 2000b: 82).

Soon after, Spalding imagined a 'poetic museum' to describe 'a new age of museums' in which 'categorical' and 'didactic' displays would be replaced in favour of those that 'draw out the profounder, more elusive meanings inherent in so many artefacts of our past' (Spalding 2002: 9).

The philosophy of new museology, as practiced by the post-museum, has been significant in the development of this research. This is because both areas of study have involved 'the democratization of museum practices and bottom-up participatory approaches' (Kreps 2003: 10). The idea of participation – of engagement, collaboration, negotiation and co-creation – lies at the heart of this thesis. Therefore, it is crucial to acknowledge a most recent variant of new museology that has shaped

this study: 'The Participatory Museum' (Simon 2010). The participatory museum is described as a contemporary institution where 'visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content' (Simon 2010: online). It is a site of activity; a place where people engage in *doing*, as opposed to passive observation.

This research has exploited the participatory museum concept, and the sector's encouragement of experimental audience participation in the museum space, to explore people-place relationships. Significantly, the project has used participation as a process to critically engage with the idea of posthumanism. That is, research has involved individuals outside the museum to draw non-human 'place' into a condition of 'becoming' – a condition 'that has until recently been seen as the prerogative of the human' (Anderson 2007: 3). Through engagement, collaboration, negotiation and co-creation, this researcher/curator and a group of Wagga Wagga residents have shaped entangled relationships between identity and place. In doing so, the project has both upheld and built on the idea of community engagement. A convention popular with contemporary museology, community engagement is a catch all phrase that refers to the practice of consulting and involving diverse stakeholders across a range of museum-led projects, ranging from exhibitions and public programs to collecting and focus groups (Perkin 2010). Community engagement lies at the heart of the participatory museum.

### *Constructing 'the community'*

The idea of 'community' can be hard to define. When considered in a spatial context, 'community' is commonly used to signify identities shaped within spaces of home, city, region, state and nation. The concept of community implies unity – a place-identity; and because of this, 'community elaborates a politics of space' (Aitken 2009: 221). Use of the term, therefore, can pose problems for scholars from human geography and museum studies sensitised to ways in which many communities have been 'emptied' out and then 're-placed' from home or nation in the last century (221).

Participatory new museology emphasises the interactive nature between museums and their communities. James Clifford (1997) first used the term 'contact zone' to describe this 'ongoing historical, political [and] moral relationship' between museum and visitor, which he saw as 'a power-charged set of exchanges' comprising both 'push and pull' (Clifford 1997: 192). Today, in Australia and the UK for example, contemporary social history museums (as part of a dominant, Western culture) work with diverse stakeholders in a similar fashion, to 'comprehend difference and choice in society in terms of recognition and identity' (Brown 2008: online). These institutions work to define and formulate identity, while at the same time seeking to make 'a population aware of its identity, strengthening that identity, and instilling confidence in a population's potential for development' (Kreps 2003: 10). The *recognition* and *representation* of different communities and community identities, therefore, are central concerns for both new museology and the participatory museum (Kreps 2003; Simon 2010).

The work of social theorists Iris Marion Young and Nancy Fraser is important when considering community identities for this research project. Both women work within a framework of postmodern and feminist ideology to reshape the idea of community around a politics of *difference* and *recognition* (for example, Fraser 1997, 2000; Young 1986). For Young, community is defined as a 'concept of social relations that embody openness to unassimilated otherness with justice and appreciation' (1986: 23); and for Fraser, the battle for 'cultural recognition' has become a defining factor of contemporary communities seeking to escape injustice through political struggle (1997: 11).

Although contemporary museology is supportive of the recognition and representation of contemporary communities, scholars acknowledge that this is hard to achieve in interpretive practice (Crooke 2007; Waterton & Smith 2010; Watson 2007b). For example, to satisfy inclusive agendas, social history museums habitually support ideas of community that equate with 'class, racial or ethnic hierarchies' (Waterton & Smith 2010: 7). In their enthusiasm to diversify museum audiences, exhibitions that categorise people in this fashion are ostensibly well meaning. Yet, this type of display carries a risk – one that implies that people from a white Western



(and often affluent) middle-class background are the social norm, and thus exempt from participation in similar projects. This implication, albeit unintentional, communicates an unfortunate message: that white, middle-class people 'once had community as a dominant form of social organisation, but [...] dropped it on the way to modernity' and individualism (Alleyne 2002, cited in Waterton & Smith 2010: 7). Such prescriptive definitions of groups of people, therefore, risk presenting 'communities' as 'revolving around a combination of a limited set of characteristics' (Waterton & Smith 2010: 10). Contextualised in this way, each individual becomes subsumed within a bland, homogenous collective of similar folks, 'with no allowance for internal unease, disappointment, conflict or power' (Waterton & Smith 2010: 10).

For a reading that moves beyond restrictive and often stigmatising interpretations of community, Nancy Fraser's account of the 'status model' of community (2000: 113, Waterton & Smith 2010) is a particularly insightful tool to respond to recognition and difference. The 'status model' is informed by the same global dynamics that frame this project:

Today's recognition struggles are occurring at a moment of hugely increasing transcultural interaction and communication, when accelerated migration and global media flows are hybridizing and pluralizing cultural forms. Yet the routes such struggles take often serve not to promote respectful interaction within increasingly multicultural contexts, but to drastically simplify and reify group identities. They tend rather to encourage separatism, intolerance and chauvinism, patriarchalism and authoritarianism (Fraser 2000: 108).

The status model of community emphasises the recognition of individual group members over group-specific identity. It situates the individual in contemporary society rather than a homogenous group; and of particular import to this research, the status model values 'transcultural interaction' over 'separatism and group enclaves' (Fraser 2000: 119). As a theory, Fraser's model offers conceptual tools for understanding the dynamics of 'community', and for maintaining the integrity of individual identities. Her work provides inspiration for the selection of individuals that participate in this project. This research, therefore, adapts key concepts from the

status model to encourage research participants to express individuality beyond local borders and traditional, or 'fixed' identity frameworks.

### *Collecting: towards an alternate logic*

The fact that research takes place against a backdrop of 'transcultural interaction' (Fraser 2000: 119) is important. Doing so moves this project beyond conventional museological paradigms of knowing people and place through acquisition of location-based material culture. This new conceptual framework experiments with a different kind of collecting practice for a global era. Message observes how:

globalization functions according to a "complex connectivity" that may [...] connect phenomena, people and experience through an alternate logic from that produced through traditional colonial flows of people, resources and knowledge (Message 2006: 200).

The idea of an 'alternate logic' is exciting; it suggests innovative outcomes that challenge conventions. How might this research contribute to an alternate logic that both strengthens and re-shapes collecting practice at the history museum?

With the advent of new museology came a paradigm shift. Scholars acknowledged that 'the great collecting phase of museums' was over (Hooper-Greenhill 2007: 81). Although 'collecting institutions' still cared for objects, studies noted how new museology instead favoured collaborative, community-centred projects that dealt with object (re)interpretation above further accumulation (Hooper-Greenhill 2007; Simpson 2007; Watson 2007b). Objects, and their (re)interpretation, continue to play an important role in the museum. Objects have an expressive quality. Museum scholars use the term 'materiality' to refer to both 'the form and the materials of which an object consists', and to the 'meaning' of an object (Dudley 2010: 7). When combined, an object's materiality draws upon a 'dynamic interaction' with 'our sensory experience' (8).

The term 'materiality' – or 'materialities' – is also familiar to human geography. Conceptually, 'material geographies' overlap with museum studies as geographers study matter for its 'inherent properties', its 'meaningful physicality' and for its import as 'material culture' (Anderson & Tolia-Kelly 2004: 672). The object(s) of research for the material geographer can be extremely diverse, ranging from nature and landscape, to 'all that which is consumed, produced, and decayed' (Tolia-Kelly 2009: 500). Here, matter is regarded as being 'both tangible and intangible, visible and absent, decayed and in the process of becoming, evoking sentimentality and mundaneness' (500). For the purposes of this project, the concept of 'materiality' connects with the body and ideas of embodiment. This idea links to a cluster of research that focuses on matter entangled with 'the spatialities of the lived body, practice, touch, emotion, and affect' (Anderson & Wylie 2009: 318).

Scholars and practitioners of both human geography and museum studies observe how objects cohere to 'articulate aspects of self' (Woodward 2007: 135; Anderson & Wylie 2009, Belk et al 1988). At the social history museum, it is common curatorial practice to use everyday objects to express elements of identity. Material culture scholars explore how objects can signify identity through a range of social markers, such as 'sub-cultural affinity, occupation, wealth, participation in a leisure activity, or [aspects] of one's social status' (Woodward 2007: 135; Pearce 1995). The phrase 'objects in action' (Woodward 2007) can be applied to the study of these complex object-people relations. For example, 'objects in action' can be used to describe the social processes through which people give value to objects, and where objects matter to people as signifiers of status or personal taste. Cultural theorists note that, in order to understand 'the contours of culture', even the most 'banal or trivial objects need attention' (Woodward 2007: 108). The application of a 'cultural approach' equips researchers with the conceptual tools to understand people-object relations in greater depth, for example, by introducing 'questions of emotion and desire' (109) into object-people relationships. I mention this here because this project elicits emotion from the research participants as we explore identity and place together; and I am mindful not to overlook any objects, however slight, that may contribute to the process of identity formation.

It is commonplace for the history museum to collect objects for perpetuity, even the seemingly mundane and commonplace, because of their significance to a particular locality, person, or event. Earlier, I mention that most scholars no longer recognise identity as being fixed and stable. However, when considering objects in a museum context, 'stability' becomes highly significant to collection management. This is because museum studies continues to maintain a distinct correlation between 'the social significance' of an object and 'its physical permanence' (Colloredo-Mansfeld 2004, cited in De Silvey 2006: 324). This research looks to challenge this idea. What if matter generated by the research participants is both socially significant, yet deliberately impermanent? How might these materialities be understood by the history museum and museum visitors?

Objects that relate to local history tend to be mostly (but not exclusively) representative of everyday life (Witcomb 2009a) depicting the working lives of ordinary people. Collections from the more recent past tend to be classified around 'territory-based' differences (Macdonald 2006: online), with contemporary collecting concerned with changes to a locality and its identity. The arrival of new residents to an area as the result of recent migration is a popular theme. Under this banner, collecting and community engagement can be funded through strategic collaboration between government agencies and cultural policy. In Australia, for example, the establishment of the South Australian Migration Museum was a notable outcome of the *Edwards Report* (1981), which argued for 'the need to develop multiculturalism through community education' (Edwards 1981, cited in Witcomb 2009b: 52). Later, the museum 'became a model for other museums wanting to work with migrant communities and foster acceptance of cultural diversity as central to Australian identity' (Witcomb 2009b: 52).

Many objects in contemporary history museums are 'mass phenomena' (Pries 2009: 595) produced for global markets. As a consequence, older, territory-based classificatory categories (such as locally made crafts, or machinery and the products and activities associated with local industries) are beginning to lose authority. This has resulted in a very contemporary problem for the history curator: how, what and where to collect? Curators are now faced with a glut of 'everyday' objects and a glut

of information. Many have begun to solve this dilemma using the power of the exhibition. The notion that 'a collection should strive for totality' (Healy 1994: 35) has been superseded by the use of 'stories' and 'narratives' as a main structuring device for their displays, with objects relegated to a more illustrative role (Hooper-Greenhill 1992; Macdonald 2006: online).

By collecting personal stories and biographies, participatory museology works with individuals on small scale projects that build and strengthen the identity of local populations. In doing so, the sector has become an active supporter of the preservation of contemporary knowledge and cultural identity (Krepps n.d. online). It follows, therefore, that alongside 'tangible material objects', the history museum has grown to be 'equally interested in intangible heritage' (Hooper-Greenhill 2000b: 81). Intangible cultural heritage (ICH) can help to keep the museum 'contemporary and living' (UNESCO 2003). That is, it can represent 'contemporary rural and urban practices in which diverse cultural groups take part'; and it can capture living identities in the process of 'being' (UNESCO 2003). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) delimit ICH as:

the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills - as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith - that communities, groups and, in some cases, individuals recognise as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, thus promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity (UNESCO 2003: 2.1).

With particular reference to working with Indigenous stakeholders, Kreps observes how collecting ICH can help museums consider alternative modes of curatorship that encompass 'living cultural expressions (performing arts, skills, knowledge and practices)' (2009: 194). In contemporary museology, life stories and other biographical accounts can also be considered as significant expressions of ICH (Solanilla 2008). In this context, ICH is regarded as being 'interconnected and interdependent' with 'objects, spaces and human expressions' (Alivizatou 2008: 49).

The practice of collecting ICH complements participatory museum philosophy, for it encourages institutions to develop egalitarian, participatory approaches to the preservation of identity and cultural heritage.

Human geographers have also expressed an interest in the intangible. Scholars note how ‘the intertwining of matters and senses’ can conjure ‘a *lived* sensibility’ – the manifestation of ‘a story to be told’ (Anderson & Wylie 2009: 327, authors’ emphasis). Spalding, writing on ‘the poetic museum’, states that ‘museums have barely begun to realise their potential as storytellers and communicators’ (2002: 9). This research project, with its focus on the body against a backdrop of transnational space, experiments with a new kind of storytelling – one wherein an ‘alternate logic’ to collecting intertwines with both the tangible and the intangible, the human and the non-human, and the material and the immaterial to shape contemporary stories of people and place.

### *On what bodies can do in museums*

It should not be forgotten that the body – as the object or ‘matter’ of this research – has an important role to play in this thesis. This project looks inward, to explore how bodies might engage with the history museum to articulate identity and the complex nature of a ‘local place’. To consider what is possible to achieve in the museum today, it is first useful to reflect upon changing attitudes to the body, in particular to the notion of bodies in the museum.

My professional interest in the body has been shaped by a growing appreciation of the individual at the history museum, sparked by the pursuit of oral testimony in the 1970s (Beier-de Haan 2006: online). Traditionally, history in the museum dealt with political history. However, as museums began to reject the grand narrative, a more intimate understanding of history based on personal memories, stories and experiences of everyday life took hold. With the rise of a more culturally-focussed discipline, museum displays shifted from ‘kings, ministers, battles and treaties with

nation-states and their mutual relations' (Beier-de Haan 2006: online), to social and economic history, and social structure and change. Today, the museum has moved even closer to the body, with a shift away from social and economic history to spotlight cultural and micro-histories (Beier-de Haan 2006: online). It is within the realm of the micro-history and the corporality of the individual that this research is situated.

However, the concept of bodies in museums has a troubling past. Historically, this can be exemplified by academic museum displays of the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. As part of rapidly expanding ethnographic collections, the bodies of Indigenous peoples from colonised regions came to be displayed in institutions across Europe. Bennett notes how 'the archaeological gaze of the historical sciences' rendered these colonised peoples as primitive 'living relics' of a European past (2004: 63). Through a process of Othering – using perceived differences to exclude and discriminate – such bodies were set apart from popular ideals of Western civilisation. The displays in which they featured served to highlight stages of an evolving society, with the West at the top of the evolutionary scale. Anderson observes how this 'fundamental anthropology of humanism' depended on the belief that human beings, and human progress, meant a separation from animals and nature (2007: 4). In Australia, for example, the process of Othering saw Indigenous peoples associated with animals and nature as part of 'racist discourses that served European imperial and white settler interests of oppression and dispossession' (Anderson 2007: 14).

'Otherness and identity are two inseparable sides of the same coin' (Staszak 2009: 43). In the case of institutions like those mentioned above, the identities of those on display would have been controlled with a dominant knowledge that was objective, disembodied and masculine. This way of understanding (and distancing oneself from) 'the Other' was part of a Cartesian legacy that privileged the mind over the body. 17<sup>th</sup> century French philosopher, Rene Descartes, saw the individual 'as a dualism of subject and object' (Edwards 2008: 186). A visual philosopher, Descartes put great value in sight. By stating that, 'it is the mind which senses, not the body' (Descartes 1953, cited in Edwards 2008: 186), Descartes created a division between mind and body, between subject and object. Thus, the term 'Cartesian dualism'

validated 'the disembodied eye' – an idea that became a significant influence on modern scientific methodology.

The mind-body dualism of Western society saw bodies as 'base, dour, material objects' in opposition to the mind, which was associated with 'the intellectual, spiritual, and symbolic' (Dunn 2010: 4). This way of thinking meant that the body, while being the traditional focus of anthropological studies involving 'pre-modern', or 'less mentally advanced' social groups, became relatively ignored by sociologists studying "'intellectual" modern societies' (Smith & Riley 2009: 262). As a consequence, traditional Western approaches to thinking about bodies have tended to 'ignore the incorporated and the physical', and have thus envisioned 'modern societies' as 'somehow having gotten beyond the ways in which primitive societies relied on bodies as carriers and symbols of culture' (262).

In human geography, Cartesian dualism worked to separate the body from place. Towards the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, postmodern and poststructuralist geographers began to challenge this distinction. Feminist scholars in particular (for example, Butler 1993; McDowell 1999; Rose 1993) critiqued the notion that female bodies, were 'a passive surface upon which meanings are inscribed' (Budgeon 2003: 36). Of particular import to this research was their ability to imagine 'a body beyond the binary materiality of representation – the body not as an *object* but as an *event*' (Budgeon 2003: 36, author's emphasis). This way of thinking is significant, for it has inspired this research to think not what bodies in the museum *mean*, but to consider what bodies in the museum can *do*.

What can bodies in the museum *do* to concepts of identity and place? This project, inspired by posthumanist ideas that reject simple dualisms between human/nature and human/non-human, has sought outcomes of a more 'infinitesimal and emergent' nature (Lorimer 2009: 347). Research, therefore, unfolds as an 'intercorporeal intermingling' (348) – a blurring of boundaries between bodies, places, spaces, people, objects and experiences. As a result, bodies have become the focus, or template, of an alternative museological model for witnessing the emergence of local place.



## *Summary*

To establish a conceptual framework for this research, this section has reflected upon key milestones and ideas shaping the fields of museum studies and human geography, both theory and practice, that are germane to this project. In subsequent chapters, the thesis will build on this framework to construct ways of knowing the world and the self that are sensitive to both flexible boundaries and relational understandings; that are open to reflexivity and negotiation, to difference and ambiguity; and that embrace imagination and active engagement.

## **Spatialisation**

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Having established a conceptual framework for this project around the construction of contemporary social life, I now consider the concept of spatialisation. This term, defined here as ‘the use of spatial metaphors to make sense of an abstract concept’ (Skupin & Fabrikant 2008: 2), is employed to reflect upon notions of **identity**, **place**, **space** and **movement**. To further this research into how the history museum might begin to think about the complexity of contemporary identity in a global age, this section looks at the ways in which people inhabit, or embody, spaces and places beyond territorial borders. As discussed previously, both museum studies and human geography have been shaped by the work of cultural theorists (Barnett 1998). Both disciplines share similar concerns, and both apply modes of cultural analysis to human interactions with society, place and space (Barnett 1998). The aim here is to explore the idea of culture as a spatial concept (Gupta & Ferguson 1997), using human geography and museum studies to guide my understanding of the self and the social in space and place. How do scholars in these fields make sense of the lived experience – and how are social and cultural experiences understood in spatial terms?

The cultural turn made geographers question the concept of space, or more specifically, the concept of the individual in space. Geographers became responsive to social relations in space, and the types of spatial constructs extant beneath these relations (Lees 2007). Moreover, they began to follow the trajectories of people in space: the mental maps, symbols and narratives of people defined by myriad cultures. They considered culture at a micro-level, at a personal scale, and thus began to think about the construction of the self. When combined, notions of culture, identity and one's position in space and attachments to place, lead to an understanding of people – or bodies – in space, and people's social and cultural connections to place, that are of import to this research.

### *Cultural landscapes and sense of place*

Both museum studies and human geography view places as socially constructed, deriving meaning, and 'even their physical form, from the actions and imaginations of people in society' (Byrne 2008: 155). Museology refers to 'cultural landscapes' to describe the 'complex processes through which individuals and groups define themselves' (Convery & Dutson 2006: 6; Byrne 2008). While scholars explore intangible, non-physical dimensions of place to examine culturally specific beliefs and value systems (Byrne 2008; Convery & Dutson 2006; Kreps 2003), studies regularly return to the tangible, to a particular place, or part of a landscape, to highlight how and why a physical place might be a source of meaning and experience (Byrne 2008; Convery & Dutson 2006).

Scholars from both disciplines recognise that when landscape and culture come together they become key components in 'sense of place'. The relationship between landscape and culture, between 'human beings and their spatial settings' (Shamai 1991, cited in Jorgensen & Stedman 2001: 233), is subtle and complex. Sense of place can be seen as 'an overarching concept which subsumes other concepts describing relationships between human beings and spatial settings' (Convery & Dutson 2006: 5). It is a tricky idea to circumscribe, because sense of place resists:

any precise definition as it does not refer explicitly to dimensions of place like defined geographic space or the distribution of socio-economic activities – there is no clear consensus on what the concept of sense of place should contain or how it should be constructed and measured scientifically (Kaltenborn 1998: 172).

In museum studies, there have been a number of texts devoted to the idea of 'sense of place' and the practice of placemaking (for example, Convery & Dutson 2006; Vanclay 2008; Watson 2007b). Here, the literature interprets human-space relationships within the framework of an individual or group in a distinct physical realm. Scholars focus on the dynamics of how people live in place, how they experience and articulate being in place, and the associations and representations that places are able to conjure within a person or group. Vanclay's study in particular, pays close attention to how people's sense of place is perceived 'through different senses and lenses' (Vanclay 2008). Thus:

sights, sounds, tastes, smells and touch fuse together in the movement of our bodies to create a sense of place. The senses we perceive are characteristic of the particular localities where they are found and where we experience them (Casey 1996, cited in Pocock 2008: 77).

Notions of cultural landscape and sense of place are fluid, subtle, subjective and complex; and significantly, they have qualities that can be experienced through a range of senses. Understanding these spatial phenomena through intense embodied experiences has inspired this research project. What if bodies could configure sense of place and cultural landscape beyond 'particular localities' – beyond a singular territory to connect instead to disparate places and spaces that blur and shift the boundaries of defined geographic locations? Theories across both disciplines exist to help understand how places and spaces might be atomised in such a way at the museum/laboratory. Pursuing this train of thought involves reflection upon broader interpretations of space and place and their potential for re-construction.

## *Constructing geographies: personal understandings of place and space*

How does museology interpret the spaces and places beyond the walls of the institution? A starting point is a very literal definition whereby scholars regard place primarily as a physical entity. Therefore, place is:

anything that has the following [...]: geographic location (whether spot, area or linear form), material form (physicality) and investment with meaning and value (positive and negative) (Vanclay 2008: 4).

Within this conceptual framework, definitions of place may verge on the abstract, for example, place as 'a web of understanding between people and their history'; place as 'permeable to new ideas, new practices and new people' (Davis 1999, cited in Watson 2007b: 70). These definitions of place prioritise the form and physicality of territory. Therefore, place is "space" imbued with meaning' (Vanclay 2008: 3). Thinking beyond this conceptual framework to imagine 'virtual places, the body as place, and "place" as any site of human engagement or activity', is seen to diminish the true concept of place as 'geographic location' (4). This way of thinking about place is problematic, as it implies that social and cultural worlds can only be interpreted through the physicality of a definite location (Drefus & Jones 2008). This literal and static interpretation of place finds its way into the exhibition galleries of many regional history museums.

However, there is a broader understanding of place to which this research adheres. Here, scholars recognise that people occupy a multiplicity of places and spaces that reach beyond the concrete and the physical (Drefus & Jones 2008) – and in doing so, they stretch the concept of place beyond mere location. Researchers who accept this way of thinking realise that static definitions of place can sedentarise individuals in museum displays (McKay 2006). Such definitions simplify the complexities of contemporary cultural landscapes, while at the same time rendering space as empty and meaningless. This more expansive (and expressive) way to envision space and

place originates from human geography. It is a conceptual framework that eschews places as 'areas with boundaries around them' in favour of places 'as articulated moments in networks of social relations and understandings' (Massey 2000, cited in Convery & Dutson 2006: 6). This way of thinking can be eloquent; it can reveal how places come into being and how cultural lives unfold.

Anderson and Gale (1999), for example, observe that when people engage in social relations and practices, they reconfigure places and spaces as part of an ongoing cycle of preservation, renewal, removal and reconstruction. Space and place combine, reform and take shape anew:

[People] arrange spaces in distinctive ways; they fashion certain types of landscape, townscape and streetscape; they erect monuments and destroy others; they evaluate spaces and places and they adapt them accordingly; they organise the relations between territories at a range of scales from the local to the international. In direct and indirect ways, both wilful and unintentional, people construct environments, regions and places (Anderson & Gale 1999: 5).

Anderson and Gale reason that 'people construct geographies' (1999: 5) as part of the cultural process through which we construct knowledge of the world. I find the idea that we 'construct geographies' to be particularly powerful. This research has afforded the opportunity to pursue this idea at a more experimental level; and in doing so an interesting premise has taken shape: that people have the power to reconfigure new kinds of territory from the disparate landscapes, townscapes and streetscapes of inner, or embodied, worlds. While this way of thinking complements the borderless fluidity of socio-spatial reality, its non-literal interpretation of territory is unfamiliar to mainstream museum practice and the place-based narratives of the regional museum. However, the notion of *personally constructed geographies* resonates strongly with this project. The idea that people might use their bodies to shape their own *personal geographies* to make sense of the world, has been an interesting conceptual basis for this research. Crucially, it has offered fresh and exciting ways for the history museum to interpret identity and place. In Chapters 4 to 6, I critically reflect upon the nature and scope of this idea in greater detail, through a series of experimental *personal geographies* relating to life in Wagga Wagga.

Although the idea that places are socially produced is widely understood in museum studies, the concept of *personally constructed geographies* can truly gain momentum in human geography. By focusing on how people *experience* places and spaces, inspiration can come from scholars who conjure momentum, connectivity and flow to describe the dynamic qualities of people-in-place. Theorists such as Massey, for example, who understand place as ‘a constellation of processes’ (2005: 141); and Oakes and Price, who regard place as a ‘fluid nexus of lived social relations’ (2008: 254). Here, place becomes a network of ‘articulated moments’ in a complex system of social relations and experiences, that can be constructed at the level of ‘a street, or region or even a continent’ (Massey 1994: 154). In Chapter 2, I start to consider place as such, in the context Wagga Wagga, the site of this research project and home to the research participants.

Dewsbury and Thrift maintain that human geographers are the ‘curators of “space”’ (2005: 89). How, therefore, might curators such as these challenge the history museum with their spatial knowledge? For the geographer, space is envisioned as being more abstract than place, but no less dynamic. It is ‘a simultaneity of stories-so-far’ where ‘every space is in constant motion’ (Massey 2005: 130, 141). Like place, space is a construct that is socially produced (Oakes & Price 2008). Therefore, we ‘live space, not merely in relation to it’ (Crouch 2010: 6). It is important to understand that ‘everything, but everything, is spatially distributed’ (Thrift 2006: 140). To explain, Thrift (2006) makes an analogy between space and modern biology:

which has discovered that the process of cell growth relies on a sense of where things are to produce particular parts of an organism, a sense that is more than just the provision of a map but rather is a fundamental part of the process of growth, built into the constitution of organ-ism itself (Thrift 2006: 140).

As a result, space can comprise a series of ‘complex composites’ (140), wherein:

small can be as complex as large, indeed that the smaller can be the bigger entity, that the world is heterarchic through and through with the same method pertaining at all levels, and that the big therefore foregrounds some of the features of the small (Thrift 2006: 140).

In Chapter 3, I devise a means to structure the magnitude and minutiae, the intricacy and vibrancy of space as experienced by the research participants. This is a methodology for capturing *personal geographies* – for exploring how people, places and spaces are ‘intimately linked and dynamic’ (Massey 2002, cited in Convery & Dutson 2006: 6).

### *Transnationalism, social spaces and new mobilities*

Notions of place, identity and locality are problematised under globalisation, which acts as a catalyst accelerating mass movements of people, ideas and products across the planet (Oaks & Price 2008; Van den Bosch 2007). Globalisation is seen to challenge the history museum, with curators noting that, ‘images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere make previous practices of cultural reproduction less effective, thereby posing a problem for the representation of social life in the museum’ (Van den Bosch 2007: 505-506). Within the sector, there is scant research as to how museums might set about interpreting the affects of such a phenomena – particularly, ‘the loosening of the holds between people [...] and territories’ (Van den Bosch 2007: 505).

This project turns to human geography and the study of movements of people, globalisation and global forces, to offer new insight into contemporary social life and its representation in the museum. In particular, the project focuses on our ‘spatial extensions’ – the embodied consequences of globalisation – that are growing in their reach and size (Crouch 2010; Oakes & Price 2008; Pries 2009). Such ‘cross-border entanglement and internalisation of the world’ is having a profound effect on the importance of geographic borders and territories, particularly as a measure for ‘structuring human life and social spaces’ (Pries 2009: 587). The economic, social and cultural aspects of everyday life, that once stretched for tens of kilometres, now range across distances of hundreds and thousands of kilometres (Pries 2009). This situation has lead geographers to pay close attention to the way people’s lives have

changed at a spatial level. This work helps to conceptualise a key element of this research: *social space*.

In its simplest terms, geographers regard our 'spatial extensions' – our social spaces – as 'social relations' that have 'a spatial form in their interactions with one another' (Massey 1994: 120). Some of these relations will be situated in a particular place, while others will extend beyond it, tying the source locality 'into wider relations and processes in which other places are implicated too' (120). Social spaces can be both tangible and intangible; an actual site where people congregate, such as a sports ground or shopping centre, or a virtual, online space, where people come together from multiple places to interact. The fact that social space can extend well beyond the place where one lives, has lead theorists to observe that, for an increasing number of people, 'everyday life and social practices, symbolic and perceptual frameworks, and the meaning and use of physical artefacts are no longer confined to one contiguous locale or territory' (Pries 2009: 590).

As we approach the first decade of this century, academics (for example, Faist 2004, Jackson et al 2004; Pries 2009) have begun to move away from the 'nation-state / immigrant' paradigm (Pries 2009: 590), to consider the idea of transnationalism and transnational societal spaces instead. Here, the role of geography in the construction of identity is de-emphasised. In its place is the opportunity to create 'new possibilities for membership across boundaries' (590). Transnational social spaces span multiple locations in addition to the social contexts of national societies, and encompass 'all of those engaged in transnational cultures, whether as producers or consumers' (Pries 2009: 595). They structure and support everyday practices and human identities; and they engage with 'the symbolic and imaginary geographies through which we attempt to make sense of our increasingly transnational world' (Jackson et al 2004: 3).

Jackson et al (2004) conceptualise 'spaces of transnationality' rather than 'identifiable transnational communities'. The distinction is important, as this research does not necessarily focus on 'ethnically defined transnational communities' (Jackson et al 2004: 3). The term 'spaces of transnationality' provides a broader, more inclusive definition, and offers greater potential to explore and interpret a



‘multiplicity of transnational experiences and relations’ (3). Jackson’s interpretation also complement’s Fraser’s ‘status model’ of community and its support of ‘transcultural interaction’ (Fraser 2000: 119). Moreover, people can symbolically occupy transnational spaces albeit very briefly – for example, during a meal, as consumers of global, deterritorialised cultural produce (Jackson et al 2004). This is a somewhat controversial interpretation, with some theorists believing that the terms is broadened to such an extent that it is ultimately rendered meaningless (Pries 2005). However, such an all-encompassing definition resonates with the inclusive nature of this research.

Within transnational social space, the concept of transnational identity formation is an emergent field of research (Khagram & Levitt 2008; McEwan 2004). Here, critical analysis begins by freeing the concept of social identity from regional or national boundaries (Levitt & Schiller 2004). In reality, the spatialities of social life involve both actual and imagined movement of people ‘from place to place, person to person, event to event’ (Sheller & Urry 2006: 208). The idea of movement is important – alongside identity, place and space, movement is a key theme underpinning this research. It is of particular interest to note, therefore, that in order to escape the static and the fixed, social scientists are moving towards a new paradigm of *mobility* (Urry 2007). Mobility has become a theme for exploring ‘the multiple ways in which economic and social life is performed and organized through time and across various spaces’ (Urry 2007: 6). The ‘new mobilities paradigm’ (Sheller & Urry 2006: 207) is a ‘post-disciplinary’ way of thinking that enables the social world to be theorized as, ‘a wide array of economic, social and political practices, infrastructures and ideologies that all involve, entail or curtail various kinds of movement of people, or ideas, or information or objects’ (Urry 2007: 18).

Mobility theorists list mobilities as activities that range from physical movement (walking and playing sport) and transportation (cars, planes and trains), to the ‘movements of images and information on local, national, and global media’, and one-to-one and many-to-many communications (such as telephone, mobile phone, Internet, email) (Sheller & Urry 2006: 212; Hall 2009; Vannini 2010). This new paradigm imagines ‘a complex relationality of places and persons connected through

performances' (Sheller & Urry 2006: 214). It promotes research across a range of disciplines to interpret the lived experience of individuals, through both sedentary and nomadic accounts, within a 'movement-driven' modern society (Urry 2007: 18). For this project, the mobility paradigm is also used to explore chronological mobility in the history museum. That is, I consider how movement within and between different temporalities might be employed to capture contemporary spatial dynamics. In the context of interpretive practice, therefore, lies the potential to present both new geographies and new chronologies of identity and place.

### *Theorizing mobile, emotional bodies in material worlds*

The idea that bodies experience and make sense of the world through movement and sensation underpins this study. As I mentioned previously, this project explores the body's emotional engagement with, and movement between, spaces and places to help make sense, not only of 'local place' but also of 'self'. Mobile bodies and concepts of embodiment appear throughout the latter half of this thesis. In Chapter 4, for example, identity is observed through social and cultural practices carried out at 'the extremely local scale of the body' (Oakes & Price 2008: 4). Therefore, it is useful to consider how embodiment is defined by this project and why it is so significant.

Embodiment is a way of knowing the world through the body. Smith and Riley view embodiment as 'a crucial component or even the very ground of cultural experience' (2009: 262). Thrift (2006) observes that, as the body moves through space:

they are leaky bags of water, constantly sloughing off pieces of themselves, constantly leaving traces – effluent, memories, messages – through moments of good or bad encounter in which practices of organization and community and enmity are passed on, sometimes all but identically, sometimes bearing something new (Thrift 2006: 141).

An embodied ontology interprets space as 'material the body engages and works with' (Lupton 1998, cited in Hubbard 2005: 121). Contemporary geographers use 'embodied practices' to study the relationship between bodies, identities and spaces (for example, Anderson & Gale 1999, Davies & Dwyer 2007; Dixon & Jones 2006; Nast & Pile 1998; Tolia-Kelly 2010). Research around the body and the new mobilities paradigm allows geographers to 'theorise social life in more corporeal and relational ways' (Anderson & Gale 1999: 16).

As discussed earlier, this research uses a posthuman perspective to engage with bodies, place and space. Posthumanist concerns are introduced to the social history museum to critically reflect upon relationships between subject and object, human and non-human, and people and landscape. I argue that this approach can help collecting institutions to not only focus on the materials that might shape 'local identity' or 'local place', but also on the *intensities* that reside within these concepts, as expressed by emotional and sensuous bodies. The mobile body, for example, offers a means to experience place through 'multiple registers of motion and emotion' (Sheller & Urry 2006: 216). It is 'an affective vehicle' through which we construct *emotional geographies* (216).

Over the last 10 years, the term 'emotional geography' has become familiar to human geography. Emotions underpin the way we interact with one another. For this research, emotions are defined as 'the felt and sensed reactions that arise in the midst of the (inter)corporeal exchange between self and world' (Hubbard 2005: 121). Geographers use emotion in the production of 'new, transformed, geographies' that cease to view 'the world and its inhabitants as abstractions' (Smith et al 2009: 3). An emotional attachment with people and places engages not only with 'the spatiality of emotion' (Bondi et al 2005: 3), but also, significantly, with the role emotion plays in the production of knowledge. Of particular interest to this project are 'the ways in which emotions are made through places' (Davies & Dwyer 2007: 262). Tolia-Kelly's (2010) recent work on landscape, race and memory is a particularly constructive example. In Chapter 4, I engage with intense emotions and sensations in-place to reflect on how both are central to the practice and production of geographical knowledge, while at the same time also being products of geographical encounters.

Emotional geography has a further dimension that is also studied by this paper: *affect*. This is a somewhat elusive term to define. Affectual geography is said to explore 'a quality of life that is beyond cognition and always interpersonal' (Pile 2010: 8). The term itself describes an embodied encounter before its transformation into subjective emotion (Lorimer 2009). Affect focuses on 'the non-verbal, non-conscious dimensions of experience'; it engages with 'sensation, memory, perception, attention and listening' (Blackman & Venn: 2010: 8). This research argues that understanding affective, emotional and sensory geographies can help the social history museum to engage with the social *present*. This way of working has the potential to document identity through new practices that move beyond traditional texts, object collection and personal testimony. Traditionally, history museums have understood the social world through category and taxonomy. However, globalisation and mass production have rendered many classificatory categories obsolete beyond museological practice. Introducing posthumanist themes to the museum can enable this research to consider new relationships arising from interactions between emotional and mobile bodies (that affect and are affected) in space. Three significant theories stem from this movement that are germane to this project.

The first, envisioned by Deleuze and Guattari, uses the term 'rhizome' to imagine the world as a network of complex and multiple branching roots (Johnston et al 2000). Within the concept of 'rhizomatics', the body is extant within 'lines of flow and flight', processes of 'territorialization, deterritorialization, and reterritorialization', and 'networks of partial and constantly changing connections' (Johnston et al 2000: 716). The body, a spatial formation, becomes a set of relations: 'speed and slowness, acceleration and deceleration, movement and rest, proximity and distance' (Doel 2004: 156). Can this way of thinking, using shifting connections and complex interrelations, be used to understand socio-spatial reality in the context of a 'local' place? As an idea, there is potential to layer diverse and perhaps unexpected and serendipitous elements of the lived experience over a multiplicity of different connections. Postcolonial theorists use rhizomatics to re-imagine postcolonial landscapes and move beyond colonial systems of representation (for example, Carter 1996); for this research, it will be a starting point with which to reinterpret familiar cartographies of Wagga Wagga and Riverina using the concept of *becoming*

(for example, McCormack 2009a). That is, by exploring notions of local identity beyond the fixed and the permanent, this project draws upon rhizomatics to understand city and region as always regenerating, and inexorably transforming into something else.

The second, actor network theory (ANT), melds human geography and non-human nature to help scholars understand the construction of the social (Bosco 2006). This approach, devised by Serres and Latour in the 1990s, regards humans 'simply as partners with non-human actors in a delicate, place-based interchange' (Oakes & Price 2008: 205). Sharing many similarities with rhizomatics, ANT is also concerned with a multitude of different connections and associations. As a curator, I am interested in ANT as it offers a way of understanding connections between place, space, people and objects. ANT can account for 'fluidity and movement between the micro- and the macro-' (Law & Urry 2002, cited in Bosco 2006: 142), and is thus a useful tool for understanding the complexity of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Moreover, it can help the museum to focus on the *processes* that shape identity and place. For example, it is an effective method for exploring the identity-process as bodies move in non linear narratives through cultural, social and professional networks. ANT is of particular interest to new museology, and the history museum in particular, because it allows social scientists to handle the intangible, the 'fleeting', the 'here today and gone tomorrow' (Law & Urry 2002, cited in Bosco 2006: 136). The ability to deal with 'the complex and the elusive' (Bosco 2006: 136) to present snapshots of modern social realities, has wide-ranging applications for the history curator seeking to understand and interpret the micro-history of everyday life in theory and practice.

With its origins in the work of Thrift (1996), the third body of knowledge, non-representational theory (NRT), invites the expressive body to engage with the complexity of place and place-based identities. NRT works 'to shift geography's emphasis away from representation and on to practice or performativity in a manner that emphasizes flows and relationships' (Longhurst 2007: 113). The origins of NRT reside in the ontological standpoints of postmodernism and post structuralism. As such, it is suited to exploring complexity and multiplicity. In the context of identity, NRT has the potential to steer the history museum beyond 'the traditional signifiers of

identity and difference (class, gender, ethnicity, age, sexuality, disability)' towards more 'abstract descriptors', such as emotions, 'instincts, events, auras, rhythms, cycles, flows and codes' (Lorimer 2007: 96). What I find most exciting about NRT is its focus on social practices and lived experiences, and its approach to landscape as 'a sort of performance that is enacted as much as is music or theater' (Oakes & Price 2006: 151).

NRT favours 'fluid encounters, juxtapositions and divergences' (Gregory 2000, cited in Knopp 2006: 222). By recognising states of placelessness and movement in both body and landscape (Knopp 2006), this ontology offers a means to accommodate the emotive, affective and sensory aspects of a lived reality in regional Australia. However, it is interesting to consider the long-term implications of such a philosophy in relation to museum theory and practice. NRT is critical of traditional representational approaches that construct meaning through 'codes and symbols of their specific historical, geographical and cultural contexts' (Lees 2007: 33). How might this way of thinking be received in the museum – a 'representational space[...] increasingly enamoured of textuality and rhetoric' (Message 2006: 48)? This research argues that there is certainly a space for 'more-than-textual, multisensual worlds' (Lorimer 2005, cited in Lees 2007: 34) in the regional history museum.

In this trilogy of theories lies the potential to capture performative, dynamic and emotive elements of human experience in-place, in ways that move beyond traditional museological methods of memory work and personal testimony recording. This research project seeks to engage research participants in the interpretation of modern life as it is lived in the present, in the here-and-now. To do so, it draws upon rhizomatics, ANT and NRT to see the world not as a reflection, but as a 'continuous composition' (Thrift 2003: 2021). These bodies of knowledge are 'process-based theories of ontology' that understand the social world through the concept of 'becoming' as opposed to 'being' (Lorimer 2007: 96).

The idea of 'process' is important to museum studies. Theorists acknowledge museum exhibitions as 'points of cultural process' that 'do not statically represent what is "out there"' (Myers 2006: 505). Instead, displays reconfigure and

recontextualise ideas, objects and practices, producing new meanings with each reconfiguration. They have thus evolved into processual activities. There are synergies between museum studies and human geography beginning to emerge here: ideas of *process*, *performance* and *becoming*. These ideas are developed further in museum/laboratory as the research narrative continues.

## Summary

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By highlighting synergistic relationships between the disciplines, this review has drawn together the varied and in some instances divergent ways in which human geographers and museologists see the world. Resulting from this process, three questions encouraging innovation and experimentation at the museum/laboratory have coalesced. These questions both strengthen and give shape to the research narrative:

- How can regional history museums better understand ontological identities, and what might these reveal about contemporary cultural diversity?
- What is the transformative effect on ‘identity’ and ‘place’ when the museum/laboratory explores embodied social space through participatory practice?
- How might the expansion of collaborative, participant-lead, identity-focused and locally-situated interpretive practices affect history museums as ‘object institutions’?

Chapter 2 opens with these questions, together with an outline of what this research sets out to achieve and how the project is to be constructed. This chapter focuses on Wagga Wagga and the Riverina – the site of this experimental research. It bears repeating here that the notion of *doing*, of making new knowledge, is a critical concept that runs throughout this project. Therefore, Chapter 2 proffers a critical analysis of the museum/laboratory as a site for experimentation – a space in which to negotiate and reshape knowledge of identity and place.





## CHAPTER TWO

### **The Museum/Laboratory and its Surrounds**

#### Instances of 'People-in-Place' Shaping Wagga Wagga and the Riverina

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Today, social history curatorship frequently involves engaging with museum stakeholders – residents in town, city and region – to shape exhibitions that explore local identity and the lived experience of being 'in-place'. Although museology uses the term 'social history' to describe the discipline, as a curator, encounters with 'the social' tend to happen in the here-and-now. Therefore, it is perhaps more accurate to say that this work deals with a social *present* that is lived and experienced today. From this contemporary perspective, the museum displays the lives of others as snapshots of a lived 'reality'. In doing so, participatory new museology can bring to light 'issues or identities prone to exclusion from older models of collecting institution', such as the colonial style "museum-as-mausoleum" (Brown 2008: online; Witcomb 2003).

Engaging with the social present, this research is set in the Museum of the Riverina, in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales. The Museum features strongly in this chapter. Here, I explain what the project sets out to do, and significantly, how the work is to be achieved. The chapter is in three sections. Resulting from the literature review in Chapter 1, three questions have now been formed to shape the research narrative. These establish a basis of the first section: *Project Construction and Key Questions*. Referencing the way knowledge is constructed by this research, the second section – *The Museum Laboratory* – expands upon the significance of the museum/laboratory, a concept that appears throughout this thesis. This section critically analyses the potential of this experimental space alongside the pitfalls, or challenges, associated with such a powerful concept. The third and final section – *The Site of Research* – is in two parts. The first offers a critical appraisal of the

Museum of the Riverina in relation to current exhibitions of identity and place. The second looks beyond the museum to focus on Wagga Wagga and the Riverina. Attention is paid to spatial connections between museum, city and region, and to notions of ‘heritage’ and place identity. How is Wagga Wagga defined through conventional ideas of ‘cultural heritage’, and significantly, how do these conventions complement, or challenge, this project? The chapter concludes by considering a research methodology. This must be suited to the project’s conceptual framework, and attuned to the key themes of **identity**, **place**, **space** and **movement**. Moreover, the method must also focus on **the body** to support the premise at the heart of this thesis – that bodies *incorporate* place (Ingold 2000).

## Project Construction and Key Questions

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This research project asks how knowledge of socio-spatial reality beyond regional boundaries might help history museums continue to support and define a regional identity. Structurally, research is steered by the following three questions prompted by the literature review in Chapter 1:

- How can regional history museums better understand ontological identities, and what might these reveal about contemporary cultural diversity?
- What is the transformative effect on ‘identity’ and ‘place’ when the museum/laboratory explores embodied social space through participatory practice?
- How might the expansion of collaborative, participant-lead, identity-focused and locally-situated interpretive practices affect history museums as ‘object institutions’?

The title of this thesis reflects both outcome and process: *Local Histories, Global Cultures: Contemporary Collecting in Transnational Space*. That is, this research is concerned with the critical analysis of both the collecting process and the nature and form of the material collected as a result of that process.

It is conventional practice for the social history curator to engage with individuals living within the catchment of the museum to record personal testimony. Such 'local histories' often describe instances in people's lives that either connect them to the locality of the museum in some way (through a descendant, or through their use of an object in the museum collection, for example), or that serve to mark their arrival into the locality, thus describing both departure point and destination. Often, these stories are amplified and further personified by the acquisition of an object or image to represent a component of the story in question. Traditionally, such processes fall within the remit of 'contemporary collecting'.

This research project looks beyond the traditional realm of personal testimony as a method for acquiring stories of place-based identity. Although still 'anchored' within the site of a local museum, it regards the city – the 'locality' – as complex and interconnected (Edwards & Bourbeau 2008). Thus, conceptually, research has moved beyond local borders to explore concepts of local identity, local place, and feelings of being 'in-place' constructed through 'socially constructed, fluid and contingent' relationships between local and global (Moore 2008: 204).

In a globalised society, the idea of cultures as stable and clearly definable entities becomes increasingly outdated and problematic. Engagement with both *local histories* and *global cultures* (and a sensitivity to the ebbs and flows between the two) opens up new possibilities with which to explore identity and place. This research, therefore, considers new methods of contemporary collecting that deconstruct, revivify and remodel conventional museological practices. Using a process able to describe 'malleability' and 'multi-locality' (Vertovec 2009: 6), this project experiments with ways to collect stories of identity and place that describe 'de-centred attachments' to a city, and 'multiple identifications' with place. It considers how to capture identities formed by ongoing transactions between local, regional and state borders, and between countries and across oceans. It experiments with how and what to collect in *transnational space*.

This thesis is structured around an activity called, **MAP:me**. MAP:me describes a series of unique actions to explore the myriad ways in which people experience

contemporary place, feelings of place attachment, and significantly, the ways in which people themselves are shaped by place. This occurs at the Museum of the Riverina. MAP:me involves working collaboratively with eight research participants who live and work in the city. These people are members of staff from Riverina Community College, an institution with whom the Museum already has strong links. The research participants, and the work they produce, feature strongly in the latter half of this thesis. Chapter 3 describes the MAP:me activity in greater detail. Here, I critically reflect upon MAP:me as a participatory, performative research method, attentive to the key themes of this research: identity, place, space and movement.

At this juncture, it is important to note the raised status given to methodology in this thesis. This is because this research project is about the *process* of making new knowledge, of pushing the boundaries of curatorial practice at the regional history museum and the interpretation of identity and place. Crucially, this project is as much about the use of innovative research methods as the results they generate. As a consequence, the thesis unfolds as a *process of performance and becoming*, to offer new ways for both curator and visitor to experience people 'in-place' (Law 2004; McCormack 2009a).

MAP:me begins with a participatory, performative activity called ***body mapping personal geographies***, to explore the concept of socio-spatial reality. This helps research participants to focus on the spatial dimension of their lives along with the material and the social. *Body mapping personal geographies* creates a set of unique and highly visual data, or *body maps*. Each map is the product of a research participant and the embodiment of a social space.

Data analysis for this project is unusual, as it does not merely describe the socio-spatial realities (the *body maps* and associated data) of each research participant. Rather, analysis draws on posthuman sensibilities that challenge the 'ontological hygiene' (Lorimer 2009: 347) associated with dualisms such as subject/object and people/place. Attentive to the construction of knowledge and power, and borrowing from actor-network theorists (for example, Giles Deleuze, John Law, Bruno Latour), data analysis broadens to explore how complex and 'messy' realities (Law 2004)

associated with everyday life are made by this research. In practice, this means a critical analysis of how this particular research method contributes to 'enacting' the social (Law & Urry 2004).

The concept of 'reality' and 'reality-making', of describing 'social realities and social worlds', is important (Law & Urry 2004: 390). Informed by the work of Law (2005) and Law and Urry (2004), this research understands reality as the product of method. The idea that methods 'help to *produce* the reality that they understand' (Law 2004: 5, author's emphasis), is profoundly important for understanding the nature of this project at the museum/laboratory. This research is *performative*. That is, in collaboration with the research participants, socio-spatial realities are *enacted*; they are 'performed into being' through MAP:me. To study 'realities' made by these enactments, this project draws inspiration from nonrepresentational theorists (for example, Nigel Thrift), who work to understand how the complexity and materiality of space 'is entangled with questions of performance and performativity' (McCormack 2009b: 280).

Because methods make, or *enact* reality, the reality-making process involves close scrutiny of the academic, political and social contexts in which research takes place. What kinds of knowledge contribute to this process, and what is left out? In practice, this means reflecting on how research participants negotiate their identities according to social, cultural and geographical contexts; how geographical and museological theory and practice combine to challenge, refute, corroborate, inform and negotiate the outcomes of MAP:me activities; how the needs of contributing institutions, organisations and individuals influence decision making; and how the choices I make as curator and researcher affect how project outcomes translate as 'reality'.

The MAP:me methodology produces its own material culture. At the end of the thesis, I offer an exhibition of *body map sculptures* to show the collecting sector how the concept and theory of MAP:me translates into practice. It is important to note that it is not my intention for every social history museum to construct a MAP:me exhibition. Rather, the exhibition shows the curator how key ideas from this research

might come together to critically and creatively challenge museum practice, particularly around the themes of collecting and interpretation.

The research project concludes with a provocative set of ideas for the history curator to take forward. As a catalyst for further discussion, this works to elicit practical, strategic advice as to how the regional history museum might adapt to sustain similar innovative, performative projects. The aim is to encourage the collecting sector to engage in more experimental practice; to help curators generate new knowledge from the embodied and spatial dynamics of everyday life. Ultimately, these ideas are offered as the starting point in a dialogue with new museology – one that will help regional museum collections and interpretive practice both reflect and resonate with a contemporary Australia.

## **The Museum/Laboratory**

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### *The civic laboratory*

The museum is an institution that is constantly changing. Sensitive to social, cultural and political transformation over time, the exhibitions therein are illustrative as ‘points of cultural process’ (Myers 2006: 505). This thesis uses the laboratory as a recurring metaphor for the transformative capacity of the museum. Both museum and laboratory ‘arrange [...] relations between objects and persons [...] and cultural contexts’ (Bennett 2005: 523). Both institutions ‘bring objects *home* and manipulate them on their own terms’ (Knorr-Cetina 1992, author’s emphasis, cited in Bennett 2005: 524). And significantly, both ‘reconfigure objects and their interrelations’, ‘inserting them into new temporal and territorial regimes’ (Knorr-Cetina 1999, cited in Bennett 2005: 524). The museum and the laboratory symbolise a broader continuum that is both ‘fluid and responsive, dynamic, shaping, political, particular and complex’ (Knell et al 2007: xx).

Social scientist, Tony Bennett (2005), advances the idea of the museum as a 'civic laboratory'. Here, the laboratory analogy is employed to explore how the museum uses 'programmes of civic management' to 'order and regulate social relations in particular ways' (Bennett 2005: 521). Bennett pays close attention to 'current concerns to refashion museums so that they might function as instruments for the promotion of cultural diversity' (521). His 'civic laboratory' interprets different cultures in accordance with programs of 'social management and reform' (542). Here, metanarratives of civic accord are constructed to achieve an informed and culturally engaged citizenship (Message 2007). Significantly, in this kind of laboratory, interpretive practice is controlled by the deliberate and careful use and juxtaposition of materials, texts and importantly, people. Thus, "culture" is made and remade, or reassembled, in different ways' (Healy & Witcomb 2006: 1).

In contemporary museology, the 'civic laboratory' is manifest through objects that are 'redeployed' 'for new civic purposes' (Bennett 2005: 535). In today's political climate, it is not uncommon for these 'purposes' to relate to the promotion of cultural diversity through exhibitions seeking to 'ameliorate conflicted racialized differences' (536). Bennett makes the connection between the 'civic programmes' of today that focus on 'ethnically differentiated communities', and those of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century that set out to 'act on relations' between 'hierarchically ranked social classes' (536). His concern with current museology lies in whether or not programs concerned with restructuring notions of culture and identity succeed in practice.

Bennett sees the museum – the 'civic laboratory' – as a site where notions of 'community' and 'culture' are *produced*. 'It would be better', he states, 'to understand [the role of the museum] as producing a culture that supports the political principles underpinning the very notion of representation' (Witcomb 2003: 80). The idea that museums shape identities to reflect current political concerns, is of particular interest to this project. In Chapter 3, the research methodology, I consider how the museum/laboratory might be reconfigured in such a way to avoid the deliberate control and management of cultural identities.

## *The laboratory as a site of performance and destabilization*

There are several ways in which the laboratory concept shapes this research. Using themes of *performance* and *destabilization*, various laboratory constructs unite to inform a museum/laboratory model for this project. Beginning with performance, and the idea of laboratories as ‘contemporary machineries of knowing’ (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 2), the museum/laboratory sets out as a space to study ontology. Ontology, ‘the nature of being’ (McCormack 2009a: 277), is performative; it is grounded in experience and shaped by interactions. ‘Knowing’, states Law, ‘is all about performing’ (2008: 12, author’s emphasis). By engaging in MAP:me, research participants *perform* knowledge about identity and place. The use of performance, a dynamic and relational set of processes to describe interactions between people and place, is central to this research. Here, the museum/laboratory becomes a site for capturing the in-betweenness of these processes; for reflecting on the transformative qualities of these interactions that eschew people/place and subject/object dualisms.

As well as being a performative space, Law notes that the laboratory can also destabilize; it can delete ‘the materiality’ of a process (2004: 20). In other words, laboratories can ignore or ‘bracket off’ key elements that comprise an experiment (Latour & Woolgar 1986, cited in Law 2004: 20). This remark is significant, for it serves as a reminder that laboratories also have the power to manipulate, control and conceal. If the laboratory can destabilize reality, how might this research maintain the integrity of the realities produced? The observations of Latour and Woolgar (1979), who focus on the scientific laboratory as an ethnographic study, suggest a way to mitigate against the more dominative aspects of the laboratory. By noting how ‘investigators should be “true to the data”’, Latour & Woolgar propose ‘grounded theory’ (1979: 38) as a means to ensure that ideas deriving from an experiment remain focused on participant behaviour rather than the behaviour of the researcher. This project, therefore, has used grounded theory (discussed in depth in Chapter 3, the methodology) as a tool to lessen the ‘dark side’ of the laboratory, as a controlled and highly developed environment.



The laboratory's 'dark side', or negative aspects, are witnessed by Latour in his influential text, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993). Latour, considering dualisms between the social and the scientific, notes that 'modern' society used the laboratory to destabilize, or upset relationships between nature and culture. He explains how knowledge of the 'modern' world split between 'knowledge of people (Hobbes and politics) and knowledge of things (Boyle and science)' (Crawford 1994: online). This becomes 'an impoverished model' for seeing the world, since:

neither natural objects nor social subjects have ever been simply real, social, or discursive. Instead, they are hybrids circulating in networks of translation and mediation while the moderns busily attempt to purify them of their hybrid qualities and locate them on one end or the other of the subject/object pole (Crawford 1994: online).

With MAP:me, this research has also rejected clear cut 'hierarchies and differences' in museology (Latour 1993: 113) – for example, between people, place and material culture. In doing so, it has shaped the museum/laboratory as a site for experimenting with – or *destabilizing* – sectoral categories for knowing the world. Thus it has sought to move museum studies beyond the conventional 'subject/object pole' (Crawford 1994: online).

Finally, yet equally important to this research, is the *constructive* power of the laboratory, and its use to destabilize relationships between local and global. That is, the laboratory's ability to focus on the 'micro', on small elements of 'a whole', to generate meaning within larger contexts. Here, Latour remarks, 'the very difference between the 'inside' and the 'outside', and the difference of scale between 'micro' and 'macro' levels, is precisely what laboratories are built to destabilize or undo' (1983: 143). Latour's statement can relate to this research and its focus on micro-history, and new 'formulations' (Brown 2008: online) of people and place as part of a broader social history of Wagga Wagga. In this instance, the museum/laboratory becomes a place where broader aspects of reality are closed off and concealed to focus on the kinds of close observation involved in studying individual identities.

In the context of this research, therefore, the museum/laboratory conjures entangled and multiple meanings around performance and destabilization. It is a performative space that empowers the performer; it is a reconfigurative space, and a controlling space. It is a site of process-based ontologies of interaction; and a space to destabilize, manipulate and illuminate 'the social' (Law & Urry 2004).

## The Site of Research Part 1: The Museum of the Riverina



Figure 2.1: Museum of the Riverina, Botanical Gardens Site

The Museum of the Riverina is the 'laboratory' for this research project. It is a social history museum that actively collects objects and stories relating to 'the history and development of Wagga Wagga and its people' (Museum of the Riverina 2004: 3).

The permanent collection prioritises objects that have been made in Wagga Wagga, or that have been used by local residents. Such material might include artworks, photographs, books, textiles and postcards. Diaries and personal testimony 'about the people, places and events of Wagga Wagga', alongside records of 'Ethnic Minorities in Wagga Wagga' are also regarded as desirable acquisitions (Museum of the Riverina 2004: 4). Recently, the Museum has begun to collect more contemporary material in an effort to address the fact that there are few items on display post 1970. The Botanic Gardens Site, shown in Figure 2.1, houses the permanent collection.

The Museum of the Riverina has embraced the ideals of new museology. It has a strong commitment to public engagement, with participation central to working practice. Staff regularly invite people to take part in the life of the museum by seeking input into exhibition, education and public program development (Museum of the Riverina 2010a). Such work has lead visitors to contribute ideas, knowledge, objects and creative expression both to the Museum and to other visitors. Since opening in 1999, the Museum has delivered a wide variety of interpretive public programs ranging from workshops in museum theatre, craft and art, to audio visual projects, digital storytelling, films and temporary exhibition programs.

The Museum is an innovative and people-focused institution. It aims to be at the forefront of 'developing new ways of approaching and presenting heritage' in regional Australia (Museum of the Riverina 2010a: 2). Working to be transparent and inclusive, staff seek to connect with the lives of those who visit, especially recent arrivals to the city such as refugees and new migrants. Museum consultant, Nina Simon, refers to 'the participatory museum' as a space where the public can actively engage with the sector 'as cultural participants, not passive consumers' (2010: online). I have mentioned that the participatory museum exists within the framework of new museology, developing Hooper-Greenhill's 'post-museum' (2000b) to progress an inclusive museum concept for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. This research builds on the participatory museum idea, particularly its endorsement of creativity, active engagement and the construction of new knowledge.

The Museum of the Riverina is very attentive to projects that explore the concept of place. This is an institution that actively exploits the potential of the regional museum as an incubator site for experimental research into people and landscape (Museum of the Riverina 2010a). This is why I chose the Museum for my study, along with its participatory and inclusive working practice. For its part, the Museum welcomed my project because it worked in accordance with institutional vision and purpose: to progress active community engagement, to encourage discovery and innovation, and to communicate the identity of Wagga Wagga and the Riverina through lively stories of people and place (Museum of the Riverina 2010a).

The section that follows sets the scene for this experimental project by reflecting upon participation, creativity and interpretive practice at the Museum. As this research focuses on the disarticulation of local identities from fixed concepts of place (and from objects that signify the fixity of place), it is of interest to consider current practice at the host site. How are the themes of identity, place, space and movement presently manifest in the gallery? The aim is twofold. First, to signpost different ways of thinking about place and identity that begin to challenge current practice. And second, to reflect upon participation and the contribution of new meaning and ideas to the Museum. Moreover, this introduction affords consideration of the museum/laboratory concept as it relates to current interpretive practice at the Museum. What kind of museum/laboratory is currently extant in Wagga Wagga, and significantly, how does it differ from the museum/laboratory that has produced MAP:me?

I want to illustrate this point via discussion of an exhibition that exemplifies many of the concerns of this research: an award winning display celebrating the diverse communities that comprise Wagga Wagga – *From All Four Corners* (hereafter FOFC).

## *From All Four Corners: identity, place, space and movement*

From All Four Corners – stories of migration to Wagga Wagga celebrates, explores and captures the personal stories of migrants coming to Wagga – both past and present, individual and group – who have helped make the culturally diverse city of today (Museum of the Riverina 2007: online).

The stories of migrants to Australia play a major part in Australian history. Petersen notes that, ‘today, four out of ten people in New South Wales are either migrants or their children, and they were born in over 200 countries’ (2010: 34). In 2007 the Museum of the Riverina developed the exhibition, FOFC, in partnership with the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and Powerhouse Museum Regional Services. Originally, the exhibition formed part of a much larger project themed around the celebration of diversity. Alongside the Museum, a further three cultural institutions in Wagga Wagga took part in the wider project activities: the Theatre, the Library and the Art Gallery. Such a project brought a diverse program of events and workshops that became the main focus of the city’s winter cultural program for that year. A year later, in 2008, the FOFC project team, and exhibition, won a New South Wales Local Government Cultural Award – a celebration of ‘council cultural success’ (Local Government Cultural Awards 2008: online). Today, the FOFC exhibition is an abridged version of the original display. Nevertheless, it still occupies a sizeable amount of exhibition space in the front gallery of the Museum’s Botanical Gardens Site.

The discursive space of the FOFC exhibition houses a series of linear narratives that together offer a story of migration to Wagga Wagga. The display’s physical presence comprises objects, object labels and panels of interpretive text. The space occupied by an exhibition – the museum space – is important. Museum scholars view spatial relations within the museum as ‘expressions of the ordering of the social’ (Hetherington 1996: 155). In FOFC, the objects on display become expressions of both identity and place. Foucault’s concept of ‘heterotopia’ can be applied to museum

space to show how the museum becomes a site where ‘unsettling juxtapositions’ (158) of objects challenge the way we represent and order the world around us. There is a truly diverse juxtaposition of objects in FOFC. For example, a Japanese costume shares a display case with a traditional German dirndl (Figure 2.2); there are silver spoons from Poland, a school book from The Netherlands, a perspex paperweight containing the head of a puff adder from Johannesburg, a shoulder bag (an example of traditional Iranian textiles) from Iran, a Lebanese drinking vase, and a metal car badge from Scotland.

Objects collected from participants are mostly things that have been used, worn or bought by the subject. Each item is imbued with a symbolic quality; it must simultaneously ‘stand in’ for the person who wore, made or bought it, and also, by association, with familiar or long-established conventions in their country of origin (Wehner & Sear 2010). Positioned in the display case, removed from any other context, these objects serve to ‘shape minority identities’ (Pahl & Pollard 2006: 6). Here, it is important to remind ourselves that, beyond museum space, identities are ‘ontological’ in nature. One’s ‘ontological identity’ forms ‘an integral part of a person’s journey through life’ (McDonald 2009: 244). It relates to ‘a coherent sense of self – [a] uniqueness’ (Hunter 2003: 326). In FOFC, identities on display are uncomplicated; they are singular and ‘essentialized’ by ethnicity (Littler 2008: 90).

Such a variety of objects in the museum space – the representations of multiple allegiances to multiple countries – offers an almost ‘zoological multiculturalism’ (Hage 1998, cited in Bennett 2006: 61). This assortment of items, within its designated space, presents ‘a collection of otherness’ that is different to the familiar textiles, toys and tools extant in the collection prior to the arrival of ‘the migration story’. Playing devil’s advocate, it could be argued that, displayed together, these constructions of diversity might be viewed as a local possession, ‘a sign of [Wagga Wagga’s] tolerance and virtue’ as a ‘governing center from which diversity has to be managed’ (Bennett 2006: 62). In this instance, the Museum operates within a *contributory* model of public participation (Simon 2010). Here, objects have been donated by individuals to be arranged in FOFC as part of an institutionally controlled interpretive practice. This level of control precludes objects from speaking *to* each other in the

display, yet allows the Museum to speak *for* them in an authoritative and anonymous voice. It is a voice that exhorts local identity as a coexistence between different ethnicities within an overarching norm of stable white culture.

Such a process of 'museumification', where identities are presented as singular and simplified, atrophied within museum space, is commonplace in the telling of public, or popular history. In FOFC, as evinced by kimono and dirndl, adder and vase, museumification renders ethnicity as both exotic and authentic. Moreover, it endorses these items as markers of difference over and above more nuanced cultural practices, knowledges and beliefs. Crucially, within such a framework, 'negotiated identities and hybridity are excluded because they are viewed as impure' (Xie 2011: 110).

Bennet articulates the Museum's way of shaping and regulating local identity through his analogy of the 'civic laboratory' – an institution that focuses on 'ethnically differentiated communities for 'civic purposes' (2005: 536, 535). This is because one can read FOFC as a direct response to Wagga Wagga City Council's *Community Social Plan* and its implementation within the operational framework of the Museum. Through FOFC, the Museum actively promotes 'Heritage, Diversity and Culture' (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d.b: 67). As a project that works in partnership with 'new settlers', 'secondary migrants' and 'identified ethnic groups', FOFC seeks to 'increase understanding' of Wagga Wagga's 'local heritage and growing cultural diversity' (67-69). In other words, the exhibition has been 'mobilized in the context of [...] civic management' as 'a means for promoting and managing the identities of differentiated communities' (Bennett 2005: 521, 538). As a result, FOFC produces the notion of a local identity that reflects Wagga Wagga back to its citizens as a harmonious and culturally diverse city.



Figure 2.2: Objects of identity and place: Japanese costume and German dirndl





Figure 2.3: *From All Four Corners*, online component

Although FOFC primarily relies on the curator to determine how cultures on display are organised and understood, there is also an online resource. This component holds a number of personal testimonies describing settlement in the city (many in the form of digital stories). This element seeks to augment the cased displays with narrative from those who now make their home in Wagga Wagga. In this virtual component of FOFC, visitors hear subjects talking about their experiences of coming to the city. Individual migrants have significantly more control over their representation in the gallery; and it is through this subjective layer of narrative, that it is possible to learn the true meaning and significance of many of the cased objects.

For example, a hot water bottle is symbolic of an emotional landscape embodied within a cold night in a local refugee cottage (Figure 2.3). Here, personal testimony is used to create an 'emotional involvement' between body and place (Bondi et al 2005: 2). Incorporating individual voices helps the Museum to add depth and an emotional and affective resonance to elements in the display. However, many visitors leave the exhibition without experiencing this online component.

This research is drawn to FOFC because of an interest in the concepts of identity, place, space and movement. However, drawing upon a geographical understanding of the dynamic relationality between place, space and the mobile body gleaned from Chapter 1, it becomes apparent that there is something missing from this narrative. There is a lack of *movement* in both the virtual and physical elements of the display, whether implicit, symbolic or overt. There is little connection between sites of departure and current residence, and a dearth of links (either real or imaginary) back to 'places of emotional and psychological importance (Tolia-Kelly 2004: 281). Thus, a complex emotional geography that embeds identity within remembered landscapes beyond a current place of residence (for example, Tolia-Kelly 2004) goes unexplored. This prompts a series of questions: how to go deeper into the lives of the people on display and their relationships with place? And how to discover where one's heart truly resides, or the site of one's emotional home (Williams & McIntyre 2001)?

In FOFC, the migration journey is a one way trip, from a country of origin to a country of destination. From the 19<sup>th</sup> century soldier settler and the refugee from modern day Sierra Leone, to the 20<sup>th</sup> century Italian hotelier and the skilled recent migrant from India, movement from 'international' to 'local' takes place along a single plane that terminates in Wagga Wagga. Geographical associations elsewhere are ostensibly severed, and instead we learn that the migrants:

... have survived. They have married, had children, gone to school, studied, bought homes, found employment, set up businesses, formed clubs, established a social life, shared their customs, traditions and cooking, practised their religion, and became valued community members (Museum of the Riverina 2007: online).

FOFC contributes to the concept of a modern, culturally diverse Australia using the liberal tradition of 'the enriching narrative' (Witcomb 2009b: 54). Here, the achievements of participants are displayed using what has come to be regarded by cultural historians as a 'standard approach to valuing [...] ethnic differences' (Witcomb 2009b: 55). This involves discussion around 'food, customs and religion', while at the same time placing emphasis on participants' 'successful integration in terms of work and family life' (55). Feelings of belonging 'in-place' (at least within the narrative of the exhibition) are manifest solely within the territorial scale of Wagga Wagga.

While material culture from Iran, Germany, Scotland, South Africa and Japan imbue the museum space with a sense of movement between nations, as a backdrop this process can be described as *international*. This is because it concerns 'the to-ing and fro-ing of items from one nation-state context to another' (Vertovec 2009: 3). Ultimately, this leaves the visitor with the impression that the migration story of arriving in Wagga Wagga (of how people move across borders with varying degrees of difficulty) is in fact, 'a one-way process of assimilation into a melting pot or a multi-cultural salad bowl' (Levitt & Jaworsky 2007: 130) from home country to country of settlement.

As a counterpoint to the one way, linear trajectory of movement in FOFC, this research explores concepts of mobility inspired by *transnationalism* – the 'sustained linkages and ongoing exchanges' across borders and boundaries (Vertovec 2009: 3). Such *transnational* practices move beyond the migrant story to explore everyday 'social movements, social networks, families, [...] identities, [...] and public cultures' (3). This has enabled the project to move from 'migration' to 'mobility' to consider relationships between 'different forms of mobility and territorial belonging on different spatial scales' (Gustafson 2009: 495). It has also lead to an exploration of new stories of identity and connection to place. Of course, tales of migration have not been omitted, but the narrative has extended beyond this theme, to include 'residential mobility, travel [and] daily mobility', alongside more conceptual forms of movement, like emotional and imaginary journeys (492).

FOFC is an excellent starting point to explore how interpretive practice at the Museum of the Riverina conceptualises identity, place, space and movement. However, rather than focus on coming to Wagga Wagga, this project explores the nature of *being* in Wagga Wagga. Attention turns inwards, away from material culture specifically made 'in-place', to the person – the body – to concentrate on new kinds of embodied landscapes. In doing so, this research offers an alternative series of narratives with which to augment 'the migration story' as 'the main gateway' for showcasing Australian cultural diversity and identity formation (Witcomb 2009b: 50).

With this project, a very different museum/laboratory to that which produced FOFC is evoked. For MAP:me, the museum/laboratory becomes a site for *reconfiguration*. At this museum/laboratory, acts of *re-shaping* and *becoming* form key components of the experiment. MAP:me is not 'a natural cycle[...] of occurrence' (Knorr-Cetina 1999: 27) to be captured by observation alone, or shaped by political agenda. Instead, it is an *event* that together, the eight research participants and myself as 'curator' and 'researcher' make happen. This performance of identity and place entails an active partnership between curator and research participant. Hence, in this participatory museum, a more collaborative and co-creative working practice is required.

## **The Site of Research Part 2:**

### **Wagga Wagga and the Riverina**

This next section moves beyond the Museum of the Riverina to the city and region served by the Museum. Beginning with an attempt to describe the problematic construct of 'the region', I explore the challenges faced by a regional museum. Attention then turns to Wagga Wagga, the regional capital. This section discusses the city's identity beyond museum space. It considers the things that are valued locally as cultural heritage in the city – and those who assign such value. Here, areas of discrepancy and balance between city and museum are examined in the context of understanding contemporary place identity.

# *The Riverina*

## **Describing the Riverina**

Spanning around 63,500 square kilometres, the Riverina region is situated west of Canberra, Australia's capital, and forms a junction between three major State capital cities: Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide (NSW Government: Industry & Investment: 2011).

The Riverina has a population of over 147,000 that is steadily increasing. It comprises six major towns and centres within southern New South Wales: Griffith, Hay, Leeton, Narrandera, Tumut and Wagga Wagga. Agriculture is the largest employer in the region. To many potential investors, the Riverina exists as the 'food basket of Australia', a highly productive agricultural landscape (NSW Government: Industry & Investment 2011). In broader administrative and economic terms, the Riverina is an empirical, geographic entity delimited by multiple agendas – for example, agricultural, political, environmental and cultural. Different authorities shift the region's boundaries to suit their purposes. Such flexibility makes it is problematic to find a 'definitive' map of the region. Figure 2.4 for example, defines the Riverina from the perspective of tourism New South Wales. However, since the time of printing, the towns of Tumut and Tumbarumba have been incorporated into the regional boundary as part of a recent electoral redistribution.

Australia's underlying history affects contemporary understanding of borders and boundaries. Geographical divisions of region and territory can be studied as remnants of 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial attitudes that divided and separated societies and cultures (Howitt 2001). Howitt remarks that 'Australian landscapes are plagued by multiple boundaries that seek to divide and subdivide places, people and resources into manageable units' (2001: 233). 'The region' simplifies the complexity of the Australian landscape. For example, the Riverina's boundaries 'are transposed over the boundaries of traditional Indigenous territories' (Gorman-Murray et al 2008: 45). The Wiradjuri are the largest Aboriginal group in New South Wales. A Wiradjuri

perspective sees the concept of 'the Riverina' as a relatively new way of apportioning and understanding the landscape. For many thousands of years before Western settlement, Wiradjuri people occupied a vast tract of land comprising much of south western New South Wales, that included and extended beyond the boundaries ascribed to the Riverina by government agencies (Green 2002).

As its name suggests, the Riverina is traversed by a series of rivers. The Murray and Murrumbidgee feature strongly in the history of the landscape, along with their major tributaries. Natural features 'do not recognise administrative boundaries' (NSW Government: Office of Environment & Heritage 2011), yet these inland rivers, and the history of those who live alongside them, form a significant part of Riverina culture and identity. To consider the Riverina as the site for this research, therefore, it is perhaps wise to envision the Australian region as a concept both a real and an imagined – a 'socially constructed' (Sneddon et al 2002: 667) environment within which cultural identity is neither bounded nor contained.

It is interesting to observe how tourism engages with the Riverina. Gorman-Murray et al remark that the trend for envisioning regional Australia as a relaxing rural retreat stems 'from cultural formations originating in Europe, North America and parts of Asia' (2008: 42). Today, Australia's tourist industry promotes regional New South Wales as an antidote to city living. This has led to the creation of a 'rural ideology[...]' for urban populations craving a relaxed country lifestyle (Carter et al 2008: 28). For the Riverina, tourist brochures equate the regional experience with 'spectacular scenery, gourmet food and wine, historic landmarks and museums, arts and crafts [and] adventure and sports' (Riverina Regional Tourism 2010: 1). Thus, a separation begins to emerge between the rural landscape of the Riverina and the urban environments of Australia's major cities.



# Riverina NSW

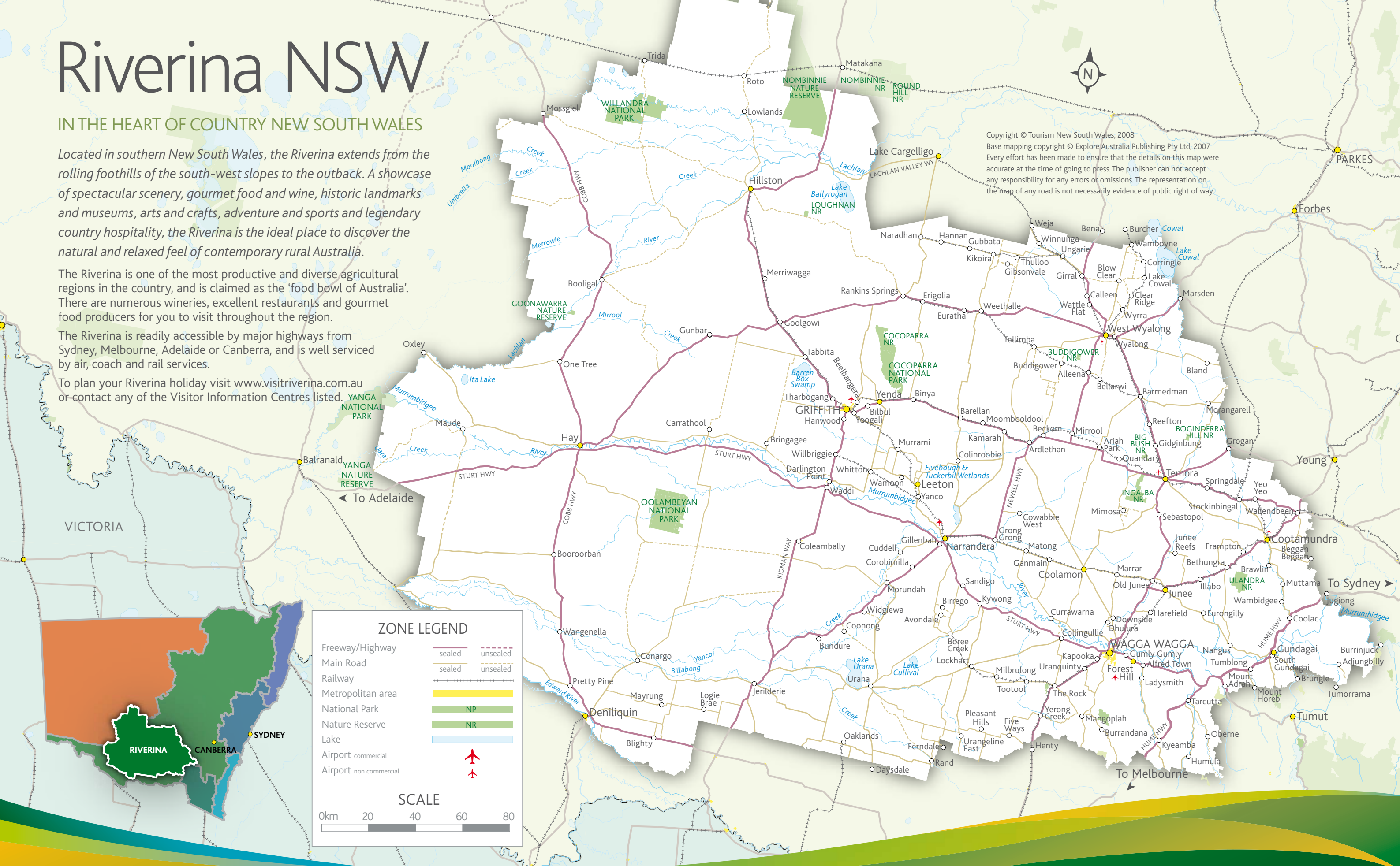
## IN THE HEART OF COUNTRY NEW SOUTH WALES

Located in southern New South Wales, the Riverina extends from the rolling foothills of the south-west slopes to the outback. A showcase of spectacular scenery, gourmet food and wine, historic landmarks and museums, arts and crafts, adventure and sports and legendary country hospitality, the Riverina is the ideal place to discover the natural and relaxed feel of contemporary rural Australia.

The Riverina is one of the most productive and diverse agricultural regions in the country, and is claimed as the 'food bowl of Australia'. There are numerous wineries, excellent restaurants and gourmet food producers for you to visit throughout the region.

The Riverina is readily accessible by major highways from Sydney, Melbourne, Adelaide or Canberra, and is well serviced by air, coach and rail services.

To plan your Riverina holiday visit [www.visitriverina.com.au](http://www.visitriverina.com.au) or contact any of the Visitor Information Centres listed.







# Major Attractions of Riverina New South Wales

## Coolamon

- Murrumbang Interpretative Nature walk
- Up-to-date store
- Local antique & art craft stores
- Ardlethan Heritage walk

### Visitor Information Centre

Cowabbie Street,  
Coolamon NSW 2701  
P: 02 6927 2181  
[www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au](http://www.coolamon.nsw.gov.au)

## Cootamundra

- Sir Donald Bradman's Birthplace
- Cricket Captains Walk, Jubilee Park
- Yandilla Mustard Seed Oil Factory & Teahouse
- Cootamundra Arts Centre

### Visitor Information Centre

Railway Station Centre,  
Hovell Street,  
Cootamundra NSW 2590  
P: 1800 350 203  
[www.cootamundra.nsw.gov.au](http://www.cootamundra.nsw.gov.au)

## Deniliquin

- Peppin Heritage Centre Exhibition Gallery and Museum
- Heritage River Walk and Cyclepaths
- Deni Ute Muster
- Mosaic Ute and Ute on the Pole

### Visitor Information Centre

George Street,  
Deniliquin NSW 2710  
P: 1800 650 712  
[www.denitourism.com.au](http://www.denitourism.com.au)

## Griffith

- Pioneer Park & Italian Museum
- Scenic Hill Lookout & Hermits Caves
- Catania Fruit Salad Farm
- Award winning Wineries & Cellar Doors

### Visitor Information Centre

Cnr Banna & Jondaryan Ave,  
Griffith NSW 2680  
P: 02 6962 4145  
[www.griffith.com.au](http://www.griffith.com.au)

## Gundagai

- Dog on the Tuckerbox
- Lanigan Abbey Art Gallery
- Rusconi's Marble Masterpiece
- Phar Lap's saddle cloth at the Gundagai Historical Museum

### Visitor Information Centre

249 Sheridan Street,  
Gundagai NSW 2722  
P: 02 6944 0250  
[www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au](http://www.gundagai.nsw.gov.au)

## Hay

- Shear Outback: The Australian Shearers' Hall of Fame
- Fishing on the Murrumbidgee River
- Bishops Lodge Historic House & Heritage Rose Garden
- Dunera Museum

### Visitor Information Centre

407 Moppett Street,  
Hay NSW 2711  
P: 02 6993 4045  
[www.hay.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hay.nsw.gov.au)

## Hillston Region

- Willandra National Park
- 'Birds of the Bush' Bird watching sites, Rankin Springs
- Australia's Tallest Bar – Merriwagga Black Stump Hotel
- Red Dust and Paddy Melons Community Gallery

### Visitor Information Centre

Hillston Red Dust and Paddy Melons Gallery,  
170 High Street,  
Hillston NSW 2675  
P: 02 6967 1594  
[www.carrathool.nsw.gov.au](http://www.carrathool.nsw.gov.au)

## Junee

- Roundhouse Rail and Transport Museum
- Monte Cristo Haunted House
- Junee Licorice & Chocolate Factory
- Junee Junction & Aquatic Centre

### Visitor Information Centre

Junee Shire Council,  
Belmore Street,  
Junee NSW 2663  
P: 02 6924 8100  
[www.junee.nsw.gov.au](http://www.junee.nsw.gov.au)

## Leeton

- Bird watching at Fivebough Wetlands
- Roxy Theatre
- Leeton Sunrice Centre
- Vibrant Art Deco architecture

### Visitor Information Centre

10 Yanco Ave,  
Leeton NSW 2705  
P: 02 6953 6481  
[www.leetontourism.com.au](http://www.leetontourism.com.au)

## Lockhart

- Galore Hill Scenic Lookout
- The Rock Nature Reserve
- Lockhart, the Verandah town
- Wool pictures at Lockhart

### Visitor Information Centre

Lockhart Shire Council,  
69 Green Street,  
Lockhart NSW 2656  
P: 02 6920 5305  
[www.lockhart.nsw.gov.au](http://www.lockhart.nsw.gov.au)

## Narrandera

- Lake Talbot Aquatic Park
- Narrandera Koala Reserve & walking tracks
- Narrandera Fisheries Centre
- Narrandera Parkside Museum
- Lavender Farm & Royal Doulton Fountain

### Visitor Information Centre

Narrandera Park,  
26 Cadell Street,  
Narrandera NSW 2700  
P: 02 6959 1766  
[www.narrandera.nsw.gov.au](http://www.narrandera.nsw.gov.au)

## Temora

- Temora Aviation Museum
- Lake Centenary
- Temora Rural Museum
- Paleface Adios life-size monument
- Visit historic Ariah Park

### Visitor Information Centre

294 Hoskins Street,  
Temora NSW 2666  
P: 02 6977 1511  
[www.temora.com.au](http://www.temora.com.au)

## Wagga Wagga

- Museum of the Riverina, historic Council Chambers site & Botanic Gardens site (Sporting Hall of Fame)
- Botanic Gardens including Miniature Railway, mini zoo and free flight aviary
- CSU Winery & Cheese Factory
- Wagga Wagga Art Gallery & National Art Glass Gallery

### Visitor Information Centre

Tarcutta Street,  
Wagga Wagga NSW 2650  
P: 1300 100 122  
[www.visitwaggawagga.com](http://www.visitwaggawagga.com)

## West Wyalong

- Bland District Museum
- Douglas DC3 Dakota Airplane
- True Blue Gold Mine Poppet Head
- Historic crooked Main Street

### Visitor Information Centre

Bland Shire Library  
6 Shire Street,  
West Wyalong NSW 2671  
P: 02 6979 0272  
[www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au](http://www.blandshire.nsw.gov.au)

above left to right  
Shearing demonstrations, Hay;  
Wine tasting, Griffith; Cricket Captains Walk,  
Cootamundra; Canola fields; Licorice & Chocolate  
Factory, Junee.

at right  
Fishing on the Murrumbidgee, Gundagai.  
Photography credit: Paul Foley for  
Tourism New South Wales





Figure 2.4: Map of the Riverina, ©Tourism New South Wales (2008), previous page

The division between regional and urban has included a tendency to 'obscure' the 'ethnic diversity of rural towns' in favour of an identity that is 'predominantly white and heterosexual' (Gorman-Murray et al 2008: 47). Historically, rurality and 'the values of the bush' have been promoted alongside national values that align hard work, loyalty and mateship with European settler history (43). For this research, it is of import to recognise how these ideas have been localised in the body (Little & Leyshon 2003). To research the rural as traditionally embodied through men and women, is to encounter enduring stereotypes of the 'ideal' Australian. Little and Leyshon, for example, observe the 'true' Australian as a farmer, a symbol of 'rugged' masculinity, who is 'physically active in outdoor work' (2003: 263). In contrast, female bodies symbolise 'tight-knit community and family values' and 'the embodiment of selflessness and succour' (Gorman-Murray et al 2008: 47). But nowadays, it is also the case for more diverse bodies to overtly shape regional cities. A series of festivals that deliberately (and perhaps selectively) celebrate the multicultural nature of the region have begun to appear in the Riverina. Griffith has the highest proportion of people born overseas, at around 15%. *La Festa* and *Festa Delle Salsicce*, the Shire's annual celebrations of cultural diversity, world music and Italian cuisine, are fitting examples. Mindful of the Riverina as a multicultural, Indigenous and settler space (Anderson 2000), this research has continued to unsettle dominant constructs around regional identity. In what follows, regional spatiality has been recast, along with many established values allied to such spaces, through the performance of male and female bodies across diverse cultures, ethnicities and religions.

Against a backdrop of longstanding Wiradjuri heritage, embodied and entrenched rural mythology, growing cosmopolitanism, complex ecologies, and economic and agricultural development, the Museum of the Riverina negotiates and renegotiates with the concept of the region. Strategic working partnerships with the region's cultural institutions, coupled with engaging interpretive displays, enable the museum to 'connect to wider discursive frameworks and historical systems' (Saraniemi & Kylänen 2011: 138) to shape narratives of identity and place. One such example, a travelling exhibition: *The River – Life on the Murray-Darling* (2008), saw the display of

regional river collections from towns on the Murray, Murrumbidgee and Darling rivers. Here, the Museum worked with the Australian National Maritime Museum, the South Australian Maritime Museum (a neighbouring regional partner), and smaller regional and volunteer run museums along the Murray-Darling Basin to realise the display. The project was funded by Visions of Australia, an Australian Government program supporting the touring of cultural material across Australia. In a more recent example, research for the exhibition, *Tracking the Dragon – A history of the Chinese in the Riverina* (2011) spanned the Riverina ‘from Wagga Wagga, west to Hillston, Booligal and Balranald, north to Temora, east to Tumut and Adelong and south to Albury on the Murray River’ (Museum of the Riverina 2011: online). This project was funded by Wagga Wagga City Council, the NSW Migration Heritage Centre and Arts NSW.

These two exhibitions show how the Museum can work both within and across regional boundaries (and local, state and national funding agencies) to connect the lives of local people to ‘place’. Through displays that focus on iconic natural features, or that work to challenge predisposed ideas of rural society as culturally homogenous, the Museum has been able to narrate ‘multiple senses of belonging’ (Panelli et al 2009: 362). These have emerged as a series of multi-layered narratives between populations that share a way of life, a cultural history, a landscape, and a *sense of place*.

Having reflected upon the complex and constructed nature of the Riverina region, and the collaborative partnerships formed by the regional museum to shape stories of regional identity, focus now turns to the regional capital – Wagga Wagga.

## *Wagga Wagga*

This section explores place identity by considering Wagga Wagga’s ‘cultural landscape’. This term refers to environments within the city that ‘reflect the interactions between populations and their surroundings’ (McDowell 2008: 37). It begins by looking at the kinds of things that are valued as cultural heritage in Wagga

Wagga. What has the city inherited from previous generations and chosen to preserve? The latter half of this section considers how this project works to challenge conventional ideas of heritage as defined by the heritage sector.

Wagga Wagga is one of Australia's largest inland cities. The Wagga Wagga Local Government Authority has an estimated population of 58,000, with the city supporting a regional catchment population of over 150,000 people. Over 90% of residents live in the town's urban areas, with the remaining percentage, less than 10%, living in rural villages and surrounding areas (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d.c).

Home to many Australian athletes, Wagga Wagga is locally and nationally renowned for its sporting prowess. Commonly branded as the 'City of Good Sports', the phrase 'The Wagga Effect', is used by scholars to refer to the high number of elite sportspeople originating from the city (Abernethy 2005). In celebration of this achievement, there is a permanent gallery dedicated as a Sporting Hall of Fame at the Museum of the Riverina. Alongside sporting achievement, the City Council identifies the iconic Murrumbidgee River (Figure 2.5) – the 'big water' (McCarthy 1963, cited by the Geographical Names Board 2011) – as being at the 'cultural heart' of Wagga Wagga (Wagga Wagga City Council 2010b: 1). Flowing through the city centre, the river forms 'a critical part' of Wagga Wagga's 'sense of local identity' (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d. c: 7).

Wagga Wagga lies in Southern Wiradjuri country (Green 2002). The city has an Indigenous population of 3.2%, which is higher than the rest of New South Wales at 1.9% (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d. c). Recent research into the Wiradjuri language (Green 2002) offers two meanings for the name Wagga Wagga. The first derives from the Wiradjuri word, *waagan*, meaning Australian raven (or crow), and the second, from 'wagawaga', that relates to people dancing. The name 'Wagga Wagga' means either a gathering place for many crows, or a place where crows and/or people 'play and dance together both in an enjoyable and serious sense' (Green 2002: 129). The crow holds an elevated status in the city, with the *waagan* symbol widespread throughout the central business district (Figure 2.6).



Figure 2.5: The Murrumbidgee River, Wagga Wagga



Figure 2.6: Crow symbols, central Wagga Wagga



City of  
Wagga Wagga

0 150 300  
Metres

This map was derived from base map information supplied by Wagga Wagga City Council with additional information added by Cartoscope Pty Ltd. This map was produced by Cartoscope Pty Ltd and may not be reproduced in any way without written permission of the publishers.  
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**WAGGA  
WAGGA  
CBD**



Figure 2.7: Map of Wagga Wagga CBD, © Cartoscope Pty Ltd, previous page

### **Exploring place identity: walking and seeing**

Wagga Wagga has a highly mobile population. Attention is drawn to three fairly recent occurrences to affect city demographics. First, in 1974, Wagga Wagga was selected as a regional site for the Aboriginal Resettlement Scheme. The Council's *Social Plan* notes how, 'the Scheme provided assistance for Indigenous families to come to Wagga from a range of language and social groups across New South Wales to take up opportunities for employment, better housing and education (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d. a: 92).

Second, since 1994:

a total of 1019 immigrants have arrived [in Wagga Wagga] from several different countries. At the 2006 Census, 88.9 percent of Wagga residents were born in Australia, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people making up 4.1 percent of the population. Many of those Australian born are the sons, daughters, grandchildren and great grandchildren of previous immigrants (Wagga Wagga City Council n.d.a: 92).

Third, between 2001 and 2006, 19.4% (almost a quarter) of current residents moved to Wagga Wagga from 'another part of Australia (excluding New South Wales)', or from 'another part of New South Wales' (Wagga Wagga City Council 2010a: online).

The City Council recognises Wagga Wagga's diverse and mobile population as a 'thriving, innovative, connected community' (Wagga Wagga City Council 2010b: 3). Significantly, this dynamism is regarded as the key to Wagga Wagga's future success.

We are connected – to each other; town and country; to the region and to the world. Community life is culturally rich, responsive to diversity, welcoming and fun. We live here but work everywhere. The international connection to Wagga Wagga

continues to grow and plays an active role in telling our story to the rest of the world.

The concept of mobility plays a key part of the Council's long-term vision for the city:

When [people] move on they remain part of 'Wagga Wagga'. Wherever they may be in the world, they join the global community of Wagga Wagga and continue to tell our story.

Wagga Wagga's strategic location means that road paths, air paths, learning paths, digital paths and life paths all cross and meet. This 'meeting' gives strength to our economy, culture, social well being and identity. It is what makes us different and how others talk about us (Wagga Wagga City Council 2010b: 3).

How might such a diverse and mobile population contribute to shaping Wagga Wagga's cultural landscape? Moreover, in light of the Council also taking great pride in the city's 'agricultural tradition' and 'built heritage' (Wagga Wagga City Council 2010b: 1), how can historic past and global present integrate within a cohesive whole? This investigation of Wagga Wagga's cultural landscape begins with an immersive walking tour of the city. During this walk, my aim is to look for signs of the city's identity, its sense of place, its past, present and future. As part of Wagga Wagga's mobile population, I want to consider how the sites I encounter relate to my own constructions and expressions of identity and belonging (Smith 2008). Therefore, my tour looks at how contemporary cultural landscapes – and by association, contemporary identities – integrate with notions of tradition and heritage to form an inclusive 'place identity'.

'Heritage can be seen as an aggregation of myths, values and inheritances determined and defined by the needs of societies in the present' (McDowell 2008: 37). When people move to a new city, they make new connections with new places. They also inherit the myths and values of their new city, embedded in monuments, memorials and buildings. Yet, different groups of people arriving in a landscape also add to a city's built environment. For example, migrants to

the Riverina town of Griffith have created their own geography; now a Mosque and an Italian Museum and Cultural Centre are part of a new inheritance. Sites such as these form 'essential reference points in ethnic identity', offering 'visible expressions of cultural diversity' within the landscape (Jordan et al 2010: 261). Walking around Wagga Wagga, it is interesting to consider how the needs of people like myself, newcomers to the city, have determined the nature of the cultural landscape; and significantly, to reflect on the kinds of cultural landscape we have inherited from the past.

'Naming is a powerful vehicle for promoting identification with the past and locating oneself within wider networks of memory' (Alderman 2008: 197). As I set off through the town, I note many names from a previous generation that have passed down to the present. For example, there is Charles Sturt, one of the first white settlers to travel over the site of what is now Wagga Wagga in 1829. I spot Henry Baylis, the first police magistrate appointed in 1826; and John Morrow, a sub inspector who teamed up with Baylis in 1863 to catch notorious bushranger, Dan Morgan. There are James and John Thorne, who brought significant numbers of stock to Wagga Wagga. And George Best, who owned large tracts of agricultural land in the area. When he died 1836, Best was in the top 30 of the richest people in New South Wales (Morris 1999). These names are integral to the city, to finding one's way within and beyond the city: Charles Sturt University, the Sturt Highway, Baylis Street, Morrow Street, Morgan Street, Thorne Street, Best Street.





Figure 2.8: Local dignitaries, agriculturalists and early white settlers



Figure 2.9: Interpretative panel, Murrumbidgee River

Scholars have studied place naming as ‘part of the colonial process of claiming territory and subordinating indigenous histories’ (Alderman 2008: 196). Walking

through Wagga Wagga, I notice how the city's heritage aligns with the Western settler (Figure 2.8). Each street I encounter appears gendered; its heritage thus far telling 'a predominantly male-centred story', an 'Anglo-masculine vision of the past' (Smith 2008: 159). The names of local dignitaries, agriculturalists and early white settlers continue to appear. They lend their names to popular buildings, like the Tomas Blamey Tavern, commemorating Wagga Wagga's highest ranked officer, Brigadier-General Thomas Blamey; and the William Farrer Hotel, named after the agronomist who bred varieties of wheat tolerant to the Australian climate (Morris 1999).

However, the cultural landscape of Wagga Wagga is not solely dominated by 'city fathers' (Smith 2008: 162) who took ownership of the land in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Indigenous heritage maintains a tentative foothold. On the banks of the Murrumbidgee, interpretive signage seeks to write Wiradjuri culture back into the landscape (Figure 2.9). I encounter Tarcutta Street (after damper made from grass seeds), Wollundry Avenue (a place of stones), Kapooka Road (eggs) and Eunony Bridge Road (after Eunon, a Wiradjuri Warrior). Later, I learn that only 6% of the city's 1200 streets and roads have names derived from the Wiradjuri language (Green 2002: 172).

While Wiradjuri street and place names challenge a 'white-controlled commemoration' (Alderman 2008: 197), much of the visible heritage of Wagga Wagga is built heritage named to commemorate a past of exploration, occupation and agriculture. These are sites strongly associated with Australia as a British settler nation. Like many such places in Australia, Wagga Wagga is a city whose heritage stems from an Australian people whose identity was 'strongly tied to the conquest and occupation of (rural) land, rather than the conquest and dispossession of peoples' (Jones & Jones 2008: 368). Hence, the National Trust Register lists churches established after the 1850s for the various denominations of Wagga Wagga pastoralists and their families. And there is the *Riverine Club*, a building dating from 1860 serving as:

a good example of a peculiarly British and male institution directly related to the grand clubs of the West End of London and closely resembling those built for the same class, with the same tastes throughout the British Empire (Wagga Wagga Library 2010: online).

Buildings like the Historic Council Chambers (1881), the Fire Station (1926) and the Police Station (the earliest single storey building dating from 1875, with later additions) bear witness to a very particular kind of history. This is a history that endures, unbroken, with the city's faith, recreation, governance and law and order, continuing in a linear fashion into the present. It is a history that manifests as 'a stream of heritage flowing from ancestors, traditions and religion to create a common sense of who a group of people are' (DCMS 2006: 11).

My walking tour finishes at one of the city's many green spaces, the Victory Memorial Gardens. This site is dedicated to collective, public, local and national remembrance (McDowell 2008). Originally a memorial to those who served in the First World War, the Gardens are now 'intertwined' with a succession of 'major world events and how they have affected Wagga Wagga' (Wagga Wagga City Council 2008: 1). This includes the Second World War and the annual Anzac Day Service, the visit of Prince Henry and the death of King George V and the celebration of the 2000 Olympics. In this space, I reflect upon the city's identity. Does a cultural landscape of monuments, street names and historic buildings make me understand contemporary Wagga Wagga any better? Or do these sites describe a 'landscape culture' that is 'closed and localised', catering only for a 'fixed, bounded local community' (Crang & Tolia Kelly 2010: 2325)? To fully explore the 'translocal values and affective experiences of mobile folk' like myself (2325) – newcomer, individual traveller, minority, non resident – I need to consider an alternative to merely *walking through* and *looking at* the city.

### **Exploring place identity: taking part and doing**

A walk through central Wagga Wagga demonstrates how cultural significance can be 'inherently physically manifested' within a place (Smith 2006: 103). Iconic buildings, and the names of streets and popular institutions, contribute to a past landscape symbolic of heritage 'in its original meaning' – a heritage conveying 'a notion of inherited property, either in the form of land or goods and chattels' (Davison 2000, cited in Lane et al 2008: 1308). Fixing notions of cultural significance in specific sites, buildings and street names problematises the construction of alternative senses of place, and notions of place identity beyond 'past landscapes'. In contrast, therefore, it is interesting to consider how Wagga Wagga caters for residents whose heritage and sense of identity is not physically manifested in agricultural and early settler history. What is the alternative to 'the traditional Western idea of heritage as material fabric, with cultural values given to age, monumentality and aesthetics' (Lennon 2007: 65) – and significantly, how is it manifest?

Wagga Wagga is indeed able to recognise and accommodate more inclusive notions of Australian heritage. Crucially, it does so by cultivating lively alternative cultural landscapes beyond the tangible built 'fabric' (Australia ICOMOS 1999: 2; Waterton et al 2006: 347). These landscapes are manifest in the city's diverse 'social identity' – a Wagga Wagga of contemporary 'lived experience[s] and attachments' (Clarke & Johnston 2003: 2) that serve to connect people to place in the here-and-now. These elements of the city's cultural landscape are accessed through active engagement with place – by *doing* and *taking part*. Such engagement with the city can be observed in Wagga Wagga's annual program of cultural events. These activities afford ideal starting points where one might encounter 'non-localized constructions of [...] identity' (Tolia-Kelly 2010: 26) – that is, identity constructed beyond the city's built heritage and early Western settlement.

Wagga Wagga's cultural events program can be used to exemplify the more 'contemporary arrangements of culture and society' that contribute to place identity (Gibson 2009: 67). Choosing events from the first half of the year to illustrate this point, I begin with city's annual *Food and Wine Festival* in March, where it is possible

to sample 'cuisine from every corner of the globe' (ABC Riverina 2011). The festival comprises a *Taste of Harmony*, an 'event that provides Australian workplaces with the opportunity to celebrate the diversity in their workforce' (Taste of Harmony n.d.: online). Wagga Wagga City Council, a 'registered workplace', encourages 'workmates' to 'bring in a dish that represents their cultural background, or cook a dish from a culture they have never tried before' (Taste of Harmony n.d.: online). June celebrates *Refugee Week*. Last year, the City Library invited visitors to borrow 'a Living Book', which in practice meant holding in a series of conversations to help people 'gain some understanding of the refugee experience' (Wagga Wagga Library 2010a: online). The Museum of the Riverina showcased a short film, *The Day We Made Rain – Embracing Diversity by Working Together*, in partnership with the Multicultural Council of Wagga Wagga (Museum of the Riverina 2010b). This six week museum theatre program worked with local children to explore the concept of leaving home in adverse circumstances to work together with others for mutual benefit. And in July, the *Wagga Wagga NAIDOC Cultural Festival* brings a week of celebration, and recognition, of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture.

These examples show that, while new residents may not be able to identify with, or recognise, Wagga Wagga's agricultural tradition or built heritage, all residents, inclusive of new arrivals, are actively encouraged to *take part* in, and identify with, the city's contemporary 'cultural process' (Smith 2006: 44). This sentiment is reflected in the statement below:

A recent survey in England (Bradley et al 2009) emphasized the importance of the historic environment as contributing to sense of place. But equally if not more important, it demonstrated the extent to which people in the UK first, understand their local environment, and second, take opportunities for engagement with it, with alacrity and enthusiasm (Schofield & Szymanski 2011: 4).

I have witnessed this enthusiasm in Wagga Wagga. Here, the act of *taking part* helps people to feel a sense of ownership of *their* city. I have also noticed that these culturally inclusive, and socially engaging, events are widely promoted in tourist brochures. This is significant, for it illustrates not only how a culturally active city is a

key contributor to the local economy, but it also shows how such activities can move a city beyond 'the traditionally hegemonic settler [narrative]' of earlier Australian regional tourist merchandise (Tunbridge 2008: 308). Critics may argue that 'multicultural food festivals' trivialise the cultural values of minority populations (Tunbridge 2008: 300). However, the idea that Wagga Wagga has begun to recognise, and encourage, identities that are 'not based on bounded, territorialized space' and that are 'neither culturally homogeneous nor historically unself-conscious' is appealing to this project (Tolia-Kelly 2010: 26). It is through participating in such events that new stories emerge, and 'alternative conceptions of what constitutes heritage [are encouraged to] take hold' (Dicks 2007: 58).

## Summary

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This research aims to construct contemporary identities in a regional museum/laboratory sensitised to complex ways of being in space and place. This is a project that actively engages with lived realities. By reflecting upon how people connect with place by *doing*, the research seeks to capture new kinds of narrative – for example, alternatives to the migration story as 'the main gateway' (Witcomb 2009b: 50) for showcasing Australian cultural diversity and identity formation. This is a project that loosens the conventional bonds of museology that tie identity to fixed location, and that focus on longevity in place, 'insider status and local ancestry' (Convery & Dutson 2006: 7). The task now is to consider a methodology with which the Museum of the Riverina might become more engaged with local residents, and the dynamic and multiple experiences within city, region and beyond that shape their lives.

What kind of methodology can capture socio-spatial reality – eight contemporary lives and the complex spatial dynamics therein? Such a method must be attuned to the key themes of this research: **identity**, **place**, **space** and **movement**. Significantly, it must also focus on **the body**, thereby incorporating the premise at the heart of this thesis – that bodies *incorporate* place (Ingold 2000). Moreover, as this

research considers the *process* of knowledge production alongside the knowledge produced, methods must enable critical reflection upon *how* notions of identity and place are negotiated and constructed by all parties involved in the process.

Capturing the complexity and liveliness of embodied spatial narratives occupies the rest of this thesis. It begins in the following chapter, with a discussion around the research methodology chosen for this project, and the development of the participatory, performative activity, **MAP:me**.

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## Section II: Process, Performance, Becoming

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## CHAPTER THREE

### **A Method For 'Doing' Identity, Space, Place and Movement**

MAP: me: Participation, Performance, Negotiation

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This chapter considers a methodology for capturing socio-spatial realities in the participatory museum. Knowledge of such phenomena, this research argues, can help the history museum to continue to support and define contemporary regional identity. This study engages with multiple identities, and fluid and porous boundaries between people and place, subject and object, rural and urban, and local and global. Research privileges shifting connections and complex interrelations over fixity and permanence. Relationships between people and place are seen as 'ever-changing', 'ever-renewed' and 'always crossing over into something else' (Mansfield 2000: 125).

The previous chapter explored Wagga Wagga's cultural landscape in the context of built heritage and place names inherited from a settler past. This chapter moves from past to present, to consider *socio-spatial reality*. Shifting from monumental to individual, this study originates from a paradigm of research, collecting and preservation at the history museum that centres on contemporary concerns of inclusion and identity. At the participatory museum, this work involves active engagement with visitors to understand lived experiences. Such work traditionally uses life stories and biographical accounts to record individual narratives of identity and place. This might be carried out using audio, visual and digital resources coupled with the acquisition of relevant objects (Brown 2008; Solanilla 2008). This research, however, requires a different kind of method – one that is attentive to fluidity and complex interrelations, and receptive to movement, entanglement and change.

It was over three decades ago that the controversial philosopher of science, Paul Feyerabend, asserted that 'everywhere science is enriched by unscientific methods

and unscientific results' (1975: 305-306). In his work, *Against Method*, Feyerabend embraced the idea that multiple methods moving between subject disciplines might lead to a greater understanding, to a more open minded approach to scientific knowledge. In line with this creative and challenging approach, this chapter has sought to embrace particularly *unmuseological* methods to enrich museological understanding of local place and place-based identity.

For this project, the Museum of the Riverina has become a museum/laboratory, a space for engaging with experimental methods. It is also a site in which to manipulate and illuminate 'the social' (Law & Urry 2004); a space for *performance* and *destabilization*. At the museum/laboratory, notions of **process**, **performance** and **becoming** are important. These concepts are integral to what it means to capture or *collect* social and cultural identities in the here-and-now, beyond borders, states and nations. The museum/laboratory is underpinned by a participatory new museology and the social engagement that occurs therein. *Engagement* and *participation* are crucial to this work. It is no coincidence that a participatory, performative methodology has been devised to engage with identities that elude the collecting sector. It is appropriate, therefore, to begin this chapter by reflecting on what these concepts mean in their various contexts, and how they converge to further this project.

This chapter is in four sections. Section one, as mentioned above, considers the meaning of *Engagement and Participation* at the participatory museum. Different levels of participation are introduced; and for this particular museum/laboratory, a collaborative model of participation is established. Section two focuses on *Participatory and Performative Methods*. What can these approaches teach us about the world, and how have they inspired this research? Following this discussion, section three tells how elements from participatory and performative methods have been adapted to develop **MAP:me**. Here, a series of unique activities come together to explore how people experience and are shaped by place. MAP:me is a methodology that engages with both the intrinsically spatial nature of this research, and with 'social, personal, and psychological connections to place' (Powell 2010: 539). It facilitates an exploration of:

abstract or metaphoric representations of place and space; reconfigurations of place to address nonlinear perceptions of space and time; the play of scale, borders, and symbols; and the cartography of concepts (e.g., identity) rather than physical places (Powell 2010: 540).

Section four – *On Generating Worlds* – looks beyond participatory, performative methods to broader issues around the construction of knowledge. Chapter 2 first drew attention to the raised status given to methodology in this research. The reason being that this project is concerned with the *process* of making knowledge – and in particular, how performative methods are used to describe a world that is ‘complex, diffuse and messy’ (Law 2004: 2). This way of thinking questions methods that prefigure the world as easily understood (Law 2004). Instead, MAP:me has sought to capture ‘the materialities and affective forces that flow between humans, organisms, and objects [that cut] across modern ontological divides’ (Lorimer 2009: 345). To do so, this research develops from a conceptual framework inspired by posthumanistic geographies and the study of embodied practice. Attentive to more-than-human geographers and borrowing from actor-network theory, the study focuses on hidden connections in complex, spatial networks.

This section, therefore, considers how to analyse such complex data. Focus turns to the efficacy of grounded theory, a qualitative procedure both performative and ontological, and equipped to deal with the complex, the messy and the fleeting. Attention then moves to the enlarged context of this research, and the wider intellectual, social, political and institutional worlds that intersect with the research data. The concept of ‘method assemblage’ (Law 2004: 42) is introduced here to describe the ontological processes at work in this project. These not only *enact* realities pertaining to the social world, but also have the power to *omit* some realities and ‘erode’ others (Law & Urry 2004: 396). In the context of an inclusive and participatory new museology, the chapter concludes by reflecting on the implications of working within an ‘ontological politics’ able to make ‘some realities realer, and others less so’ (Law 2004: 67).

## Museums, Engagement and Participation

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New museology places people, and their stories and memories, at the heart of the museum (Gurian 1999). Where traditionally, curators would mainly work with objects to gain insight into people and place, a *participatory museology* has moved curatorship from objects to people. Museum practice now seeks to encourage people to *engage* with the museum to explore new ideas and relationships, and to interpret their own identities. This research unfolds within a contemporary new museology characterised by *social engagement* and *participatory practices*. This section considers the meaning of these terms and how they apply to this project.

### *Engagement and participation in this research*

In museology, it is becoming particularly important to connect the institution to the lives of the visitor. Museum scholars use 'engagement' to describe an extensive body of work concerned with the visitor experience in museum space. Engagement can be understood as 'a situational phenomenon that occurs in the interplay between visitors and the exhibition space'; it is embedded in 'visitors' prior experiences, knowledge and preferences' (Dindler & Iversen 2009: 1). In practice, this means that a museum can engage a visitor if the museum understands why the visitor is motivated to visit, and how the visitor relates their life to the knowledge displayed in the museum. To be engaged by the museum is to have one's interests or aims reflected by the institution, for example, as a result of the cultural and social values promoted in a display. Sustaining engagement is challenging, yet necessary if the museum wishes to remain relevant, responsive and meaningful (Black 2005; Gurian 2006). For the Museum of the Riverina, this means a diverse schedule of exhibitions and public activities targeting a wide range of audiences and tapping into current issues that touch local lives. Nowadays, visitor engagement has become a key part of the

museum experience – an experience that presupposes the visitor ‘as an actor with personal interests, knowledge and preferences’ (Dindler & Iversen 2009: 2). Recently, a newer form of engagement has been taking place at the museum. This involves the visitor as an enthusiastic contributor to museum content. This type of engagement is known as participation. Participation takes place when the museum actively encourages visitors to become involved in the cultural life of the institution. Institutions where such activity takes place have become known as participatory museums. Building on a concept first introduced in Chapter 1, this research defines a participatory museum as:

a place where visitors can create, share, and connect with each other around content. Create means that visitors contribute their own ideas, objects, and creative expression to the institution and to each other. Share means that people discuss, take home, remix, and redistribute both what they see and what they make during their visit. Connect means that visitors socialize with other people – staff and visitors – who share their particular interests. Around content means that visitors’ conversations and creations focus on the evidence, objects, and ideas most important to the institution in question (Simon 2010: online).

A participatory museum is a safe and welcoming space. It is an institution where people can engage with complex and challenging ideas; creativity is encouraged and visitors have a voice. There are different levels of involvement in the life of the museum. In her work on *The Participatory Museum*, Simon (2010) describes four models for public participation based on projects that are contributory, collaborative, co-creative and hosted:

- In *contributory projects*, visitors are solicited to provide limited and specified objects, actions, or ideas to an institutionally controlled process. Comment boards and story-sharing kiosks are both common platforms for contributory activities.
- In *collaborative projects*, visitors are invited to serve as active partners in the creation of institutional projects that are originated and ultimately controlled by the institution.

- In *co-creative projects*, community members work together with institutional staff members from the beginning to define the project's goals and to generate the program or exhibit based on community interests.
  - In *hosted projects* the institution turns over a portion of its facilities and/or resources to present programs developed and implemented by public groups or casual visitors.
- (Simon 2010: online)

There is no definitive model of participation to which a museum should subscribe. Participatory museums often deliver a range of participatory projects, with participation often an institutionally controlled process. Moreover, it is common practice for museums to take elements from different participatory models to shape activities that suit the needs of both visitor and institution. This research project has identified with a collaborative model of public participation. Here, the research participants have guided the direction and content of the project. They have come to the project with the specific intention to getting involved, and have helped to analyse, design and curate the results of their work. This process of engagement has been overseen by myself as researcher/curator, a job that has involved setting out the initial project idea, drafting principles for working together and working closely with participants to bring MAP:me to fruition.

The participatory, performative methodology used to realise this project has been one of two instances of visitor engagement created in the museum/laboratory. The second took place during the MAP:me exhibition, when visitors and research participants visited the Museum and interacted with the display (as described in Chapter 6). Although this episode of engagement was observed by myself as researcher/curator, it was directed by the visitors themselves, as their interests, curiosity and knowledge connected them with the knowledge presented in the gallery space.

## Participatory and Performative Methods

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*The nature of the person is shifting in social theory and practice [as] agency is imagined as emotive and embodied, rather than as cognitive (Law 2004: 3).*

To explore the idea of *contemporary collecting in transnational space*, this research has sought a methodology attentive to 21<sup>st</sup> century socio-spatial realities. Law and Urry note how ‘the fleeting, the ephemeral, the geographically distributed, and the suddenly proximate are of increasing importance in current senses of the social’ (2004: 403). This understanding of ‘the social’ underscores the complexity of socio-spatial reality. This is a concept inclusive of potentially multiple places and identities, and multiple interpretations of place and identity. A method for its capture, therefore, must be sensitive to fluid relationships between mutable identities; to rousing strong emotions and provoking the senses; to tracing mobile bodies and crossing porous boundaries. Such an approach must elicit a performative encounter between body and world. It must generate rich data around the project’s four key themes of identity, place, space and movement. And ultimately, it must satisfy the three key research questions:

- How can regional history museums better understand ontological identities, and what might these reveal about contemporary cultural diversity?
- What is the transformative effect on ‘identity’ and ‘place’ when the museum/laboratory explores embodied social space through participatory practice?
- How might the expansion of collaborative, participant-lead, identity-focused and locally-situated interpretive practices affect history museums as ‘object institutions’?

The starting point for method development is a participatory, performative suite of methods that facilitate the generation of knowledge through *doing*. These are methods of ontology rather than epistemology, and as such, they bring this research



into proximity with geographical knowledge of people and place, and the fluidity and relationality that inform this project.

## *Participatory methods*

Geographers working across many sectors of development will be familiar with the concept of participatory methods. The term 'participatory research' is recognised as a tool to integrate 'the knowledge and expertise of community members into locally controlled development projects' (Kindon et al 2007b: 10). In this type of study, research participants are involved in many or all stages of research, from describing the problem to broadcasting and actioning outcomes (Pain & Kindon 2007). Such approaches have been promoted as 'offering opportunities for more emancipatory and empowering geographies with transformative development as their key objective' (Pain & Kindon 2007: 2807). Participatory methods, therefore, actively involve research participants in the decision making process. In doing so, they generate a sense of ownership in the project in question.

Participatory methods are diverse, comprising a range of practices and techniques. To include potentially vulnerable participants who may not be literate, data collection is often reliant upon visual methods and role play. Approaches include observation, focus groups, semi-structured interviews, storytelling, mapping and diagramming (Kindon et al 2007b). These are methods that involve participants as collaborators rather than objects of study. Data analysis also adopts a visual approach. This does not happen in isolation after the event, rather, it is a collaborative and reflective process that involves both researcher and research participants. Participatory approaches, with their emphasis on people, inclusivity, collaboration, empowerment and local knowledge, resonate with the conceptual framework of this research. Although these methods are not new, established techniques and practices can be adapted and applied to the capture new knowledge in the museum/laboratory.

While participatory methods have inspired this research, it is important to highlight the challenges associated in their delivery. Many of the wider concerns around this type of research method link to issues around 'participation, knowledge and empowerment' (Jupp 2007: 2832). I draw attention to these using three exemplars. First, participatory techniques often expect participants to be 'suitably disciplined subjects' capable of performing 'appropriately within the participatory process' (Kesby et al 2007: 21). In reality, however, participatory research can be 'messy' and punctuated by 'moments of awkwardness and silence' (Pain & Kindon 2007: 2809). Although such moments can be read as 'valid interventions' (2809), they also emphasise the sometimes uncomfortable realities (for both participant and researcher) of such active engagement. Second, and in many ways connected to the first point, is the issue of the site, or location where methods take place. Kesby notes that, 'specific sites chosen for a participatory activity can fundamentally affect its operation' (2007: 2820). Therefore, it is important to select a location that does not make participants feel awkward or reticent; and it is crucial that the site does not exclude or disempower participants through prior associations with uncomfortable histories or politics.

A third issue concerns participatory ethics. With regards to the myriad ethical principles associated with participatory research, Manzo and Brightbill recognise that these methods 'can be more riddled with dilemmas than other forms of research' (2007: 33). They identify 'dimensions of participation that have direct implications for ethical decision making' around representation, accountability, social responsiveness, agency and reflexivity; and warn that, 'projects attempting genuinely collaborative forms of participation present complex ethical issues, not least because of the greater number of people involved in the research design and decision making' (Manzo & Brightbill 2007: 37, 39). It is essential to recognise that issues such as these are inherent in a collaborative and participatory approach. An ongoing reflexivity is important, therefore, to continuously question the process of capturing and recounting lived experiences.

As will be clear from the preceding section, the term 'participation' in a museological context is different from the 'participatory research' of human geography, where

participation is commonly aimed at social transformation. Yet, although the participatory museum is not necessarily driven to achieving 'collective action and self-mobilisation by participants' as a sign of success (Kindon et al 2007b: 15), it shares the development professional's desire to capture local knowledge and highlight issues of social change. Participatory approaches, therefore, offer an exciting method of enquiry for the participatory museum to engage with social realities.

## *Performative methods*

Performative methods bring this study into proximity with issues of representation. Performativity unsettles stability; and performative approaches make places, identities, borders and bodies slippery and changeable (McCormack 2009b). Since the 1990s, the humanities and social sciences have begun to consider 'performative ways of knowing the world' (Perkins 2009: 126). This has signalled a shift away from text, from the written archive, to a 'repertoire' of 'embodied action' (Taylor: 2003: xvi). Recently, in human geography, participatory and performative methods have been used to engage with 'questions of agency, embodiment and emotion' (Davies & Dwyer 2007: 258). Such approaches have been applied to 'evoke relationships between place, lived experience, and community' (Powell 2010: 539). They offer an opportunity to visualise 'unspeakable geographies' (Davies & Dwyer 2007: 259) embedded within embodied experience. The fact that performative methods have the capacity to generate serendipitous results that stem from a basis that 'there is no singular or fixed version of reality awaiting detection' (Kesby et al 2007: 28) is particularly exciting for this project.

Museology turns to performance to capture intangible cultural heritage, the practices, expressions, knowledge and skills transmitted from generation to generation (UNESCO 2003). Traditionally, such performative research engages with 'cultures outside of existing Western orthodoxies' (Perkins 2009: 128). Heritage professionals are developing a growing suite of participatory community development projects to

explore Indigenous identity and knowledge systems. Such projects value local knowledge, and local experience and observation of 'place' (La Frenierre 2008). The use of performance does not focus solely on the preservation of resources that stand for a community's past. Rather, it seeks to capture 'vital elements of [...] living culture and its continuing development' (Kreps 2003: 10). As an approach, therefore, these methods focus on a group or individual and their 'collective memory, oral traditions, personal histories, and everyday experiences' (10).

Taylor remarks how performance 'constitutes the methodological lens that enables scholars to analyze events as performance' (2003: 3, author's emphasis). Hence, it has been appropriate to apply performance to examine a key element of this research: modern mobility and 'the kinds of moving systems and experiences that seem to characterise the contemporary world' (Büscher et al 2011: 7). In this regard, the performative method also presents as a 'mobile method' – a means with which to understand 'the fleeting, multi-sensory, distributed, mobile and multiple' worlds in which 'social and material realities' are made (Büscher et al 2011: 7). Typically, mobile methods seek to reflect the movement of various subjects, for example, people, objects or information. In practice, this might mean observing the movement of people, the tracking of objects, or the exploration of virtual mobility by following blogs, texts and emails (Büscher et al 2011). The concept of mobile methods has offered further inspiration for this research project; particularly methods that have stemmed from artistic interventions that experiment with imaginative or conceptual forms of mobility. These, coupled with mobile methods that research 'the active development and performance of "memory"' (Büscher et al 2011), have been particularly exciting to explore.

Performative methods present an excellent opportunity for doing innovative and unconventional research into identity and spatiality. By adopting a methodological fusion of participatory and performative approaches, this project has sought to push the boundaries of working practice and at the participatory museum. As a tool for 'agitating and altering theorizations of space and place' (McCormack 2009b: 136), performativity has proffered the means to capture subjective, lively and emotive instances of being 'in-place'.

As the name suggests, MAP:me, the participatory and performative research method for this project, stems from a suite of techniques known simply as ‘mapping’. As scholarly interest in the performativity of knowledge production has grown, the idea of maps and mapping has attracted renewed attention. For example, Crampton observes how ‘interest has shifted from the map as *object* to mapping as *practice*’ (2009: 840, author’s emphasis). In a performative context, therefore, maps are no longer ‘devices of representational capture’, but ‘performative operators – things that do work rather than arrest the “doing”’ (McCormack 2009b: 135). Mapping practices largely connect people to place. In MAP:me, a specific kind of mapping has been devised to capture socio-spatial reality. This method takes the form of a series of embodied activities to explore the dynamic qualities of identity. Here, identity is understood as ‘a process and interpretation rather than as destiny or an essential given’ (Sandahl 2005: online).

### *Mapping and the body: inspiration for method development*

The participatory, performative methodology, MAP:me, has been developed as a tool for knowing ‘some of the realities of the world’ (Law 2004: 2). It is a technique inspired by social science research, where ‘participatory mapping’ is commonly used to harness local knowledge of a geographic area. As ‘community-based productions of spatial representations’ (Sletto 2009: 444), maps that emerge from this method are valuable tools to assist in the process of resource decision-making. Participatory mapping is a relatively new practice for museology, yet it is seen as an ‘especially effective method for a community to identify and communicate the resources and values they deem important’ (La Frenierre 2008: 97). Practitioners recognise ‘cultural mapping’ as an inclusive and empowering way to communicate and preserve tangible and intangible cultural resources.

For this research project, interest in participatory mapping focuses on the concept of map making as *performance*. As both ‘social history curator’ and ‘researcher’, I have been especially drawn to the ways in which the mapping process can generate complex and subjective outcomes beyond the mere ‘communication of community spatial information’ (IFAD 2009: 4). For example, reflecting on the dynamics taking place at a mapping workshop, Sletto recognises mapping as ‘a performative practice in which individuals speak and act their histories of landscapes and belonging’ (2009: 465). Part of this process involves individuals ‘negotiat[ing] their relationships with each other, with space, and with power’ (Sletto 2009: 465). Therefore, it is possible to envisage participatory mapping workshops as ‘theaters for the performances of identities, the reading and interpretation of histories, and the production of material and imaginary landscapes that participants consider “theirs”’ (465).

For this project it is envisaged that the body *becomes* the map – an integrative site in which to explore identity, place, space and movement. Inspired by the technique of ‘body mapping’, the aim has been to capture the fleeting nature of place, to shed light on how places are interrelated (Davies & Dwyer 2007), and to consider how stories of identity and place take shape in space and time. Body mapping has enabled this research to focus on the self, and to move from a singular fixed landscape to multiple places and spaces.

Body mapping has become widely used by health researchers as a tool to empower people to think about themselves. Solomon, for example, working with people living with HIV and AIDS, uses body mapping to help groups ‘to find or create many new parts or layers in their own identities’ with the help of other group members (2007: 2). In the safe environment of a small group and a facilitator, this approach enables people to reflect upon aspects of their lives that might otherwise be challenging to discuss in a formal, hierarchical situation. As a consequence, body mapping can bring ‘strong, painful memories to the surface’ (Solomon 2007: 8). With this in mind, it is important to acknowledge this highly visual approach as a powerful experience for both researcher and participant.

The visual and creative potency forged by joining mapping with corporeality also finds a niche in visual art. This type of artistic practice engages with bodies, materials and places to create new narratives and connections. Crucially, such work has helped this research to envision the confluence of body and space as an 'embodied map'. Originating from the satirical cartographic tradition of 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe, embodied maps can be understood as 'analogies between corporeal form and cartographic depiction of geographic shapes' (Perkins 2009: 129). The earliest embodied maps show people personifying places, and geographic shapes merging with corporeal forms to personify nation, and highly unsympathetic national stereotypes.

The tradition of the embodied map continues today, with a number of contemporary artists making use of maps and bodies as part of their creative practice. It has been interesting to learn whether (and how) such artists have engaged with some or all of the themes of this research. Consequently, I have found the work of the following two practitioners to resonate particularly strongly with this project. Figures 3.1 and 3.2 show how artists Mary Daniel Hobson and Monica De Miranda use skin on the human back as a canvas for expressive cartographies.

The first, American artist, Mary Daniel Hobson, superimposes maps, diagrams and objects onto print images of the body to inspire questions of an inner world of emotion and universal experience (Hobson 2007: online). Introducing her work, Hobson states:

I am interested in what lies beneath the surface of the skin. It is not the physical structures that concern me – ligaments, organs, bones. Rather it is the emotions and experiences that are imprinted on our bodies – the places we travel, the music we listen to, the letters we read and write. Our past informs our cells (Hobson 2007: online).



Figure 3.1: “Embark”, from the series, *Mapping the Body*. Mary Daniel Hobson, © 2001

The second, London based artist Monica De Miranda, documents the formation of new, expressive places. Inspired by the idea of rootless and short lived cultures, her work focuses on issues of globalisation, hybridisation and ‘the disruption of one-dimensional cartographies of power and social control’ (Goodwin 2007: 9). Commenting on her work, geographer and urban theorist, Paul Goodwin states, ‘Miranda is putting the body back into mapping, a return to the spirit of the medieval “mappae mundi”’ (2007: 9). Integrating the symbolic and the corporal, Miranda’s photographic work, *New Geographies*, forms ‘new alphabets and geographies, inspired by her experience of itinerant and transient culture’ (Miranda 2007: online).





Figure 3.2: “Back Pack Paradise”, from the series, *New Geographies*. Monica De Miranda, © 2007

## *Constructing the method for this research*

This section presents a critical account of how the participatory, performative method, MAP:me, came together. MAP:me has been developed to explore the fluid and multiple nature of social space. This can be understood as ‘plurilocal frames of reference which structure everyday practices, social positions, biographical employment projects and human identities, and which simultaneously exist above and beyond the social contexts of national societies’ (Pries 2009: 595). To capture socio-spatial reality beyond regional boundaries, MAP:me has focused on the ‘geographicity’ of the embodied experience (Backhaus 2009: 205) rather than knowledge of a single physical terrain. To gather this information, mapping activities have had to be generative of social contexts beyond the borders of city, region and nation.

MAP:me took place during two half-day workshops. Within these workshops, the body mapping process became a series of visualisations – or ‘exercises using the imagination’ (Solomon 2007: 6). These participatory, performative activities focused on ‘identity as an embodied event’ (Budgeon 2003: 35) and on descriptions of spatiality, materiality and experience. For workshops to make sense, the idea of *social space* had to be conceptualised in a way that was both engaging and resonant with the research participants. This involved breaking the concept down into a series of constituent parts. The goal was to look at how individual parts, or elements of socio-spatial reality might connect with the body and bodily metaphors; and then consider how these elements might elicit experiences in place, or connections between places that could be expressed through the body. Therefore, the body mapping workshops developed as a succession of elements; as each participant responded to an element of social space, so their body map took shape.

The work of transnational scholar, Thomas Faist (2004), presented a useful starting point for this task, by helping to picture social space as a series of descriptors denoting connectivity, mobility, temporality and scale. In the mapping workshops, this

enabled social space to be understood as ‘a series of personal transactions’ (Faist 2004: 4) taking place across geographical borders. Faist’s understanding of social space draws upon an earlier study by Held et al, which looked at ‘devising and constructing fresh ways of thinking about globalization’ (1999: 14). In this context, globalisation was envisaged as ‘those spatio-temporal processes of change which underpin a transformation in the organization of human affairs by linking together expanding human activity across regions and continents’ (Held et al 1999: 15). Successive transnational and sociospatial scholars (for example, Jackson et al 2004; Jessop et al 2008; Pries 2009; Vertovec 2009) have produced more recent investigations into the ‘increasing cross-border entanglement and internationalisation of the world’ (Pries 2009: 587). However, it is useful to refer to Held et al’s (1999) initial study to identify basic spatio-temporal processes – processes that are often taken for granted in later research. For example, Held’s “spatio-temporal” dimensions of globalization’ are particularly helpful:

- the extensity of global networks
- the intensity of global interconnectedness
- the velocity of global flows (1999: 17).

Building on these terms, Faist’s descriptions of ‘transborder transactions’ and ‘the extensity and intensity of flows and exchanges’ (2004: 3) in transnational space, translated particularly well into performative activities that informed the mapping process. For example, terms descriptive of human and non human activity, like ‘networks’, ‘extensity’, ‘transaction’, ‘intensity’, ‘interconnectedness’, ‘velocity’ and ‘flow’, found their equivalent in the sensuous and emotional body standing, reaching out, focusing, thinking, acting, reacting, interacting and feeling. With these actions, therefore, I could begin to establish the abstract concept of social space in everyday bodily experience. As a result, workshop activities came to be informed by the ‘spatio-temporal dimensions’ of globalisation and the continuous momentum of ‘flows’ and ‘transborder exchange’.

The next stage of method development was to consider how this language might encourage research participants to reflect on their lives. How might these terms elicit

information on social networks, activities and journeys, experiences and transactions linking people to places and spaces across different temporalities and across multiple scales? A starting point was to consider questions to prompt reflection as to how descriptors for social space and transborder exchange might be understood through the body. This resulted in workshops underpinned by five key questions aimed at the 'embodied mind' (Goschler 2004: 33). Reflecting on Faist's work, these questions deliberately embodied the to-ing and fro-ing of global processes. They were open-ended, and sought to disrupt subject/object connections and boundaries between people and place. My intention was to help participants engage with a range of subject matter without feeling restricted as to what they could say; therefore, questions did not relate to a specific theme. Instead, they were devised to encourage discussion of disparate experiences, memories, emotions, journeys and imaginings – events that did not have to be causally related. I wanted to encourage participants to think about themselves and their relationships; about the fleeting and ongoing interactions that shape a life. As bodies entangled with place and space, with people, things and experiences, my questions called for a momentary pause in the performance, to stop. And consider:

*Where is your head?*

*Where is your heart?*

*Where do you stand?*

*What lands do you see?*

*How far can you reach?*

To conclude the process of method construction, it was necessary to make the term 'social space' accessible and appealing to the research participants. Inspiration for a more engaging phrase grew from Anderson and Gale's observation that resonated so strongly with the aims of this research in Chapter 1. That is, that 'people construct geographies' as they construct their knowledge of the world (Anderson & Gale 1999: 5). Shortening the idea of *personally constructed geographies* to **personal geography** was a logical step forward. This user-friendly phrase was then used to replace 'social space' at the body mapping workshops. Here, it described the potentially disparate and uniquely individual 'terrain' of social space. But, I should

note that the term *personal geography* is not my own invention. Beyond this research project, I have found it to span multiple disciplines. For example, it appears in the field of visual arts practice, where artists experiment with 'cartographic languages' to question the nature of the world we inhabit (Iniva 2007: online). Yet, since there is no set definition for this concept, I felt able to bring my own interpretation to the fore.

Relating the idea of *personal geography* to MAP:me meant replacing the words that Faist (2004) and Held et al (1999) had used to describe the dynamics of social space. Terms such as 'interconnectedness', 'extensivity', 'constructed environments' and 'transnational transactions' were replaced with more accessible language. As a result, *personal geography* became: *the combination of places near and far that shape a life*. At the body mapping workshops, each research participant was to create a *personal map* on which to chart this information.

At this juncture, it is useful to reflect on the genesis of activities eventually used to encourage participants to situate socio-spatial realities on the body. At the workshops, my aim was to take participatory mapping beyond the communal production of a single map and a single knowledge system (IFAD 2009); to move body mapping beyond its use as a 'treatment information and support tool' (Solomon 2007: 3) for people living with HIV and AIDS, to construct something new. This new method would enable the mapping of personal connections and multiple territories onto situated bodies – or to be more specific, onto bodies that might be 'situated differently in different situations' (Gallagher 2007: 293).

The body mapping workshops were shaped by two objectives. First, mapping activities were to be realised as a series of team building exercises (which I discuss in detail in Chapter 4). Therefore, it was important to align my method with activities designed to reaffirm positive group relationships. MAP:me would target 'team member interactions' (Klein et al 2009: 183) through activities devised to provoke reflection and discussion. Workshops would focus on 'affective outcomes', such as building trust and interpersonal relations, with mapping activities developed to strengthen connections between participants (193). Conventional body mapping methods seek to reinforce effective communication and active listening skills, while

helping people to 'support and inspire each other' (Solomon 2008: 2), therefore, it was interesting to observe how well this participatory, performative method lent itself to a team building scenario.

The second objective was the desire to achieve 'empowerment and transformation at a variety of scales' (Kindon et al 2007a: 2), while at the same time ensuring that participants were not left vulnerable by body mapping activities. Initially, exercises to help participants think about their bodies were to be adapted from Solomon's *Facilitator's Guide* (2007). Although targeted at women living with HIV/AIDS, the *Guide* was intended to be suitable for all. However, Solomon notes that body mapping can bring 'strong, painful memories to the surface' (2007: 8). This made me uneasy, as I wondered what kind of memories might surface, and how participants would be affected. In an attempt to ensure the workshops would be an enjoyable and empowering experience, I decided to trial Solomon's activities on myself. Doing so meant I could gauge their suitability and adapt them if necessary. Here it is interesting to consider my own personal experience of an activity to find and identify marks on and under the skin:

The world and our environment impact on us and on our bodies. Our skin, which is the biggest organ of our bodies, becomes the link between our inner and outer worlds. Are you thin-skinned and sensitive, or thick-skinned and tough?

When we were born, or as children, our skins were clear and unmarked, like the piece of paper before we started working on it. However, sometimes children are born with birthmarks. As we age, the skin bears witness to years of being alive, and it records our personal history. Bruises, scars and blemishes tell our stories. Where did you get that mark from, and when? Was it a self-inflicted hurt, or did others wound you? Did you choose to mark that place with a tattoo or scarification? Rashes, pimples, moles, stretch marks, superficial or deep scars... these marks come from the inside of the body to the outside, and show our emotions and the state of our nervous system. We blush, or we change colour with fright. Our stress levels can affect the skin. But is it possible just to shed our skin, like a snake coming out all new and shiny?

Scan over your skin. Where are the marks on your body? (Solomon 2007: 37).

Applying this exercise to my own body provoked an intense reaction that I did not anticipate. Such rigorous and thorough concentration on positive and negative feelings, alongside close scrutiny of marks on the skin, both visible and internal as a means to capture physical and mental life journeys, triggered emotions that while not altogether unpleasant, were not feelings I would choose to associate with participation in this research project. I was surprised at how this activity moved me. In 2005, I was diagnosed with Leukaemia. Subsequent treatment and partial remission in 2006 has made me overly sensitive to scrutinising my life. At times of introspection I am thin-skinned, especially when considering the future. I find these feelings hard to articulate, they are a part of me that is usually kept private. Would the research participants relive similar experiences? People exist with painful memories; they hide internal scars, weaknesses and fears. As workshop facilitator, responsible for the emotional wellbeing of the group, I did not want participants to suffer embarrassment or upset through prolonged and intrusive questioning. Therefore, I chose to steer away from activities that deliberately focused on emotional, psychological and internal marks, scars and 'unseen pain' (Solomon 2007: 40).

Taking my own experience of body mapping into consideration, the workshops eventually constructed for this project drew from a number of sources. Many practical ideas arose from Solomon's *Guide*. For example, visualisation was used to help participants concentrate on their bodies and identify areas on which to focus. In addition to this approach, mind mapping was used to envision how relationships extended into multiple spaces beyond the confines of a physical location. Workshops borrowed from team building activities to facilitate reflection and encourage participants to listen to others (Reed & Koliba 2003). And performative exercises were devised to move participants beyond their bodies, and aid reflection as to how places and lived experiences might be enacted *through* the body. Appendix I presents a detailed overview of each of the two *Body Mapping Workshops*. It comprises a *Workshop Program* handed out to participants at the start of each session, along with my detailed set of *Facilitator's Notes* to aid explanation and exploration of body mapping activities.

## On Generating Worlds

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Having developed MAP:me as a participatory, performative methodology to capture *personal geography*, discussion now turns to how this research might comprehend the social worlds generated by MAP:me. In his book, *After Method*, sociologist John Law considers how social science attempts to make sense of the ‘mess’ (2004: 2) qualitative methods leave in their wake. The concept of ‘mess’ is central to the following section. Here, I consider what to do with the mess resulting from this project – that is, how to interpret the ‘complex, diffuse and messy’ social worlds of the research participants, as observed through the body mapping workshops (Law 2004: 2). This research develops museological theory about the *process* of collecting contemporary place-based identities. Therefore, the *process* of knowledge construction, or how ‘truths’ about identity and place are made by MAP:me, is as important as the knowledge itself. The following section considers how methods like MAP:me ‘help to *produce* the reality that they understand’ (Law 2004: 5, author’s emphasis). It is underpinned by ethical considerations regarding how the curator/researcher might generate these realities as ethical research practice.

### *Analysis of MAP:me*

*‘Knowing’ is possible ‘through techniques of deliberate imprecision’ (Law 2004: 3)*

How might this ontological research project set about performing socio-spatial realities? Law and Urry observe that ‘methods are productive: they (help to) *make* social realities’ (2004: 390, authors’ emphasis). In MAP:me, realities are enacted into being by research participants through interactions with material and social worlds. Such interactions, I argue, have the potential to challenge and excite the participatory museum. They signal a move beyond collecting and researching *that which already exists* towards a more innovative and performative practice. Here, the



curator/researcher becomes a creative force, joining with others to generate contemporary worlds stemming from new and lively trajectories. But, if such methods perform reality, then it is necessary to reflect on how this reality is captured and distilled. In what follows, I consider data analysis – specifically, the mess generated by MAP:me and how and with whom this research works to make meaning.

In this project, data analysis involves a reflexive and ongoing relationship between researcher and participant. This process is informed by grounded theory, a set of tools enabling researchers to *create* rather than *collect* knowledge over the duration of a project. Grounded theory, therefore, is both performative and ontological. Based on the work Glaser and Strauss (1967) and later Strauss and Corbin (1990, 1987), grounded theory is a qualitative procedure used to generate theory in social science research. Reed and Runquist (2007) explain the process as follows:

Grounded theory method simultaneously employs the strategies of constant comparative analysis and theoretical sampling to facilitate the discovery of theory. The researcher works iteratively with these two techniques to capture the breadth and depth of the phenomenon. The grounded theory is constructed as relationships among categories that are identified within the context of ongoing data collection and comparative analysis. Grounded theory methodology generates a theory that is grounded in the data and therefore reflects the social reality of participants experiencing the phenomenon (Reed & Runquist 2007: 119).

I first mention grounded theory in Chapter 2, when considering the more dominative aspects of the laboratory; here Latour and Woolgar propose grounded theory to ensure researchers remain ‘true to the data’ (1979: 38). Grounded theory is a method that is concerned ‘with people’s subjective experiences of everyday life’ (Knigge & Cope 2006: 2025). It is employed by social science researchers as a tool for ‘incorporating both human agency and social structures’, and is of particular interest to contemporary geographers (2025). Tolia-Kelly uses grounded theory in her research to explore relationships between landscape, race and memory. After first adopting a participatory approach to generate the required data, she embraces grounded theorization to ‘encourage reflexivity’ and ‘induce the patterns and ideas inscribed within the material collected’ (Tolia-Kelly 2010: 42). Here, grounded theory

promotes an understanding of multiple realities; it shapes research practice by focusing on ‘subjectivity, difference, meanings, discourse, partial or situated knowledges, and power, as well as being open to geographical concerns of scale, place, context, and flows’ (Knigge & Cope 2006: 2025).

Crucially, grounded theory makes this research project aware of itself as a process of working together to generate materials (Whatmore 2003). By focusing on how bodies, places and spaces intersect to enact multiple identities, grounded theory helps me to understand this research as ‘an *intervention in the world* in which all those (humans and non-humans) enjoined in it can, and do, affect each other’ (Whatmore 2003: 90, author’s emphasis). Here, all parties in the research process (for example, researcher, participant and human and non-human actors) work together to shape knowledge as an event. While actor-network theory, for example, is later used to describe how these interactions come together, it is grounded theory that enables this research to focus on manifold relationships over multiple sites, or networks, to understand how these interactions shape socio-spatial reality. Such a ‘co-implicated process’ (Gibson-Graham 2008: 618) for generating worlds is identified as an ethical research practice for the museum/laboratory.

### *The enlarged context of research*

Adopting grounded theory helps data analysis to remain ‘sensitive to context, positionality, the social production of knowledge, and the contingencies of the social world’ (Cope 2009: 649). Yet, this project invites wider intellectual, social, political and institutional worlds to intersect with the data. I call this *the enlarged context of research*, and it plays a major role in the overall process of knowledge construction. Managing this enlarged context is to attend to the broader ethics of this research, for it shapes the knowledge process, and challenges this researcher/curator to think about how, and from whom, knowledge is constructed. An enlarged context of research can form a backdrop to any research project, yet it is rarely included in data analysis. Such an omission can cause the knowledge process within academic

disciplines to be taken for granted. However, this research is different, in that it deliberately focuses on how such a context shapes understanding. In practice, this is achieved through two linked and interacting processes. First, analysis of participant data from MAP:me using grounded theory; and second, engagement and negotiation with 'preconceived theoretical convictions' (Tolia-Kelly 2010: 42) from human geography and museum studies, and the various individuals, institutions, agendas and conventions that have come together for this project.

The term 'metanarrative' might also be used to describe a similar concept. A metanarrative is a framework or theory used to explain a problem or legitimise a particular 'truth'. In Chapter 1, metanarratives were described as totalising accounts with the might to sanction particular power relations and favour certain groups over others. Associated with postmodernism, the metanarrative works to privilege a particular theory or ideal at the expense of diversity (Thompson 1993). This project deliberately draws attention to metanarratives in the enlarged context of this research (such as interpretive accounts stemming from human geography and museum studies, and from the Museum of the Riverina and Riverina Community College) to assess how these frameworks shape 'reality'.

Law uses the term 'hinterland' to describe similar authoritative statements. Adapting a geographical term referring to a tract of land lying beyond a port, city or town, Law invokes the idea of periphery; a place where knowledge lies within reach yet out of sight, to be drawn from margin to centre to validate meaning. Law's hinterlands are networks or reoccurring social and political practices that work across time and space to enact reality (Law 2009). Knowledge of reality, therefore, is dependant upon 'practices that include or relate to a hinterland of other relevant practices – that in turn enact *their* own realities' (Law 2009: 241, author's emphasis). When observing 'scientific production', Law uses the hinterland to describe networks of texts, objects, people, ideas, practices, procedures and 'overtly political and economic agendas' (Law 2004: 27, 41) that are fundamental to method development, but omitted in the writing up of research. In this instance, hinterlands work behind the scenes of methodology to 'produce statements that carry authority, that tell about the outside world' (Law 2004: 27).

In this project, it has been possible to negotiate a series of 'truths' about identity and place as the enlarged context of this research encounters the socio-spatial realities enacted by the research participants. These realities, shaped during MAP:me, divide into the following broad categories:

- social, cultural and ontological identity
- place attachment and belonging
- the mobile body in space
- intense emotion
- relationships
- work and leisure
- belief

Knowledge capture, therefore, begins as worlds are generated during MAP:me, when the real (feelings, experiences, identities) and the imagined (visualisations, personal geographies) enact cartographies (*body maps*) tempered by subjective issues (ethics, politics, history and power) residing within each participant, and between participant, researcher and museum. Thereafter, the enlarged context of this research engages with each cartography to shape a series of emergent 'truths' pertaining to this project's key themes: identity, place, space and movement, and to the disciplines of museum studies and human geography. These truths then coalesce into statements, from which knowledge can be gleaned to satisfy the research questions.

I should note that there have been instances when the enlarged context of this research has challenged or refuted the data. Law mentions that hinterlands can be 'played off against one another' to 'produce statements that carry authority' (2004: 27). In MAP:me, this has meant negotiating realities from distinctive disciplines whose understanding of the world and its interpretation frequently diverge. Law states how truths that 'hold together' in one particular context may collapse in another (2004: 21). In MAP:me, for example, this saw participant realities concerning mobile, emotional bodies in space challenge hinterlands of theory focused on flat ontologies. Chapters 4 to 6 critically reflect upon how the enlarged context of this

research has interacted with, informed, corroborated, refuted, entangled and empathised with worlds generated during MAP:me. The results of these interactions inform the latter half of this thesis.

In summary, the point I am making here relates to how this project works to destabilize conventional museology – particularly the ways in which the collecting sector understands identity. For example, selecting only frameworks that relate to personal testimony and biography during research and collecting can render outcomes uniform and largely predictable. It follows, therefore, that curatorship drawing only from these contexts perpetuates a cycle of normative and rigid practice. However, inspired by theorists like Law, this research offers a fresher approach. By recognising the capture of ‘reality’ as a much more complex and less selective process, this project seeks a method for generating worlds that takes ontology seriously.

## *Method assemblage*

When considering how realities are constructed by this project, it becomes evident that the research methodology extends far beyond MAP:me and the museum/laboratory. In fact, this participatory performative method reaches out in multiple directions to its many contexts. Increasingly, geographers have used the word ‘assemblage’ to describe such phenomena. With this term, scholars are able to ‘emphasise emergence, multiplicity and indeterminacy’ (Anderson & McFarlane 2011: 124). The term assemblage, therefore, can be adapted to describe this project, and how diverse elements unite to generate knowledge of the social world. A ‘method assemblage’ denotes how this work remains deliberately candid as to its composition and stability and to the socio-spatial interactions between human and non-human elements of the study. Anderson and McFarlane observe how ‘assemblage’ can ‘draw[...] attention to the labour of assembling and re-assembling sociomaterial practices that are diffuse, tangled and contingent’ (2011: 125). I also note that assemblage (mostly) implies a coherence of different ways of thinking and

doing, and of different perspectives and agendas. This is an appropriate term, therefore, with which to capture the myriad processes and negotiations within the enlarged context of this research.

Law also speaks of a 'method assemblage' (2004: 42), which he defines as:

enactments of relations that make some things (representations, objects, apprehensions) present 'in-here', whilst making others absent 'out-there'. The 'out-there' comes in two forms: as manifest absence (for instance as what is represented); or, more problematically, as a hinterland of indefinite, necessary, but hidden Otherness (Law 2004: 14).

Law's method assemblage works to accentuate objects and processes while at the same time deliberately ignoring or omitting others. Here, the act of 'making present' is also an act of conjuring Otherness or absence. Sometimes that which is apparent disappears into Otherness 'because what is being brought into presence and manifest absence cannot be sustained unless it is Othered' (Law 2004: 85). Able to produce multiple realities, Law's method assemblage works within an 'ontological politics' capable of making 'some realities realer, and others less so' (67). This method assemblage, therefore, is sensitive to difference, and to reasons 'for preferring and enacting one kind of reality rather than another' (13).

The concept of an 'ontological politics' is revisited in subsequent chapters, with a critical reflection upon absence and presence in the constructions of identity and place. The challenge as to how to construct 'realities' of people and place to reflect the lives of their audiences (many of whom have been previously marginalised by the collecting sector), is a perennial issue for an inclusive and participatory new museology. Pondering a broader context, Law notes that, 'in an ontological politics [...] the good of making a difference will live alongside – and sometimes displace – that of enacting truth' (Law 2004: 67). By shaping a method assemblage to interact with 'different constellations of practice and their hinterlands', this research has deliberately sought to enact social realities that differ from conventional display (66).

In making a difference, it has endeavoured to show a diverse range of visitors glimpses of themselves and their social worlds.

## Summary

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To capture the complexity of social worlds, Law has inspired this research to 'think seriously about methods that ignore the rules' (2004: 40). In doing so, this project has aligned with the repertoire of 'methodological experimentation' currently emerging from contemporary human geography (Dwyer & Davies 2010: 95). Using the participatory, performative methodology, MAP:me, this project has endeavoured to make 'the invisible visible' (Lorimer 2007: 91). This has been an 'ontological process' wherein the 'crafting of many realities' (Law 2004: 152) around identity, place, space and movement has gradually taken shape.

The design of this project has no precedent, no guide book. MAP:me, therefore, is a novel approach – and with such an approach comes a certain trepidation. Law and Urry state that, 'novelty is always uncomfortable' (2004: 404). Yet, this experimental research is in good company. The work of geographer, Divya Tolia-Kelly, also moves beyond conventional methodology. For her exploration of 'race, ethnicity and cultural geographies of citizenship and identity' (Tolia-Kelly 2010: 4) she too designs a method which, like MAP:me, stems from a reflexive, participatory approach. This is employed to conjure data relating to both the temporal and spatial positionalities of her 'diasporan subjects' (41). Tolia-Kelly's innovative research practice is 'part of a political act of fracturing methodologies which fix and define a static identity formed by a static culture, which in turn, is attached to a static biological type' (70). Using an experimental visual methodology that seeks to make tangible concepts that are complex and messy, Tolia-Kelly moves beyond 'a framework of thinking identity through narrow categories of essential identities of birthplace, religion, ethnicity or even social groupings based on civic categories' (19). Her work is bold and innovative, offering heightened levels of insight into transnational relationships, and the 'dialectics of post-colonial race politics in Britain' (70).

The novel technique adopted by this research plays out in the chapters that follow. Here, the thesis unfolds through a series of critical analyses that relate to knowledge construction. Taking this approach, the capture of socio-spatial realities becomes an exploration into processes of *participation*, *performance* and *becoming*. In practice, this means close observation and consideration of each affirmation, negotiation, challenge and reconfiguration as part of the method assemblage, to offer the history museum multiple enactments of identity and place. The resultant effect is an overt and parallel critique of the process of 'reality making' in conjunction with critical observations concerning the nature of each social reality made. It is a reflexive and transparent response with which to communicate the ambiguity and complexity of contemporary regional identities.

Davies and Dwyer describe the application of new performative methods as a way to 're-enchant' geographical research (2007: 262). Borrowing from this term, this project shows how geographical research can re-enchant the history museum by reinvigorating and re-imagining conventional practices of research, collecting and interpretation. The process of 're-enchantment' begins at the start of the next chapter, with an introduction to the research participants, and a critical reflection of what took place during MAP:me.



