Painted Records of Place: a return to lived experience and systematics

Sue Michael
Artist in Residence, Adaption, Community and Environment Research Group, School of Social Sciences, Department of Geography, Environment and Population, University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia, 5005.
E-mail: smichael@westnet.com.au
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Abstract
Explorers in earlier centuries utilised visual artists’ skills in drawing and painting geographical records. A particular branch of Visual Art was melded with Geography and constituted the early transdisciplinary relationships that this paper now draws inspiration from, to supplement the recent forays geographers have taken into installations, video and digital representations. This paper explores the ways in which art and geography as two disciplines can work together. Using the systematic triadic approach to place developed by Geographer David Seamon, I use my own artwork to show how the links between art and geography via place relationships can be constituted and which incorporate interactions, identity, creative expansion, concentration, order and freedoms; all potential painters’ themes. The paper concludes that these approaches can help artist-as geographers to develop new ways of thinking about and seeing place. If solutions are to be found with regard to climate challenges, the cementing of logical, scientific analysis with intuitive, imaginative, creativity may offer more some options, and pathways to resolution.

Keywords
Interdisciplinary, Place studies, Genre painting, Systematics.

Genre painting as an archive
This essay has brought together various shards of knowledge to analyse the melding of geographical thinking and genre painting (the painting of everyday life) in their shared interests in environmental awareness, and the associated complexities of place. According to humanistic geographers, place is more than a physical location; rather, it is a uniquely experienced site of phenomena in which meaning is inscribed. Thus, perceptions, experiences, senses, and memories of human dwelling are attached to a location (Henderson, 2009, pp. 539–541). It is presumed that the act of painting scenes of everyday life allows open ended explorations and deep thought concerning place. A survey of Victorian senior secondary school students revealed that geography was listed as the 24th most favoured subject in their final year, at a time when there are almost daily articles reporting climate challenges (Victorian Education Assessment, 2018). This suggests a need to further connect to young people concerning the complexities of place and climate change. Many newspapers share research findings, or interviews with the public, reporting shifting weather patterns, stresses placed on flora and fauna, landform changes, and difficulties in sourcing supplies of drinking water. This essay suggests that artworks can seek to highlight a holistic approach to promote environmental awareness in urgent times and argues that painting, in particular, can be reinvigorated within geography, to join the photographic and video contributions made by these commonly utilised practices.

Art not separated
I have a background in nursing that has shaped my current viewing position as an artist-as-geographer. My
present concerns for my parched and dying garden, during a time of low rainfall, may well parallel an earlier approach to patient care, for there is a particular way of thinking that shapes nursing practices. As a 22-year old, I remember there were three consecutive nights assigned to a disoriented patient in an Intensive Care setting. This patient had liver damage which had caused multiple complications. There was a complex system and chain of events at work as this patient began to return to health, and as a nurse I was required to apply skills gained in training – a careful focus on the outward signs, a sort of unbeknown, first person phenomenology. Analytical skills were also used to determine why changes were happening. It would often become evident that one physiological system was intricately linked to another. In the case of this life-threatening episode it would be easy to see the surface behaviour and its management difficulties, and not penetrate the problem enough to consider the biochemical rationale ‘lurking beneath the surface’. Similarly, artists can present their own assumptive opinions, own feelings, imaginings, inventive thoughts, like a visitor casually walking past and looking into the above-mentioned hospital room, but for me this superficial approach has been rejected. In order to dive into those deeper understandings of my chosen locations for paintings, I aimed to become a place researcher, with aspirations to find the rationales that accompany and bring meaning to place making. This paper explores the ways in which art and geography can be brought together to contribute to our connection to place and ideas about place making.

Inspiration from the past

First, art offers a lens through which to interpret and see different constructions of place, which in turn help us understand how we arrive, in the here and now, to our appreciation (or not) of place. There is great value in viewing paintings of earlier patterns of settlement where people’s actions and the resultant consequences were documented. Reports from early Select Committees in Sydney (Clark, 1955, p. 673) describe the living conditions of the working classes in 1860:

A block of twenty or twenty-five wretched hovels affords shelter for perhaps one hundred human beings. The rooms, two in number, are ten or eleven feet square, and scarcely high enough for a man to stand erect; the floor is lower than the ground outside; the rain comes in through the roof, and filth of all kinds washes in at the doors; the court or yard, that is common to all, is covered with pollution that all must endure, and inside and out, everything is an object of disgust [...] In smaller groups there is no provision for greater comfort.

During that time there would have potentially been only a few sketches rather than large paintings made of such scenes: this report was perhaps the extent of formal data collection. I suggest a sketch can also orientate a viewer to the edges and singular characteristics of a place, such as the above descriptions provide, where experience is not possible. Whilst current statistics, graphs, and analytical data are indispensable within the research environment, images may also carry similar sorts of understandings to a general viewer, even without an artists’ formal geography training.

Art critic Lucy Lippard (born 1937) argues that significant artwork is often undertaken by transient artists who notice the special qualities embedded in the everyday and who restore these qualities to those of whom created those aspects of place (Lippard, 1997, p. 36). Travelling Artist Samuel Thomas Gill (1818–1880) painted the Mid North during the busy copper mining booms (1841–1877) in Kapunda and Burra, which are described in the 1849 drawing Kapunda Copper Mine (Figure 1). Neat rows of European-style housing have been sketched, occupying an untidy and newly formed landscape.

Local Ngadjuri people are pictured watching the housing rows from within a grove of tree stumps, which is suggestive of South Australia’s widespread stripping of vegetation by private landholders during the nineteenth century (Williams, 1974, p. 25). Historian Michael Williams (1935–2009) suggested that the original natural landscape was thought by the pioneers to be ‘dreary and horrid, repulsive and monstrous, valueless and by no means cheery’ (Williams, 1974, p. 12).

Gill’s untidy landscape and displaced Aboriginal people present viewers with an alternate view to a replicated parkland-like settlement, which was common to European landscape paintings of the period. The manager’s house is elevated in this sketch, like a supernumerary insert, as it is not the focus of the work. Gill’s scene provides a conceptually wider view of place than the more popular images reflecting a relocation of a Cornish or Welsh mining town. His moral imagination has introduced a degree of sensitivity, intention, judgement, and perversity to his visual documentation of Kapunda. This approach to documentation is consistent with historian Alan Atkinson’s recent reassessment of Australia – through the people’s common imagination. Atkinson (born 1946) observed that early Australians ‘took the circumstances as they found them’ and were ‘more like crabs with the incoming tide instead of ants with
their organized traffic and communication pathways’ (Atkinson, 2004, p. 339). Gill’s work reveals this sort of fluid honesty, allowing the reality of information to grace his works.

Geographer Donald Meinig (born 1924) (Meinig, 1970, p. 221) suggests that the era within which Gill was painting coincided with:

[...] a new organization of the land, the creation of new resources out of nature’s materials, the spread of a new volume of population, new networks of route ways, new pulses and patterns of circulation [...] a radical new geography.

Gill documented life as it was, despite the painting fashions of the time, and which art historian and curator Sasha Grishin describes (Grishin, 2015) as ‘hankering for glowing romantic or picturesque landscapes’. In exploring a time of irreversible social changes, Gill was, as Grishin suggests, Australia’s first painter of modern life offering an alternative depiction of geographical landscape at the time.

Painting and place

Artists, however, do not just bring history to life, they bring emphasis to place studies. The painter shifts formal elements in an image, whether they be through the use of vivid or dull colours, strongly defined or hazy line, repeated shapes, repeated patterns, or variations between the sense of scale in a scene. The process of abstraction can alter details that can simplify a scene and thus potentially clear the path for understandings by the viewer. A painting can bring about an appreciation of the absence or celebration of place, a sense of unity where elements of the scene have been brought together, and a sense of calm balance or provocation in response to a scene. Atmospheres can dominate in their representations, and acuity can be brought to previously barely emphasised aspects of life. A series of painted works can connect geography to the social world and become part of community life. The painter can present observations, or suggest further analysis, or provide triangulated revelations previously unknown, and this can potentially extend their representations beyond the need for the painter to present only their own stories or self-expression. These are all painters’ strengths that may accompany their inherent intellectual freedoms.

To bring emphasis to a representation is to provide a point of contrast, and I argue that the artist can bring together elements that have not previously rested together to reforge connections to place. This is a very precious gift; seasons can be mixed, history can be re-engaged, potentials can be brought to
The painter has the freedom to forward any combination of ideas. There is much listening in art, for the quiet, ‘inner’ voice leads to a ‘surer footing’, and this highlights the spiritual and cosmological potentials in any contribution shared with other disciplines. There is waiting, and revisiting, and the potentially valuable use of a heuristic filter to help sort information. The next section shares the way the artists’ freedoms can be aligned with the work of Human Geographer David Seamon (born 1948) and reflects on the connection between and power of the art-geography nexus.

Case study

My heuristic foundation is concerned with positive adaptations to the climate. Rather than drawing upon my own memories, I sought a systematic, theoretical foundation that would be holistic. Several bodies of work have inspired my understanding of place. Seamon’s practical applications of philosophical thought to place studies have a long lineage. His work can be traced back to the mathematical and quantum science understandings of the greater universe, contributed by J.G. Bennett (1897–1974). Bennett’s four volume work The Dramatic Universe has renewed interest in the community at the time of writing, for it provides a template to align spiritual concerns with the consideration of the earth (Bennett, 1997). Bennett was a student of George Gurdjieff (1866–1949) and was influenced by Gurdjieff’s inclusion of self-examination, ancient knowledge, and interconnections, often visualised in the diagrammatic device called the enneagram (Seamon, 2017, pp. 170–172). A century earlier, the consideration of interconnections with nature were also importantly considered by two companions: writer and statesman Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), and explorer and geographer Alexander von Humboldt (1769–1859) (Wulf, 2015, pp. 25–38). Above all, I have found inspiration from Aboriginal thought, where there is a belief that there is no separation between people and the natural world. The search for these larger, more spiritual inclusions when considering place, may be the result of the perceived loss of balance between humans’ care of the earth and the prioritisation of human needs, in the age of the Anthropocene, and a personal momentum to move beyond such ideologies.

This essay will now display paintings of regional locations in South Australia that have been sorted into David Seamon’s approach to place. Seamon, amongst others, is reinvigorating Humanistic Geographer Yi-fu Tuan’s early 1970s work on place to promote an empathetic, holistic observation of the world as-it-is (Seamon, 2014, p. 45). Seamon’s framework of the systems at work within place offers three inseparable forces that combine in various configurations as a triadic approach to place. First, there is the lifeworld, synonymous with the taken-for-granted world, where habits, actions, and attitudes are experienced as a whole (Seamon, 2014, p. 37). Second, the local geographic ensemble or material environment, whether consisting of person-made or natural features, influences place. The final force is the genius loci or atmospheric characteristics of place. The triadic approach arranges the three forces into six different processes; one force initiates an action, the next mediates whilst the remaining force reconciles (Seamon, 2012, p. 12). The three forces are interchangeable, but their presence is a constant in place processes. The six processes are all found in successful place making in any location and may help to understand reasons for place destruction. For example, perhaps an arid location dictates the mood or genius loci of a location: the dry plains and lack of trees or verdant vegetation may present a certain mood to a visitor. It may be too difficult to change the geographic ensemble, to grow tulip beds, or to build fountains. Perhaps people are unwilling to change their garden’s design, knowing years without rain may be common. The mood is, thus, directly linked to place, and the destruction of place. Seamon’s framework contributes originality to genre painting and the wider discipline of visual art as it has brought to the fore extended, preparatory understanding of the underlying forces at work in experiences of place. It is important to understand that experiences of place are not products only of the imagination, but blended, reproducible factual observations (Hodgson, 2006). There is a reminder that the triadic approach, with its geographic thinking, is just one of many approaches to exploring the meanings within place, for the artist can also draw on personal sentiments, memories, knowledge of history and stories.

I have mapped my artwork against the triadic themes, as they are as easily applied to daily life as well as the academe. In applying this technique, I find that every place I explored in my art, has aspects of each of the six triads operating simultaneously; in real-life settings, these processes cannot be easily separated (Seamon, 2012). Therefore, I argue that the application of these triads in art can help disentangle, without completely separating, people from their places. The triads thus become a mechanism by which to understand place, both holistically and appreciatively, at various locations.
while incorporating various scales, from a kitchen table to a valley. A summary of the triads is shown in Table 1.

Findings

Triadic Theme 1: interaction

The term ‘interaction’ refers to a reciprocal or mutual influence. The following artworks have examined both human and the natural world’s interaction through gardening. The triadic process entails willing people in place to attend to the atmospheres and characteristic moods within their garden, thus, resulting in a new geographic ensemble. A painter can assist to release concealed meanings in place by providing descriptions of narratives and specific activities. This garden in the country town depicted in The Electric Universe at Eudunda (2018) (Figure 2) has an expanse of dirt that is suggestive of local conditions that are to be overcome.

The various shade-cloth structures covering vegetables, stakes and alfoil plates are details that a viewer may not necessarily know about, but direct viewer’s emotions to an appreciation of resourceful, creative, local adaptations. It is a record of the seasonal activities, for there are suggestions of the cleared vegetable beds, seedlings and plants ready for harvesting; there may be potential for such scenes to reinstate, emphasise and archive these cultural aspects of local community life. The waves of energy depicted in the sky suggest a felt but not clearly seen world.

Sketches, too, hold a special place, for they can locate details of sentinel objects, favoured sites (as seen in Figure 3) with well-worn paths, and relationships between objects and cultural practices, like sunbaths, within a garden.

Triadic Theme 2: identity

Seamon asserts that ‘through repeating an action, skill, routine, or situation, it becomes a part of who and what we are – our identity as an individual or group’ (Seamon, 2012, p. 8). The triadic approach suggests that a geographic ensemble requires the reconciliation of atmospheres that can shape the people in place. The climate challenges within South Australia, with its week-long heatwaves, or the sudden storms that bring torrential rains, may shape us. Perhaps there is a pattern within ourselves that parallels these climate rhythms, where resilience is summoned during summer heatwaves, as well as an acknowledgement that sudden climate events, such as flash flooding and bushfires, may require our vigilance. This could be seen as a sort of rhythm to life here, just as those who live in tornado prone environments, or where roads may be coated with black ice in Winter, may be psychologically and physically shaped by their local geography. The following images of interiors were used as a way to highlight how the geography shapes the dwellers at home. For example, artificial flowers, knee rugs, and floral curtains seemed to be a response, or perhaps a counterweight, to geographical conditions such as drought and cold winters. Place making was perceived as flexible with a wide variety of decorating styles, cleanliness, degrees of clutter and uses for furniture. Philologist and literary critic Erich Auerbach’s (1892–1957) warnings on writers’ viewing positions (Auerbach, 2013, pp. 27, 137, 278, 272, 290) were avoided; subjective gushing, scenes set apart from the common ‘herd’, formless plethora of erudition, countless allusions with intermingling experiences and the skipping of intermediate stages of reasoning. It may be prudent for the painter to study such considerations of viewing positions, for it may assist in overcoming subjective, imagined, or potentially narrow points of view.

The painter can modify a scene and focus on making knowledge accessible by forwarding alternative views to popular culture’s treatment of interiors. Scenes such as The Mice Have Eaten the Soap (2014) (Figure 4) offer difference in our viewing by choosing to represent hungry mice in a rural setting, as well as differences in viewing perspectives by the use of multiple viewing positions in the one composition. Two rooms have been joined together, although there is recognition that it is a home despite the unusual, central doorway. An antique mouse trap has been added to the composition, allowing a historical artefact to take part in contemporary thought. These are artistic devices to make knowledge accessible, especially if it has been languishing, with an aim to change existing thinking about dwellers’ environmental relationships. Another device is the use of warm, harmonising pink hues so that an image of a potentially unpleasant subject matter can be made alluring and perhaps suggestive of a mood where the perils are overcome.

Repeated abstractions as seen in the Sketches of Peterborough House (Figure 5) allow the artist to remove distracting, insipid, meaningless or anodyne information and thus influence how the scene is thought about (Wollheim, 1987, p. 23). In these quickly painted sketches, the idea of a large television upon an added pantry within a small kitchen was reflective of a phenomenon sensed, appreciated and
Table 1. Summary of David Seamon's six triadic processes inherent in place.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Seamon’s key place themes</th>
<th>Flow of place processes</th>
<th>Specific characteristics to consider in this triad</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interaction: focuses on the life-world</td>
<td>People begin the process, the atmosphere is reconciling, and the final geographic ensemble has to be renegotiated. The genius locus mediates and balances the place processes</td>
<td>Endless flow of interlocking events, the everyday goings on, both active and passive are brought into relationship through reconciliation. A place's typical unfolding that often goes unnoticed. It is a two-way process rather than one way. It can be between individuals or groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity: focuses on the life-world</td>
<td>The geographic ensemble initiates the process. Once again, the atmosphere negotiates, so that people will change. The genius loci mediate and balances the place processes</td>
<td>One becomes who they are typically through repeating an action, skill, or situation. This repetition can be about how people living in a place connect and recognise the place as part of their individual or collective identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expansion/release: focuses on the geographic ensemble</td>
<td>People begin the process, the local geographic ensemble must be flexible so that a new atmosphere can be formed. The genius loci are created as a result of the place processes</td>
<td>Expansion is about thoughtful citizens, public decision makers, and professionals who add knowledge to a place, contributing to a transforming atmosphere, ambience or character. It requires thoughtful connections to manipulate the geographic ensemble into the improved atmospheric outcome. The genius loci are no longer the mediator but the outcome</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concentration/intensification: focuses on the geographic ensemble</td>
<td>The exclusive attention is given to one thing, assembling it in one area, with a specified intensity and duration. The geography dictates the circumstances, with the people instrumental in creating a new atmosphere. The genius loci are created as a result of the place processes</td>
<td>It is a process and actions whereby progress is possible. The geographic ensemble that began the process is hopefully progressed, creating a new atmosphere, though this is not always accomplished</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Order/realisation: focuses on the genius loci</td>
<td>The atmosphere spurs on the willing people to act on their place making, so they can create a new geographic ensemble. The genius loci initiates the place processes</td>
<td>Why everything has to be as it is, acting through affirmation. Places unique qualities are perhaps logical and comprehensible. Order may be associated with constancy and determinism, without sudden, uncontrolled, unreasonable, and unpredictable notions. By acting though proper functioning a sense of order is achieved in the new geographic ensemble</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Freedom/creation: focuses on the genius loci</td>
<td>Once again, the atmosphere dictates and initiates place processes, by pressing in and shaping the geographic attributes. In the end the people are changed. The genius loci initiates the place processes</td>
<td>Points to the ways in which people become more themselves, and develop belonging and self-worth as they find their sense of place. This triad helps to alert as to why the world does not have to be set, that there are creative openings that perhaps would not happen elsewhere</td>
</tr>
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</table>
now shown, for it marks a place that differs from the usual. There may be universal qualities of kitchens, but this added pantry suggests a specific singularity of place. We can see, even though these are simple semi-abstracted sketches, who the people are, rather than what they are aspiring to. A direct perception at the site has been shared, to counter what the general public may think they know about creative adaptions; it is on-the-spot reportage of lived experience, rather than what I have imagined.
At times, the viewer can sense and perhaps worry about the artist’s intentions, especially when artworks are emotionally provoking, have an exaggerated scale, or introduce unusual variations. In these small sketches, I have directed attention to the lived experience and unfolding improvements observed in the surrounding world. It is as if there has been a documentation of the move from a space to a place, the repeated drawings akin to the nurse staying three shifts with the one patient and understanding the complexities, adjusting viewing positions and offering gestures that facilitate a sensitive appreciation of that place. In this case, I stood on the sidelines, observed with an ‘empty openness’, and then made a visual argument; life-as-it-is has been located, simplified in the representations and thus documented as an archive.

**Triadic Theme 3: expansion/release**

The expansion triad begins when active people in place can create altered geographic ensembles that then potentially lead to new atmospheres. Indeed, people are the more changeable and dynamic factor between
a location and its special atmospheres in Seamon’s place processes. Homemade building improvements remind us that place fosters processes of ongoing change, like buildings themselves. Vernacular architecture has been documented in the following paintings where locally available materials and practical designs both carried recurring regional qualities. As Australian architect Phillip Cox (born 1939) reminds us (Cox, 2010), the scenes of vernacular architecture provide an insight into people’s imagination: ‘the delight of vernacular architecture cannot be underestimated; it lies at the root of understanding a nation, a region and its people. That is what makes the world interesting’.

_Shed Curtain, Whyte-Yarcowie_ (2016) (Figure 6) reveals an atmosphere suggestive of the mundane, yet focus has been given to a degree of local creativity that accompanies architectural possibility. Perhaps the children needed a skateboard ramp, the old sink had to be moved closer to transport, and a new protective cover found for the boat. The use of vivid orange paint on the representation of the shed curtain helps to focus meaning on it, thus, asking why and how it was there and emphasising its unique, innovative and homemade quality. This painting can assist in writing the history and evolving culture of the area, even with its small but detailed aspects of everyday life.

Concerning the depiction of domestic buildings in _Pt. Germein Outbuildings_ (2018) (Figure 7) responsibility was purposely taken to present paintings that avoided an impression of decay, instead the bright repurposed bathroom vanity with accompanying interior tiles becomes a focal point. The scene was not imbued with a sacred air, nor of ruin; instead it aims to be a record of local ingenuity. Several similar backyard locations in the town were collaged together in preparation for this actual painting; this scene is located in the town of Port Germein but is never to be found.

**Triadic Theme 4: concentration/realisation**

Scenes of domestic restorations in relation to temperature extremes have informed a triadic theme of concentration. Concentration is a sort of opening of oneself to nature, to listen respectfully to what it ‘has to say’ and to see its core aspects (Bortoft, 2007, p. 54). The triad begins with a particular setting that requires people in place to be active so that a new atmosphere is possible.

The paintings discussed in this section provide descriptions that move into the realm of _ur-phenomenon_, a term Goethe used to describe the primordial, basic and elemental aspects of phenomena (Bortoft, 2007, pp. 22–23). Trust in dwellers’ own modification capabilities is documented in this series of paintings in which people, plants and animals must grapple with temperature extremes and destructive forces that accompany storms. Tuan’s reminder (Tuan, 2011, p. 103) that ‘humble events can be seeds of lasting sentiment’ suggests the possibility of an outgrowth of emotions that were not previously apparent. The collective register of a place may be increased if the taken-for-granted lifeworld is perceived by an artist.

Painting can promote a visceral response within the viewer, and the extensive spread of dusty earth around the home shown in _Marree House_ (2019) (Figure 8) may help the viewer to understand winter in an arid climate. The title is an important way to

Figure 6: Michael, S. 2016, _Shed Curtain, Whyte-Yarcowie_, acrylic on canvas, 60 x 120 cm, private collection.
impart additional information such as pinpointing the surprising season. Concurrently I also included a wide variety of objects in the yard, all suggestive of being social sites in this house’s yard: a place of significance for residents.

Another painting – the house in Beach Shack, Second Valley (2016) (Figure 9) is shielded from gully breezes by a line of pines and holds numerous rainwater tanks close to the home. These aspects are suggestive of strong winds and a need for self-sufficient water supplies, therefore express conditions of possibility, practical coping mechanisms, and discrete, hidden logic that promotes a life made more comfortable, if not survivable. The tanks are not secondary but essential items, and this representation reinforces a viewing position that looks past purely ornamental objects or status-seeking architectural representations and gives attention to universal concerns – for the benefit of urban viewers of such genre paintings.

Geography can be connected to the everyday social world through these depictions. Painted lived experience can be done without being partial, imposing, focussed on fanfare, or fear-filled degradation. The representation of examples of lived experience, if given a thoughtful and comprehensive context, may be enough to encourage understandings of place.

Visits to numerous deserted towns with starkly exposed cellar ruins stirred personal reminders of jams, pickles, ginger beer, and green groceries, which were stored in family cellars, and provided the momentum to paint architectural features that were once important. Indeed, cellars may have once made life survivable, thus, affirming their adaptive importance. Cellar Love (2014) (Figure 10) features an abstracted
and stylised representation that was developed from a series of photographs of a home in regional South Australia. Bold red emphasises the location of the usually concealed cellar and asserts their evolutionary noteworthiness in such a hot and dry location. This imaginative element is restrained and concurrently operates as a fictive reality, a philosophical device used in art and literature where virtual worlds grounded in truth are made but make no claims that undermine the works as fiction (Baggini and Fosl, 2010, p. 69). They treat reality in their own terms, and cannot easily be classified as truth, a hoax or non-fiction.

**Triadic Theme 5: freedom/place release**

The following paintings are concerned with a prevailing mood of a location and how a flexibility with the geographical circumstances can shape the people of the district. This adjustment to the atmosphere or mood has shaped their identity and, importantly, provided them with opportunities that may not be possible in other places. Freedom in this triad can be associated with shaping forces that may have been ruinous for some. This fact reveals the value of triadic understandings of place, as they can pinpoint
weaknesses that may potentiate place destruction, such as when natural forest dwellers are not motivated to explore the freedoms or benefits inherent in that place, but prefer extensive logging. Another ‘weak’ point in this triad of freedom may be when new geographic realities occur that may drastically change the freedoms enjoyed in a location. A clear example can be found after the 1905 formation of the Salton Sea in California, after an accidental man-made breach of the Colorado river led to ongoing changes in local settlement patterns there, ruptures that continue to this present time. When considering the freedoms of place there is the idea that dwellers could attend to their daily lives in a way that others could not do, for the singularities and particular atmospheres of place dictate conditions to those people. Their social activities, daily routines, or particular cultural practices may have been given particular latitudes due to their surroundings.

Discussions and discourse may be hard to reach when the subjects, such as a home-made dressage ring for horses, are far away from society’s interest. Yet, in this painting, the *Horse Ring, Yongala* (2018) (Figure 11) I assert more than a theoretical concern about place, to forward the idea of social capital where make-do living, imagination and hopefulness have been brought into form, in this somewhat remote town. There is a suggestion that a sort of sensitive lyricism has been quietly used, rather than brutally so, to refresh the viewer with the potential activities within place. The intentions, skills, and creativity of the maker of this ring have been recorded, and the painting has included all the ring’s informality and untidiness, rather than a taxonomical, carefully mapped, design. The convivial spirit of the ring has been matched by my heuristic filter of joyous discovery. This sort of record of life-as-it-is can potentially accrue regional, social meaning over time, more so, because it is not a record of the artist’s individual imaginings. It can also become a record, or a point from which to triangulate information, when viewing the district over time.

Building on this theme of freedoms within place, my childhood visit to the summit of Mt. Kosciusko, the highest peak in Australia, is depicted in *Top of Australia, Tobogganing. Mt. Kosciusko* (2008) (Figure 12). It may be the inspiration for a re-enactment of a set *a priori* vision, where, as a child, without fully formed intellectual or spiritual ‘filters’, I felt the profound sanctity of the location, along with the other visitors, without the need for evidence, or verification of that striking atmosphere. There are dangers to consider as geographer Harriet Hawkins (b. 1980) argues that a site is not an instrumental resource for the enactment of artists’ applied ideological agendas; this warns them to avoid ‘overt antagonism, smoothing over relations, [or] covering over differences’ (Hawkins, 2014, pp. 103, 166). This is a reminder that the painter may be required to leave particular agendas, viewpoints, and interests to the side, and to embrace what that site presents to them. In a similar way, this artwork has utilised memories combined with the, now, adult perception of nature’s presence in this scene, prior to the task of painting, there by combining intuitive and careful scientific consideration of what place, itself, may be. There was no ideological agenda within the preparations of this work. While my memories of the conceptual connections with nature, especially when formed in childhood, may be too partial, emotionally loaded and subjective; when painting as...
a place researcher; awareness of such momentums is useful. The pixelated shards of colour in this work seem to remind us of the ever-moving elements of place – that place cannot be fixed or remain as we perceived it in earlier decades. The vast landscape also suggests freedoms for visitors, for there are not many barriers here with which to prevent communion with natural forces. The larger scale of this work helps infuse a feeling of vastness. The road is closed to the summit now; there is no easy passage by car for the general public. The painting of this modest exploration on the summer summit, by family groups, even children, reinforces the idea that the meanings of place can build in profound ways, and across many decades.

**Triadic Theme 6: order/intensification**

This triad begins with a prevailing mood within a location that requires activity from people so that a new geography can be brought into being. In my opinion Australia seems to experience strong atmospheric conditions that dictate or initiate place processes. During regional fieldtrips, I found that ‘order’ was manifest via an acceptance of drought and what appeared as the ‘natural lore’ of the area: the capacity to and determination that one must prepare for nature’s challenges. By recording tangible evidence of people’s celebratory attitudes despite living in a drought-prone expanse, artists can then add to a collective register of such places.

For example, the sketch *Marree Camel Races* (2018) (Figure 13) depicts a race meeting at the remote town of Marree and presents particulars such as the dust that billows as a consequence of several years without rain in the district. Locals have made their own stories of survival under these drought conditions. At such a gathering of tourists and locals, special provisions are made regarding the use of water other than the local artesian water, that is not suitable for drinking. Feed must be brought in for the animals. Dust must be cleaned off equipment that was hired. In turn, the artist must be open to surprises and new aspects of local lived experience, not previously understood.

Just as portable water storage, stock feed and hygiene facilities are a new geographical ensemble, the shade cast by a pergola is also a new geography in the backyard depicted in *Outdoor Room* (2013) (Figure 14). By depicting the pots close to the backdoor where the specially valued plants grew, and a section of the surrounding plains and hills, a context is given for this lush green shade. Emphasis has been given by the simple choice of neutral,
earthly colours that contrast with the more luminous green paint hues.

A comparison with the same image rendered in a grey scale (Figure 15), allows for a differential assessment of colour within images. If the pergola was imagined as a less vibrant and somewhat olive infused, light green that matched the light tones of the surrounding earth, again, the viewer’s perceptions of the shaded area would potentially be changed. The choice of colours, tones, textures, lines, and repeated shapes all relate to what the artist wants to say. This paper wishes to, again, reinforce the benefits of extended understandings of place, prior to painting.

Applying Seamon’s triadic themes to art as a mechanism to explore geographies of place was difficult to master but has become a grounded method by which to deploy the power of observation. Essentially, a triadic framework allowed for understanding the negotiated environmental relationships inherent in place, thus, providing a new approach upon which to reflect.

Discussion: encouraging art as a way of thinking

As these painted examples display, the inclusion of an artist in place studies asserts the role of more heuristic momentum where a filter of appreciation and joyous recognition of adaptive domestic practices can be highlighted and shared with wider audiences than academia. The artist can transfer emotion to the audience, and thus help to forward the importance of geographic thought, if they so wish. The examples of images presented in this paper highlight the benefits of exploring homes, nature fieldtrips, surveys of historical displays and material culture. The artist interested in a particular region, whilst looking for the meanings inherent in place, could study the feel of locations,
sensory inputs, its limits of place, and incorporate memory into their assessments. Semantics could also be a consideration, as birds repetitively swooped to investigate my artistic activities on location; a sign that there are multiple viewing positions to consider. The artistic approach to place exploration requires slow contemplation to a point where one would also grasp what the location needed of the artist. This idea aligns with geographer John Cameron’s (b. 1951) studies of phenomenology, and the importance of open reception and skilled recording of perceptions within a location, over time (Cameron, 2005). For me, whilst sitting amongst my locations of choice I listened to the sound of what seemed to be a quiet planetary broadcast.

There are many instances of communication other than the use of words: you can enter a dry riverbed in a gorge, traverse over the rounded rocks to find the best indentation to dig for the hidden water table. The tallest trees will guide you from afar. A trail of insects, birds and animals will also signal a close proximity to hidden water. In the same way, artists with the stamina to metaphorically look for the ‘hidden’ may be of use to geographers. ‘Painting the hidden’ may be some sort of inclusion within a manifesto for an artist-as-geographer. When the water is found, the creatures take turns to drink; this is another metaphor for transdisciplinary actions, for nature does not seem to force particular goals, and generally leaves room for all to refresh themselves.

I argue that the paint box is a potential tool for interface, linkage, and unification of ideas. One can paint in a gesture of a sort of devotional outreach, for a garden, for a specific home, to capture a street, provide a sense of phenomenological measure of a valley, or to archive a region as a whole with a lifetime of an artist’s work. The paint box allows licence for a user to roam, but also dictates where it would like to be utilised. These intuitive impulses, harnessed by artists, can relate directly to the perceived atmospheres of place.

Anthropologist Justin Armstrong has extended his understanding of places by using art photography and video to document the traces of the past that are still active components of local atmospheres in the Badlands of Northern America (Armstrong, 2010). The loneliness he portrays is palpable. In a different sort of activation, John Cameron (b. 1951) speaks of daily visits to the Cornish coast to allow phenomenological understandings of those meanings within place (Cameron, 2005). This mirrors working routines of artists such as Scottish Painter Duncan Shanks (b. 1937), who has painted his local ‘lowland hills’ in the Clyde Valley, through all seasons, noting the movement of the birds, the seasonal foliage, and the lie of the changing landscape.

If a geographer had a particular interest in a region, what potential mutual benefits may be possible in a partnership with a local artist? Envisagement may be abstracted or hazy if such scenes are drawn only from a memory, but the artist can provide suggestions of a way of life and how people coped with the challenges within their places.

Further, what do people not know? Is there something more to share? When concerned with climate change, has the atmosphere of reciprocal maintenance between people and their natural environment been observed and interpreted? Is there evidence of positive adptions within modest, accumulative actions, by ordinary citizens? Has overlooked domestic culture been brought to the surface? These considerations were the final reflections within this study and these same questions could be asked of paintings made of Intensive care settings – atmospheres, interactions, hidden aspects are there for the artist to grasp and add to a considered study of place.
Noetic Scientist, Dean Radin (b. 1952) describes the links between our thoughts and the material world (Radin, 2018, p. 210):

Throughout science and scholarship, a basic principle of Perennial Philosophy – that consciousness is fundamental – is slowly becoming acceptable to talk about. Within science this notion tends to be cast into the more conventional language of information and mathematics, but the connection with consciousness is undeniable. After centuries of life-threatening suppression the societal shift that now allows sciences and scholars to publicly discuss consciousness in a new light might seem like a trifling matter. But it’s a positively astounding transformation.

In this light, the exchange of knowledge between an artist and a geographer has the potential to consider new aspects of consciousness within geography, including a closer, phenomenological consideration of place, especially when emotional instabilities may abound in the humans’ associated with that place. If a place is bowing under stresses, an artist may have a role in making this clear to the wider world.

This paper has reflected on how art, in offering particular representations of place, opens up the opportunity for interested geographers to draw inspiration from or share interests about place. There are challenges involved in this partnership – first for the artist because all viewers are free to interpret in their own way, and this is not under the direct control of the artist. Further, an audience may not be interested in the artist’s findings. On the other hand, geographers may not be convinced by artistic interpretation, and even the process of involving an artist in geographical research may involve negotiating value judgements and discomfort (Foster and Lorimer, 2007, p. 426):

Collaboration can also be used to ask awkward questions of your own conventions and accepted working practices. For a geographer, it is counter-intuitive to let images offer a lead and structure […] The practice of art usually lacks such recognizable organizing principles, at least while it is being made. What drives an artist towards occasional points of resolution depends on a ‘self-discipline’ motivated by an insistent attempt to articulate and describe an experience or way of being in the world. Through dialogue with different paradigms, cross-disciplinary works can also nudge at worldviews—aiding a transition towards a critical stance, moulding independent values, and sharpening scepticism about imposed targets or external markers of success.

This separation between disciplines was noted in 2007, and perhaps it still exists, judging by the decline in artist in residence awards, such as the Leverhulme Trust Artist in Residence Grants that previously supported artists within university geography departments between 2004 and 2016. The notion that artists may not be structured in their thinking, as well as within their own visual arts discipline as compared to geography, could be challenged; it is one of the reasons why the systematic structure offered by Seamon has been trialled here to particularly help the visual arts. If artists were guided by more structure—and more knowledge of geography’s deep considerations of place, art could build on what is already known.

If interested in place, it may be time for painters to turn their attention to the outside world, without preconceived ideological agendas. John Cameron speaks highly of Australian author Barry Lopez (Cameron, 2003, p. 4) praising his, ‘acute observations of creatures and natural phenomenon with detailed knowledge of field ecology and equally acute self-observation and reflection on larger human themes’. Furthermore, he adds that, ‘It is unfortunate that a tradition of place writing of this calibre has been slow to develop in Australia’. This paper suggests there are emergent ways to reinforce place writing via arts that presents unique forms of cognition and enjoin the intellectual interest of humanistic geographers. Intellectual partnerships are possible. Any future steps to create melded disciplines would require an understanding that the image makers have key roles as public intellectuals, albeit embedded within the general population.

In summary, over the last century there have been many art exhibitions concerning a ‘sense of place’, and ‘spirit of place’. Sense of Place+exhibition, when entered into Google’s search function, reveals over 84 million website finds. There have been some standout exhibitions though, the photographic display in The Family of Man, MoMA, 1955, paintings seen in the 1972 A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land, and Georgia O’Keeffe and New Mexico: A Sense of Place, exhibited across the USA during 2004 to 2005. The recent exhibition Australia, held at the Royal Society, London in 2013, was less well received by critics, instead the 2017 exhibition Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters, National Museum of Australia, Canberra, inspired many artists, critics and the public. Curatorial essays and artists’ statements that accompany such displays show little of a geographer’s understandings of place.

We are entering a new era when the earth is much like an ailing patient. It is hoped that this paper offers some insights into how art and geography can work together to expand our environmental
awareness, whether as artist-as-geographer or the geographer-as-artist, to progress place understanding as well as place making. The earth needs our consideration and care at this time.

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