

Enchanted Experience *

I'm looking to get a feeling for a way of knowing, a *way of knowing with places and their pasts*. Let's call it research into the possibilities of a postcolonial culture. Such research seems increasingly necessary in a settler-society like Australia, where I choose to live, for it has become clear that we have not been served well by the philosophies of governance that were imported out of the eighteenth century and put in place here. So I want to get a feeling for some other ways of knowing an Australian's place in the world of time-and-space.

This process of "getting a feeling" is proposed here as a technical term rather than as an alibi for tentative beginnings or as a vague, "new age" appeal to instinct or *genius locus*. I will look for such an "integrated" way of knowing in a couple of places: the Pilliga Forest in northwest New South Wales; and the site of the first Government House where British colonialism was administered at Sydney Cove between 1788 and 1846, when the house was demolished. But before surveying these intensely significant precincts and the audiovisual portrayals that I have made of their histories, I need to spend some time puzzling through a larger question about time-and-space and historical knowledge.

What does it mean to know a place in the twentieth century, in a nation formed out of the second wave of European military imperialism? For European-Australians like myself, it means working with, around and against a heritage of "psychological mapping" which causes experience to be ruled off into subjective and objective realms of sovereignty and challenge; it means being governed by the Cartesian compulsion to maintain one's sense of self by way of actions applied to a world of objects, a world in

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which space is believed to be a neutral stage where dramatic, self-definitive actions propel a person into the "new world" of the future.

However, living in the place called Australia also means being exposed to a web of alternative philosophies and land-cultures, of Aborigines, Melanesians, Polynesians, Asian garden-farmers, European peasants, and others. And once the Western mentality begins to suspect that it is somewhat dysfunctional in its present context, the process of knowing a place begins to entail experimentation with adapted modes of being in the world of matter and meaning, the world of time-and-space, of past, present and future.

As one way of commencing this groundwork, I want to retrace some strands of modernism, a movement which I take to be a radical response to a crisis in the conditions of Western presence-in-the-world at the end of the nineteenth century. Choosing from the myriad available definitions, I am calling modernism a means of constructing "worldviews" which presume a *profusion* (rather than a Cartesian *delimitation*) of spatial and temporal vantages on experience. In other words, I'm choosing to understand modernism as a process that disallows the tidy, stable placement of a subjectivity separate from and in charge of a world of experience and potential "out there" in the future, past the boundaries of the presently sovereign self. In this respect modernism is a set of attitudes and strategies formed to disallow the "imperialist" belief that the world can be organised as a resource for the affirmation and profit of an active, assertive self moving conclusively along a line of time. The Cubists' attempts to annihilate singular viewpoints in representational space-and-time; the Italian Futurists' celebration of an earth-scrambling technology of radio waves and electromagnetic energy; the Russian Futurists' dreams of accelerating existential time to a "voluminous" kind of chronic ubiquity that renders linear history obsolete: these are some of the more striking examples of modernist challenges to the conception of history as a positivist series of eventful subsumptions of the past.

Pondering these changes to our ways of "modelling" experience in time and space, I've been wondering about modernist geography and how it might inform the reimagining of post-settlement Australia. Which has taken me back to Ellen Churchill Semple's *The Influences of Geographical Environment* (1911), a strange amalgam of evolutionary determinism and poetic speculation. Even as it tries to be strictly scientific and developmentalist, Semple's book is also charged with an irrationalist attraction to "primitive" consciousness and with a belief in a kind of spiritual telegraphy webbing the globe wherever human societies have managed to live. Consider the opening paragraph of the book:

Man is a product of the earth's surface. This means not merely that he is a child of the earth, dust of her dust; but that the earth has mothered him, fed him, set him tasks, directed his thoughts, confronted him with difficulties that have strengthened his body and sharpened his wits, given him his problems of navigation or irrigation, and at the same time whispered hints for their solution. She has entered into his bone and tissue, into his mind and soul. ¹

Semple starts from the proposition that mind and soul are integral to her science of geography, that they are the "object" of her investigation and that when she analyses the geographical characteristics of the earth she is also examining the structure of human experience. A functional separation between human subjectivity and scientific objectivity seems untenable in Semple's scheme of things; the inner world of the subject and the outer, objective world are folded into each other. She looks for a way of knowing in a world where experience has become wider, faster and more multifarious than any single viewpoint or time-line story can hold.

Like many early-modernist texts, *The Influences of Geographical Environment* is an attempt to register a verve that runs and rules the complexifying culture of the

¹Ellen Churchill Semple, *The Influences of Geographical Environment*, New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1911, p.1.

twentieth century. This verve, or energy, or mind-and-soul: how could you know it? Semple implies it might be caught with a rigorous intuition involving immersion in, and receptiveness to, the surging valency of experience and ecology. I suspect that this is how you start to know with a place. You begin with nothing more than a sense of an intricately charged, overall pattern in the material world in which you are implicated. You get a feeling. It's something like "knowing in your bones".

To draw this knowing into the realms of analysis and communality, we need words. (I'm trusting that language is the patterned material that makes our most complex and communicable models of being in the world of time-and-space.) What are some of the words we have for knowing the domains where colonialism has taken place? Land. Territory. Terrain. Earth. Real Estate. Space. Emptiness. Environment. Property. Realm. Stretch. Expanse. Reserve. Note how each word is toned with multiple connotations. Each warrants close analysis, but the one I want to work with is "tract". A tract is something you can read.² But let's not ignore the other nuances. A tract is also: a region or area of indefinite extent; an anatomical term for a system of organs; a short discourse on a religious topic. These glossings are especially illuminating if we try to work with the Australian idea of a *tract in a colony*. "Colony" has a complex derivation stemming from the Greek *kolon* (limb or organ) and the Latin *colere* (to cultivate). The two nuances relate well enough insofar as each is concerned with *organisation*, with integrating a body of constituent parts or organs so that a coordinated entity can function in the world.

This etymology suggests there is some sense in thinking about tracts of colonial land in bodily terms: the language we have inherited encourages us to know a place as a network of feelings and stimulated responses in much the same way that one can know the overall cohesion (or soul?) of one's own body precisely because one is immersed in it

²See Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology*, Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1984.

and neurologically mapped throughout it. Or to approach the idea from another direction: as far as I understand the systems, most hunter-gatherer societies organise feelings into crucial sites throughout their country so that the people and the country are intricate with mutual sentience. Such people ail when their tracts are abused. This should not be surprising. The country has entered the bone and tissue, the mind and soul. The country is a structure of feeling that is also a way of knowing, a way of being in one's place at all its times.

But what happens in a colony? How does a settler-society incorporate the new country once the multiple lesions of arrival, battle and settlement have been endured? The place which newcomers deem to be devoid of meaning and intricacy, how can it be made "nervous" with deeply felt significance?

The organisation of a colony happens through storytelling, through the application of intense emotions and ideas all over the country so that the feelings and memories of the citizenry are coordinated by the country. And it happens slowly. (One is tempted to say organically.) Eventually particular locations are charged with particular stories which overlay or occasionally intermingle with whatever stories were in place in the indigenous landscape (some history, some myths, some fantasies, some cautionary tales). The stories arrange ideas, fears, aspirations, pleasures and pains spatially in geographical patterns and temporally in narrative rhythms that can be experienced and re-experienced by the people settling into (or being unsettled by) the country. Violence in the north can be felt as convalescence in the south. Fire in the present might be harvest in the future. Or, as Ranginui Walker has summarised a key aspect of Maori cosmology, one can only contemplate a future by keeping one's attention fixed on all the events of the past which are told and re-told assiduously so that they are available and informative *all at once* in the environment of time-and-space. Informed by the connection among all your human descendents, you back into the future, knowing how to move only because you never turn

away from the time-and-place you have come from. A fool turns around to face the future, as if anything could be seen there once you took your eyes off the luminous, interrelated stories that are placed in the past.³

In northwest New South Wales, the forest called the Pilliga has a clumped and intricate past. Through violence, infection and invasive systems of agriculture, the place has been organised out of its native corporation into something that is beginning to have new a compartment now that the marks and rhythms of colonisation have been set down. How to know this torn tract? How to sense its patterns? One way is through *A Million Wild Acres*, Eric Rolls' great literary account of the forest. In this tangle of local history plus Romantic tall-taling and auto-didact science, the Pilliga eventually gets represented with contentious, complex patterns of "liveness": plants and animals are described in terms of their breeding cycles and interdependencies; people of the forest, past and present, are characterised; events, such as the introduction of exotic species and the renegade turns of feral evolution, are narrated to show the evershifting imbrications of animals, vegetables, minerals and signs that comprise human understanding of the country. The book is a litany of personae, morphologies and stories that have occurred or are persisting in thousands of locations throughout the changeful system of timber and scrub called the Pilliga. Across 450 pages, Rolls treats the place as an integrated, sentient system; he attempts to divine the structure of its wonder.

But Rolls is not only attempting to assay the nervous system that is already in the Pilliga. He is also bringing meaning to it through the process of his own storytelling. He is looking for signs of life and he is also organising the country, galvanising it with charges of his own choosing. With his array of histories and morphologies he is attempting to enchant the forest.

³Ranginui Walker, *Ka Whawhai Tonu Matou: Struggle Without End*, Auckland: Penguin, 1990. See Chapter 1, "Mythology". pp. 11 - 23.

This idea of enchantment comes from Morris Berman's *The Reenchantment of the World*, which is in part an account of the European alchemical tradition. Berman analyses an ancient scholarship founded on the premise that "matter possessed consciousness". Given that the world was preternaturally enchanted, the alchemist "did not *confront* matter; he *permeated* it"⁴ To investigate an enchanted world is thus to become elementally knowledgeable.

One might argue that, in a *colonial* world, the settler initially perceives absence rather than enchantment. (For example, in 1818 John Oxley was the first white man to see the Pilliga. He called it "forbidding", "miserable", and "desert".⁵) In the logic of colonialism, consciousness must be brought to the new world and ascribed to objects and places during the processes of naming and settlement. Colonial enchantment, therefore, would be the orchestration of consciousness, the singing into place of meaning. And by galvanising the country with stories, a narrator such as Rolls and the reader of a book such as *A Million Wild Acres* can become both constitutive of and constituted by the enchantment. The people might permeate the country and get organised by it even as they array it. Eventually as the history of a territory moves out of the colonial phase, the parvenu enchantments that have been put in place fuse with some of the native ones that have persisted through the turmoil. And in this jittery reanimation, a nervous system of meaning manages to prevail.⁶ This is one way to understand the postcolonial condition.

The importance of *A Million Wild Acres* is that it facilitates such reorganisation of country. It is a deliberately feral book that ranges across several modes of address, deploying legend, document-based historiography, zoological morphology, oral history and autobiographical reminiscence in its processes of enchantment. Integrating a place

⁴Morris Berman, *The Reenchantment of the World*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981.

⁵Eric Rolls, *A Million Wild Acres*, Ringwood: Penguin Books Australia, 1984, p.1.

⁶After coming up with this analogy for the postcolonial condition, I discovered Michael Taussig's recent book, *The Nervous System*, New York: Routledge, 1992, which in some respects is about the gestalt of knowing.

that slowly coheres in the reader's consciousness, the book folds the reader and the Pilliga into each other.

Because this literally *sensitive* incorporation of country seems crucial to the reduction of alienation in the place I inhabit, I have been looking for ways of transforming Rolls' literary project in other media and constituencies. Hence my involvement recently in an essay-film called *Wild*⁷ which is set in the Pilliga and which condenses, develops and adapts many of Rolls' ideas while attempting to deploy film-form to conjoin citizen and country ("subject" and "object") in a way that disallows our knowing these two entities as separate.

Film is well-suited to this task, particularly in the way it folds a spectator into a scene through the all-encompassing environment of sound and through editing sequences which array space over, around and *in* a viewer whose vantage-point is being "shifted" constantly across a profusion of possible sites-of-being and sites-of-telling.

The film-theory term for this process is "suture".⁸ A viewer is placed in a position. Then a cut occurs and a new placement is effected. Then with the next cut the "wound" of the previous displacement is stitched insofar as the viewer's perturbation is allayed by a new move which "explains" retroactively the previous displacement. As this repeated process of cut-and-heal recurs, the film sends the viewer away from themselves and all over the place. The viewer "becomes" an expansive, changeable "place" that is kept alive in an immediate, urgently remembered past wherein all the "places" of meaning course through the viewer's consciousness.

⁷John Cruthers, Ross Gibson and James Manche, *Wild*, Sydney: Huzzah Productions, 54 mins, 16 mm, VHS and U-matic. *Wild* is distributed by Ronin Films.

⁸See Jean-Pierre Oudart, "Cinema and Suture", *Screen* vol.18 no. 4 (Winter 1977/8), pp. 35 - 47; Daniel Dayan, "The Tutor-Code of Classical Cinema", *Film Quarterly* (Fall 1974), pp. 22 - 31; and Stephen Heath, "On Suture" in his *Questions of Cinema*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1981.

Consider this hypothetical sequence as an example: a shot of a woman looking; a shot of a car approaching; a shot of a man at the wheel of the car; he is looking; a wide shot of the street, the car, the woman; an extreme close-up of the woman looking. Ponder the array of displacements and reconstructions that you as a viewer have undergone during this twenty-second encounter with a model of a world: you have "occupied" at least three different constructs of personality (in addition to whatever psychological configuration you brought into the theatre!) in a "charged" universe, *and* you have moved all over and become the place itself.⁹ Technically speaking, this has been an enchanting sequence. The spectator has been immersed in, or formed through, the locations of the film. The place of the film has entered the spectator's mind and soul. The viewer backs into the future of the film by concentrating on everything that is always becoming the ever-present past. With time, the spaces of the film pass through the spectator as all the shots are held in the memory so that the startling revelation of each new shot can continue to "heal" the viewer after the wrenching of each cut throws the world askew ever-again. The drama occurs in the modelled world of the film and simultaneously in the body of the person contemplating the world of meaning that arises.

So, hoping to fold a few more people into the Pilliga, we go into the forest with camera and microphone. We go to the locations and we cut-and-heal them so that the site-specific stories get evoked and enmeshed. We move viewers and forest-characters around their particular locations. We take the viewer all over the Pilliga, with sound and stories accruing constantly, in an attempt to know a place that is charged with the significance of Aboriginal, colonial and postcolonial Australia all contentiously incorporated in an urgently remembered present. With sounds, images, rhythms and textures, *Wild* tells its history as an audiovisual event rather than as a text.

⁹I recall attending a press conference for the director Nicolas Roeg in the early 1980s. In a revealing off-the-cuff remark, Roeg said that the great thing about working in the movies is that you get to move people. Knowing Roeg's predilection for a "wrenching" editing-style, I take him to mean not only that viewer's emotions are activated, but that he gets to move people -- characters and viewers -- around, all over the spatial layout of the world represented in the film.

As much as any written document, a sound, a gesture or a way of walking might inform the present about how the past persists. Although verbal language may be our most complex and rule-governed way of representing the world to ourselves, it is also a censorious system, precisely because it is rule-governed. The past has vivacity and charge which has lodged not only in the words we can retrieve but also in maddeningly ephemeral events and pulses. How can the past be walked and glanced and breathed as well as talked?

We need film and video for such a question. We need the "convergence systems" of multimedia programmes also, in order to imagine the past-in-the-present by thinking and feeling in response to sounds, textures and choreographies all proposed in various rhythms as traces of past consciousnesses which upbraid our common sense. The definitions you take for granted, the materials, gestures and interpretations that you overlooked or presumed to be reliably settled, they can all get challenged as this extra-textual work proceeds.

Such dubiety is the reason for doing the work. There's always the vivacious chance that the world you represent to *yourself* might undergo fascinating change; you might wander a little knowingly into what you don't know. This is how I'm understanding the work I produced in digital media systems at the Museum of Sydney, which is a project dedicated to imagining and interpreting colonial history in the Sydney environs, 1788 to 1850.

Several terms require definition here. For example, what are these digital media? I'll get to this question soon enough, but first let's consider some other opportunities for doubt and redefinition. Such as, what is a "museum" nowadays, when so many electronic, *ethereal* presentations supplement (and sometimes even replace) the *material*

culture that used to be the specialty of this kind of institution? And what is Sydney, once you concede it is, and always has been, not only a place but also a receiver and transmitter of information from many times and spaces around the world? And what is "history" nowadays, particularly when you attempt to "tell" it with systems of documentation and narration that are highly manipulable and are thus ungoverned by a traditional reliance on the unimpeachability of material "evidence"? In other words, what happens to the status of a place over time when dubiety and negotiability irradiate the matter that you deploy to define the place?

These questions have arisen in the Museum of Sydney mainly because we have wanted them to be cardinal, but partly also because the digital and multi-media resources that we have been working with have prompted all kinds of redefinitions about the tasks now awaiting people who represent the past and the present to the present and the future.

In the case of the Museum, we are using digitised audiovisual systems to deliver ever-reconfiguring "micro-narratives" about everyday life in the Sydney environs. These are fictions "performed" by life-sized, computer-rendered characters backgrounded by an "historical dreamscape" of images and soundtracks that are all stored on laser discs. The stories and their performances are based on historical research and are couched in a range of generic-narrative conventions, from sailors' yarns and lovers' confessions to surrealistic dream-movies. As viewers move throughout the meaning-full space of the Museum, looking at objects and images of objects, looking at people and images of people, dozens of questionable little histories get activated. The stories combine and recombine, over time, in a virtually limitless "metanarrative" pattern.

Objects, texts, stories and characters are rucked and rubbed together so that little flames of fiction lick out pungently from a tinder of records, rumours and artefacts rummaged out of the everyday life of colonial Sydney, 1788 to 1850.

The Museum's "intertexts" do not present a conventional history. Nothing gets proved once and for all. No truths are established to put an end to argument. Rather, the Museum spooks out some uncommon memories and some wonderment from the tarnished old lamp of the past so that our present lives might be visible anew in brief flickers of revelation.

Therefore, the Museum is a place for your imagining. It is designed to let you wonder about some of the everyday experiences that have been overlooked in our conventional histories. For example, you might like to imagine how you could tell a history of Australian laughter. Or of Sydney sighs, groans or moans. Limps. Grunts. Agreements. Gestures of hello. Gestures of dismissal, seduction, or shame.

We have to *imagine* these ordinary mysteries now, because nobody thought to record them methodically in our past. Except for occasional slips of the pen, or nonchalant sketches, private collections or archaeological lucky dips, there is little in the official records that can help us catch fleeting experiences such as desire or repugnance. The way the past breathed is rarely noted explicitly in the evidentiary systems that historians customarily go to.

In the Museum, the multimedia gallery called *The Bond Store* is designed to help us muse up a better understanding of these everyday passions and actions. It is a kind of warehouse and seance-room where we might attach human character and voice to "dead" chattels that have been traded through Sydney. It is a haunting-place where we might hear some of the stories embedded in commodities that have touched peoples' past lives. And in addition to the stories themselves, we might see and hear versions of the bodily comportments -- the walks, gestures, vocal quavers, scars and breathing patterns -- that have been lodged in people in this place through time.

Versions of these unquantifiable, always-questionable experiences are offered for consideration. As the sounds and images configure and reconfigure in the multimedia programmes, fleeting minutiae of everyday life, pulsing rhythms, attractions and revulsions can be imagined, trusted, tested or dismissed with reference to information that is accruing and potentially always available. Visitors wander curiously around *The Bond Store*, and the ethereal culture of the place "responds" by "embodying" and telling some of the stories that have arisen from research into the material culture. Depending on the chancy contiguity of story to story as the visitors snoop about, unstable larger histories get knitted together out of the micro-histories. Therefore, during a thirty-minute period, let's say, a visitor can gather up a kind of demountable, questionable-yet-persuasive history, which is patently provisional and fleeting. The half-hour mesh of stories that you just "created" may not get constructed again. And if there were valuable meanings arising there for you, you must now be the custodian and communicator of them. In response to the slightly random, interactive space of the gallery, you become a provisional and sceptical historian.

Perhaps this sounds new and different. Actually, it is as old as communal narrative itself. As a friend quipped recently, an Aboriginal bark painting is as sophisticated a multi-media system as you could hope to find, with its spatially and temporally arrayed prompts (or "access windows") to hundreds of stories, songs, dances, gestures, paintings, journeys and data.¹⁰ What we're coordinating in the Museum is just another way to facilitate contentious communal interpretations of a habitable time-space. Deploying computational signals, the Museum is a series of sonic and imagistic prompts for remembering, imagining and arguing.

¹⁰ Thanks to Martin Harrison.

Digital images and sounds are astonishingly manipulable -- overlays, tonal changes, seamless reversals, and shape-shifting are all possible even as the results of the metamorphoses still look trustworthily photographic, despite the fact that they have been "written" not by light in the "real world" but by blips in mathematical programmes. As digital audiovisual programmes are becoming more common, it is ever more difficult to conceal the fact that photographic and cinematic realisms are not faithful indices or imprints of real events or objects. Representation professionals -- photographers, cinematographers, sound-designers, layout artists -- have known this for a long time. Lawyers have been disturbed to glimpse it for a decade or so. And now this fact is about to become popularly obvious: truth has always been a malleable set of contentions carefully administered by powerful classes of story-keepers. Because the systems for constructing the acceptance of truth are set to range about, truth is now poised to range about. "Validity in interpretation" (to borrow E.D. Hirsch's famous phrase) will be difficult to establish once the conventional documents of proof are no longer popularly believed to be inviolate.

This is causing both perturbation and celebration in the institutions that govern interpretation. Consider the ramifications for police work and criminal prosecution. Or take historians as another example. As a professional "class", academic historians have barely begun to know how to interpret the nineteenth-century photograph as a "document"; and now that large numbers of people are getting to manipulate digital information, it is becoming evident that the photorealist image (as well as the phonorealist sound) is principally a set of postures or propositions presented in a quaint style from the late nineteenth-century. The impression of reality that realism used to support will soon begin to fade in front of us.

Is this a crisis? Well it might be for people who need unimpeachable factuality. But it's also an *opportunity* for people interested in contending over interpretation. Here

is the great challenge of digitisation: suggestion and persuasion rather than unequivocal proof are now probably the best you can hope for when using imagistic and sonic "documentation" to present "truths" about the world.

So, the items of evidence themselves are becoming more "corrupt". What of the processes of interpretation that happen around these items? What redefinitions of "narrative" and "history" are required now that the public sphere is adorned with the digitisation and micronarrative patterning which sometimes dubbed "interactivity"?

Let me declare immediately that interactivity is *not* inherently a libertine, democratic experience (despite the rhetoric that hucksters use to sell themselves in relation to it). Interactive systems are *pre-selected* systems. Someone or some organisation has set the frames around carefully chosen data. Even so, the *negotiability* of the data and of the frame does get dramatised. One is still constrained by the chosen, available information, but one knows that the information is *relatively* unstable, *relatively* rearrangeable. Interactivity is thus *suggestive* of democratic procedures *relative* to the closed, directed and overwhelmingly directive sets of propositions that usually get driven into line by standard authorial narratives.

This notion of relativity is crucial when interactivity is brought to historiography. And it is particularly germane in Australia, in this place and time where so many realities are attempting to relate on the contentious ground. With so much incontrovertible evidence of "otherness" in "our" midst now, and with so much evidence of the culpability of evidence, we are becoming more savvy about how relative differences are presently constitutive of everyday life in Australia. Moreover, it is increasingly apparent that the *past* everyday life in Australia must also be understood to be definitively unruly with relativity. One can see now that for hundreds of years, if not thousands, Australian realities have been contested and negotiated. And a digital, interactive museum, with its

dubious evidentiary systems and its reconfigurable narratives, is well-placed to prompt more of this "endemic" negotiability of meaning.

Such "historical volatility" has made me wonder about the *information* that is said to issue from the highways and byways of the digital world. It seems clear that once the binary blips are arranged into patterns of narration and speculation, they give rise not to information, but to *knowledge*. I take this distinction from Walter Benjamin's great essay on storytelling and tutelage¹¹ in which he writes of the endlessly reorganising system of awareness that gets developed in "apprenticeship" modes of learning. This regime, where the master tells tutorial stories improvisationally in response to vocational puzzles and challenges, is contrasted with training routines that are "skills-based" and bolstered with written instruction manuals which assume (almost always wrongly) that the object to be learned is a static, inert thing. Benjamin implies that *information* is the mortar of immobile complacency in an unchanging system, whereas *knowledge* is a currency for enquiring and negotiating in an unpredictable world. Knowledge is the currency which gets generated out of experience remembered and proposed in a myriad stories about fleeting versions of masterly activity in the changeable world-to-be-known. Knowledge never stops, whereas information gets poured out and then sets.

Accordingly, *historical* knowledge might propose a contentious set of feelings for the pulses of power and emotion that have shaped everyday life through the past. Historical knowledge might be an unstable, unending store of narratives that "ring true" occasionally and temporarily. Such shifty storytelling will never establish conclusive understanding. Nor does it aim to. Rather, narrated expertise -- the enchantment of a place and its puzzles -- is always looking and listening to stimulate an urgent, doubtful meditation on the unsettled status of the "audience". The people looking and listening then become aware of themselves as *somewhat* authorial in contention with the larger

¹¹ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller: Reflections on the Works of Nikolai Leskov" in his *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt, New York: Schocken Books, 1969.

forces which also vie to arrange the experiential world, forces such as political power, climate, disease, economics, and the various configurations of yearning and revulsion that cause social action.

Historical knowledge prompted by digital and interactive systems cannot be classified as verifiable, reliable or responsible. It does not accord well with the strictures of historical method. But as we learn more about the other past-stories -- indigenous histories, criminal histories, outsiders' histories -- which can still be imagined and retrieved and which were never documented for conventional historiographical purposes, we drift ever closer to declaring that orthodox history often gets in the way of the stories that really matter here and now. The more we learn how dubious and open-ended our past-stories are, the more we are compelled to argue with the frames of realistic information that have been set as walls against our knowledge.

As always, our own liberties, thoughts and feelings must be seized and tended for our own purposes. And even as governmental and commercial powers seek to commandeer the new audio-visual technologies, right now no-one can tell anyone else exactly what is going on in the world of representation. And speaking historically, it's also increasingly difficult to prove what *was* going on in everyday lives of our past. For the moment, we're fortunate enough to have new ways of seeing and hearing which compel us to distrust our eyes and ears. This may be disenchanting to traditional historians, but it is also stimulating to our more changeful narrators of the past.

In the long run, therefore, I have been trying to make some sense of the Pilliga and Sydney Cove (and of Australia and postcolonialism therefore), here in words and elsewhere in sounds and images. This will be an endless project, but in looking to conclude for the moment, I want to call up a very different tract of enchantment: the Alabama dust bowl of James Agee's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Agee's farmland

is a long way from Rolls' timber country or the ghost-Sydney that the Museum conjures, but the quest-to-know is similar in each case, and Agee's words seem right for an ending which is restless enough also to be a beginning:

let me hope the whole of that landscape we shall essay to travel in is visible and may be known as there all at once; let this be borne in mind, in order that, when we descend among its windings and blockades, into examination of slender particulars, this its wholeness and simultaneous living map may not be neglected, however lost the breadth of the country may be in the winding walk of each sentence.¹²

So long as such uneasy, relational orienteering continues, the past will stay contentiously alive in the present. This is one way to enchant the present.

¹²James Agee, *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, first published 1941, reprinted London: Picador Classic, 1988, p.111.