

Sera Waters

PhD Candidate, University of South Australia

Knotted Lines: Entangling genealogical methodology with practice-led research

Key Words: Genealogical Methodology, Reconstruction, Repetition, Problematization, Practice-led Research, Craft

In this paper I will investigate the tangled methodologies operating in the early stages of my postgraduate research titled 'Settling Ghosts: a visual arts enquiry into repetitious acts of making home in settler Australia'. In particular I am focusing upon how genealogical methodology can have ameliorative potential when entangled with specific methods of practice-led research. Revealing the constructed-ness of history and dismantling it through interdisciplinary genealogical critique creates chasms which not only unearth knotty 'forgotten' pasts but creates spaces where the reconstruction of inherited narratives can prosper. Practice-led research, particularly repetitively crafted methods, can offer important yet under-examined avenues towards reconstructing histories. It should be noted that while 'reconstruction' is borrowed from the scholarship of John Dewey, instead of aiming towards resolution my practice uses reconstruction as a tactic to celebrate numerous tangled and ambiguous threads from the past. My methods takes art critic Jan Verwoert's theory around the 'craft of manifestation' (2010, p. 271) literally, and reconstructions arise through the generative performativity of practice, often drawn from intergenerational traditions. Overall it is argued that the combination of genealogical critique mixed with repetitive and crafted methods can re-knot the lines of history for present and future generations; and this potential for creative research requires further attention.

This paper will address two developing methods; the evocation of ghosts, and the conjuring of embodied knowledge. To explicate these methods and how they operate within genealogical critique and performative modes of practice-led research, is to recognise that evoking and conjuring rely upon sustaining modes of dwelling; prolonging processes of discovery without predetermined pathways. Whereas genealogical critique dwells within remnants like those found in archives, anecdotes, traditions and photographs, performative (including crafted) research examines these fragments through the body to channel what Barbara Bolt (citing Heidegger) describes as 'the particular form of knowledge that arises from our handling of materials and processes' (2007, p. 30). She refers to this as praxical knowledge which can provoke a 'shift in thought' (Bolt cited in Dean & Smith 2009, p. 6); a shift which potentially also draws attention to the depth of ancestral knowledge contained within our inherited habits and

gestures; stitching, gardening and making home for example. Dwelling reflectively and reflexively upon archival fragments and embodied knowledge requires an 'historically informed imagination' like that explicated by Ross Gibson's 'imaginative investigator [who] keeps on speculating and testing, speculating and testing, always proposing possible worlds that are tethered to the actual world... of evidence' (2006, p. 6). I argue that an imaginative investigator can dwell within archival evidence as well as in handed-down traditions and skills to rediscover the body-languages which for generations have carried the ghosts of our histories.



Figure 1: R. Duryea & Co, date unknown (late 1800s?), Sitter Unknown (possibly Charles Braddock), photographic print, Source: Waters family history collection

The Evocation of Ghosts

The claim that genealogical methodology knotted with repetitive crafting practices can lead to change has been developed in response to Colin Koopman's theory of 'genealogical pragmatism', espoused in a number of publications (2011 & 2013). Koopman pairs Michel Foucault's methods of genealogy, particularly 'problematization', with Dewey's pragmatist 'reconstruction' and makes the case that each requires the other; claiming 'Genealogy agitates and pragmatism meliorates' (2013, p. 247). In a

1983 lecture Foucault (cited in Koopman 2011, p. 541) explained problematization as the process by how:

... an unproblematic field of experience, or a set of practices, which were accepted without question, which were familiar and 'silent', out of discussion, becomes a problem, raises discussion and debate, incites new reactions, and induces a crisis in the previously silent behavior, habits, practices, and institutions.

These debates and crises rupture established givens, making them ripe for reconstruction by the individual, who Dewey describes as 'the agent who is responsible through initiative, inventiveness and intelligently directed labor for re-creating the world' (1920, p. 51). For this visual arts project, the 'intelligently directed labor' of performative practice is aimed at dismantling the deceptive truths embedded within Australian narratives of settling, and reconstructing them in endless possible configurations.

Problematization relies upon the critique of history, and as Koopman highlights, 'history' was the focus of both Foucault and Dewey to 'help... us specify the conditions of the problems we face in the present' (2011, p. 559). On its own historiographical enquiry does not suffice, especially in what Gibson (2006, p. 3) has described as:

... the conditions of living and working in the aftermath-culture of Australia ... where ... a great deal of the vital evidence is either missing or non-textual. And the evidence that we do have is often partial, broken or sometimes obscured by denials.

Instead it is genealogical critique that can begin to reveal the constructed-ness of present histories, not by following lineages back to 'origins' but by dismantling 'truths' ('traditions' or the 'natural') to reveal how they are generationally fabricated and sustained. Foucault famously applied this methodology to such normalisations as discipline, power, and sexuality and in doing this he exposed what he described as 'an entire historical tradition (theological or rationalistic) [which] aims at dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity – as a teleological movement or a natural process' (Foucault 1977, p. 154).

With this revelation it becomes critical to question the motives behind historical construction. One response arises from Paul Connerton's question 'why do we produce histories?' His answer: 'histories seek to legitimate a present order of political and social power' (2001, p. 1). This coercion of history into powerful present-day narratives entails

as much lopping off, tidying up, burying and ghosting, as it does selective reiteration, again and again. Thus, from genealogical critique ‘an expression of radical historicism ...’ (Bevir 2008, p. 263) emerges, acknowledging the historical presence of many tangles, knots and broken lines which have been disavowed from the historical present. By observing, then problematizing, what is culturally repeated like a mantra (warding off the past), genealogical critique raises what Koopman calls ‘submerged problems’: those ‘found below the surface of our lives ... that condition us without our fully understanding why or how’ (2013, p. 1).



Figure 2: Sera Waters, 2015, *Mount Braddock*, Linen, cotton, crewel, hand-made beads, felt, card, stuffing, approximately 26 x 37 cm, photograph by Grant Hancock, image courtesy the artist

Within my research I see submerged problems as having amassed ‘ghosts’; the marginalised and historically invisible casualties that result from the selective construction of socially and politically motivated narratives. Though disembodied, a ghost, Verwoert (2012) described, is like those captured within ‘proton packs’ in *Ghost Busters* (1984); they might be hidden from sight but they still emit stinking gasses which make their presence known. In the cultural terrain of the Australian aftermath ghosts are the repercussion of what spatial theorist Paul Carter has labelled an ‘abysmal discourse’ (cited by Rutherford 2010, p. 9): a discourse constructed through disavowal and

reinforced through generational repetition. Ghosts, as well as specters and other uncanny happenings are regularly cited in aftermaths and Gibson interprets the 'ghosts that so many people glimpse in the Australian landscape nowadays' as not only metaphorical, but also a way to 'name a perturbation that lingers in the Australian consciousness' (2002, p. 165). In most spooky tales, ghosts haunt sites where the evidence of ghastly happenings has been obscured. They haunt the present in order to seek justice for the past. And ghosts haunt homes as well.

Coming from a family-line of South Australian settlers since 1838 — home-makers within a culture haunted by colonialism and its cultural 'forgetting' — this research induces a crisis around settling. It questions how generationally-repeated ghosting is transferred bodily and materially through domestic practices of craft and care; housing and unhousing simultaneously (Rutherford 2010(b), p. 114). From my own family history has arisen the story of Fritz, my German Grandfather who jumped ship in Australia to build a new home, initially through his award-winning rose garden in Loxton, South Australia. This site is now a ghost itself, yet was also complicit to the process of ghosting. Challenging 'settling' calls into question such generational practices, habits and behaviours which have continued to form ghosts up until the present. Insidiously, settler colonialism has thrived on remaining invisible to itself (Veracini 2010), and while this makes its tactics apt for genealogical critique, tracing its current elusive network requires much unburying.



Figure 3: Photographer Unknown, 1930, Friederich Kroeger (Fritz) in his rose garden with dog, black and white photograph, Loxton, source: Waters family history collection.

Ghosts not only provide a metaphor to understand our relationship with disavowed histories, they importantly also suggest methods for reconstructive practices. While the text cited as beginning the late twentieth century spectral turn is Derrida's *Specters of Marx* (1994), in art theory it has been Verwoert's use of Derridian spectral notions that has given weight to 'living with ghosts' as a strategy in the visual arts (2007). As Verwoert (citing Derrida) articulates:

... the task is to 'learn to live *with* ghosts' and this means to learn 'how to let them speak or how to give them back speech' by approaching them in a determined way that still remains undetermined enough to allow them to present themselves. (2007, p.7)

In his analysis of appropriation in the visual arts since the 1980s Verwoert extends this ethic for contemporary artists evoking 'ghosts'. Rather than being possessive, he claims

evocation calls for 'performing the unresolved by staging object, images or allegories that invoke the ghosts of unclosed histories in a way that allows them to appear as ghosts and reveal the nature of the ambiguous presence.' (2007, p. 7). The gathering of archival fragments using dwelling methods gives over to ambiguity; their presence is neither here nor there as they cross temporalities and destabilise historical constructs. Yet just how the 'practicalities of the performance of evocations' (2007, p. 7) are realised are questions Verwoert leaves practice to answer.

Conjuring Embodied Knowledge

As well as haunting houses and archives, ghosts are found within human habits, behaviours and practices. As genealogy is 'an analysis of descent ... situated within the articulation of the body and history' (Foucault 1977, p. 148), an examination of human acts passed along as 'tradition' can reveal hitherto under-acknowledged historical knowledge. To conjure forgotten knowledge from tradition requires a 'craft of manifestation', which entails repetitive and generative dwelling within intergenerational processes to observe and document what forms of embodied knowledge emerge. This method is a process of discovery, reliant upon time, reflection and 'imaginative investigation' which understands performativity as research. Such conjuring methods propose a 'recuperation of the past' (Tucker 2005, p. 111) using craft techniques which for generations have been enacted into material forms and tangible repositories of knowledge. In our contemporary lives however many crafted forms and techniques are becoming forgotten due to industrialisation displacing household and manual production, particularly crafting domestic textiles. Hence it is timely to dwell.

Using the analogy of the witness, Verwoert in his essay 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real', ponders how 'unresolved emotions', or ghosts, are socially transferred along generational lines. He notes that within homes

... parents pass the burden they can't carry on to their children, most likely because their own parents couldn't come to terms with it either, and therefore imposed it on them. ... Things are kept within the family. People repeat their mother's mistakes or pursue their father's unrealized dreams. For generations on end. That's how tradition is built (2010, p. 258).

This home-bound disavowal is predominantly passed along through unspoken bodily behaviours, habits, and practices; forms of embodied knowledge which are symbolically (and unknowingly) regurgitated and repeated through domestic labour and production. Verwoert calls these the 'arts of affective labour' (2010); social practices through which emotions and values are transferred. While often these are invisible yet affective acts,

sometimes they take on tangible forms; home crafts, cooked meals, and the like. Due to this often unwitting passing along, cultural and family traditions and their repositories become key sites for the summoning of ghosts.



Figure 4: Sera Waters, 2014, *Fritz and the rose garden*, felt, hand-dyed calico and string, cotton, wool, hand-made stones, trim, approximately 300 x 200 cm, photograph by Grant Hancock, image courtesy the artist.

Traditions can be understood as habits; behaviour and beliefs of significance which have passed from one generation to the next. Habits, as Hugh LaFollette writes, 'carry the past into the present' (2000, p. 402). He claims that 'culture is best understood as the social transmission of habits. We inherit (and then refine) habits from our ancestors who inherited (and refined) habits from their ancestors' (2000, p. 403). When these habits manifest as material and cultural objects through the transference of human gestures, as

Connerton has explored, such artefacts become mnemonic devices which ‘both describe and enforce the values and habit patterns of the group’ (2011, p.104). Whether conscious of the values being transferred or not, the re-enactment of traditions reinforces embodied forms of knowledge, including practices of settling and consequently ghosting.

Traditions rely upon repetition, and it is argued here that purposeful and repetitive performativity of traditional or habitual practices may conjure the forms of knowledge bodies know, to reconnect us with fragmented pasts. Just how to grasp the wisdom of embodied knowledge is the challenge met through using repetition consciously to conjure. Elizabeth Wayland Barber discovered from her contemporary recreation of an ancient textile practice, that ‘the process of re-creating ancient artifacts step by step can shed light on the lives and habits of the original craftworkers that no amount of armchair theorizing can do’ (1994, p. 23). I too conjure the past through passed along repetitive traditions; rag rug making, ripping, dyeing, braiding, needlework, black-work embroidery and more. The cognizant performing of tradition, repeatedly and with practices teeming with embodied knowledge, creates suitable conditions for inducing the art of remembering, and reminds our bodies of gestures that have complex meanings.



Figure 5: Sera Waters, 2014, *Fritz and the rose garden* (detail), felt, hand-dyed calico and string, cotton, wool, hand-made stones, trim, approximately 300 x 200 cm, photograph by Grant Hancock, image courtesy the artist.

It is particularly repetition within craft practices which not only invoke tradition, but are methods which can generate shifts, leading to innovative reconstruction. Studies by lead craft theorists Richard Sennett, Glenn Adamson or Tim Ingold (2008, 2007 & 2011) have contemporised definitions of 'craft' as the generative combination of concentrated thinking and making which goes beyond skill into what David Pye coined a 'workmanship of risk' (1968). Pye further described this as 'workmanship using any kind of technique or apparatus in which the quality of the result is not predetermined, but depends on ... judgement, dexterity and care ...' (1968, p. 20). Craft practice then both repeats and shifts embodied knowledge and does so in an attentive manner. On a practical level, as Ingold has written, 'the practitioner's movements are continually and subtly responsive to the ever-changing conditions of the task as it proceeds' (2011, p. 59). In fact such repetitive and labour intensive craft practices create an altered relationship with time. Marcia Tucker refers to this as 'polychronic time' which she describes as 'interactive, multitasked, social, and in-flux rather than linear or goal-oriented' (2005, p. 125). This relational dimension of repetitive craft not only 'weaves the past and present together' (2005, p. 125) through tradition, leaving it open to generative shifts, but also summons the ways in which these practices have been used socially within homes.

To remember these home-based traditions is especially important as since the mid-nineteenth century and Modernity, a wave of cultural forgetting has ensued. In *How Modernity Forgets Connerton* (2009, pp. 1-5) equates collective forgetting with when human-scale modes of connecting to locality and temporalities became so overwhelmed as to become ungraspable. As we remember through the body, a loss of certain habits, rhythms and skills embedded in traditions equates to losing memories. The danger of collective cultural forgetting to the point of losing the ability to perform traditions is also the loss of the link to certain ghosts. With no opportunity for avowal, ghosts could continue to haunt indefinitely. To work with tradition, but to shift it, is to acknowledge ghosts exist in an ambiguous and unresolved manner. Or as Verwoert writes in abstract terms suitable for 'ghosts':

... the avowal does neither in itself equal forgiveness, nor does it have to imply full mutual understanding. It's simply is a way to hand over what would have been passed on indefinitely ... It only means that the feeling of its presence is avowed as something that then exists between us. There it is. It's mine now, though it shouldn't have been. It's yours now, too, though it needn't be. There it is. Just there (2010, p. 302).

The affect of 'repetitive crafting' (Waters 2012), derived from the traditions of affective labour (Hardt 1999) within the home, relies upon an unexpected alignment with

'relational aesthetics' (Bourriaud 1998). This, as well as other contemporary art theories which underscore the power of small repeated gestures to forge social relations, has given renewed appreciation to the potential of affect in art practice. However looking back to the home as 'a site of social reproduction' (Weeks 2007, p. 235), before the eighteenth century disregard and disparagement of 'domestic' expressions took hold (Parker 1984; Ravetz, Kettle & Felcey 2014, p. 4), reveals the 20,000 year history of materially manifested care, enacted predominantly by women. (Wayland Barker 1994). Ghosts live on in a comforting hand-knitted blanket, a handkerchief embroidered with a personal motif, clothing embellished with symbols akin to personalities and values, and within this creative research. Though consisting of small accumulative acts the affect of this labour is read through the body, and has always been. Affect is 'social in origin, but biological and physical in effect' (Van Alphen 2008, p. 23). Performativity linked to affective labour within creative practice, carries this past and these ghosts forward for avowal.

To reconstruct....by way of a conclusion

The dwelling methods of evoking and conjuring, when used within the knotted methodology outlined in this paper, have the power to incite ghosts in the hope of puncturing the façade of history; in this case Australian settler histories. The presence of 'rather too many histories' (Verwoert 2007, p.4), as tangled and multi-temporal they may be, is one means to avow denied pasts, rouse further unburying, and uncover the motivations governing the constructed-ness of present-day narratives. Numerous reconstructions not only benefit the past and the present, but also the future. As LaFollette advises: 'once we recognize that we are who we are and live the lives we live because of our predecessors, then we must recognize that the habits we give our progeny and our peers will likewise shape their worlds, their lives, and their habits' (2000, p. 403). Putting reconstructions back in circulation often and repeatedly, unresolved and ambiguous as they are, acknowledges they are there, could have been and could be. That is enough for now.

Acknowledgements

I would sincerely like to thank my supervisor Professor Kay Lawrence for all of her encouragement and advice. I would also like to acknowledge the ACUADS organising committee and chair Marie Sierra, and give thanks for the support provided through the 2015 ACUADS Postgraduate Scholarship.

References

- ADAMSON, G 2007, *Thinking Through Craft*, Berg, Oxford.
- BEVIR, M 2008, 'What Is Genealogy?', *Journal of the Philosophy of History* 2, no. 3, pp. 263-275.
- BOLT, B 2007, 'The Magic is in Handling', in E Barrett & B Bolt (eds.), *Practice as Research: Approaches to Creative Arts Enquiry*, I. B. Tauris, London, pp. 27-34.
- BOURRIAUD, N 2006, 'Relational Aesthetics', in C Bishop (ed.), *Participation*, Documents of Contemporary Art series, MIT Press with Whitechapel Gallery, London, pp. 160-171.
- CONNERTON, P 2009, *How Modernity Forgets*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- CONNERTON, P 2011, *The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- DEAN, R & SMITH, H 2009, *Practice-led Research, Research-led Practice in the Creative Arts*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.
- DERRIDA, J 1994, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, The Work of Mourning, & the New International*, P Kamuf (trans.), Routledge, New York and London.
- DEWEY, J 1920, *Reconstruction in Philosophy*, Henry Holt and Company, New York.
- FOUCAULT, M 1977, in D.F. Bouchard (ed.), *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, pp. 139–64.
- FREUD, S 1914, 'Remembering, Repeating and Working-through (Further Recommendations on the Technique of Psycho-Analysis li)', in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume Xii (1911-1913)*, J Riviere (trans.), pp. 145-156.
<http://www.history.ucsb.edu/faculty/marcuse/.../1914FreudRemembering.pdf>, viewed September 2014.
- GIBSON, R 2006, 'Places Past Disappearance', *Transformations Journal*, issue no. 13, September 2006, pp. 1-6, http://www.transformationsjournal.org/journal/issue_13/article_01.shtml, viewed September 2014.
- GIBSON, R 2002, *Seven Versions of An Australian Badland*, University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia.
- HARDT, M 1999, 'Affective Labor', *boundary 2*, vol. 26, no. 2, pp. 89-100.
- HASEMAN, B 2006, 'A Manifesto for Performative Research', *Media International Australia Incorporating Culture and Policy: quarterly journal of media research and resources*, no. 118, pp. 98-106.

- INGOLD, T 2011, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, Routledge, Oxon.
- KOOPMAN, C 2011, 'Genealogical Pragmatism: How History Matters for Foucault and Dewey', *Journal of the Philosophy of History*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 533–561.
- KOOPMAN, C 2013, *Genealogy as Critique: Foucault and the Problems of Modernity*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- LAFOLLETTE, H 2000, 'Pragmatic Ethics', in H LaFollette (ed.) *The Blackwell Guide to Ethical Theory*, Blackwell, Oxford, pp.400-419.
- PARKER, R 1984, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the making of the feminine*, The Women's Press Ltd, London.
- PYE, D 1968, *The Nature and Art of Workmanship*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- RAVETZ, A, KETTLE, A & FELCEY, H (eds.) 2013, *Collaboration through Craft*, Bloomsbury Academic, London.
- REITMAN, I 1984, *Ghost Busters*, Columbia Pictures, USA.
- RUTHERFORD, J 2010 (a), 'Kairos for a Wounded Country', in J Rutherford & B Holloway (eds.), *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, pp. 1-11.
- RUTHERFORD, J 2010 (b), 'Undwelling; Or Reading Bachelard in Australia', in J Rutherford & B Holloway (eds.), *Halfway House: The Poetics of Australian Spaces*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, pp. 113-125.
- SENNETT, R 2008, *The Craftsman*, Penguin Books, London.
- TUCKER, M 2005, 'Labor of Love', in M Fariello & P Owen (eds), *Object and Meaning: New Perspectives on Art and Craft*, The Scarecrow Press, Lanham, pp. 106-134.
- VAN ALPHEN, E 2008, 'Affective Operations of Art and Literature', *RES: Anthropology and Aesthetics*, no. 53/54, pp. 20-30.
- VERACINI, L 2010, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, Palgrave MacMillan, London.
- VERWOERT, J 2007, 'Living with Ghosts: From Appropriation to Invocation in Contemporary Art', *Art & Research: A Journal of Ideas, Contexts and Methods* 1, no. 2, pp. 1-7, <http://www.artandresearch.org.uk/v1n2/verwoert.html>, viewed July 2013
- VERWOERT, J 2012, 'Anti-Materialist Materialisms', paper presented at Adelaide Festival: Artist's Week: Into Cosmos the Presentness of Utopias, March 2012, podcast: http://www.adelaidefestival.com.au/2012/visual_arts/artists_week_into_cosmos_t

- he_presentness_of_utoopias/anti-materialist_materialisms?event=anti-materialist-materialisms.
- VERWOERT, J 2010, 'You Make Me Feel Mighty Real: On the Risk of Bearing Witness and the Art of Affective Labour', in V Ohlruan (ed.), *Tell me what you want, what you really, really want*, Sternberg Press, Rotterdam, pp. 255-305.
- WATERS, S 2012, 'Repetitive Crafting: The Shared Aesthetic of Time in Australian Contemporary Art', *craft + design enquiry*, issue 4, <http://epress.anu.edu.au/titles/craftdesign-enquiry/issue-4-2012>
- WAYLAND BARBER, E 1996, *Women's Work The First 20.000 Years: Women, Cloth, and Society in Early Times*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York.
- WEEKS, K 2007, 'Life Within and Against Work: Affective Labor, Feminist Critique, and Post-Fordist Politics', *ephemera*, vol. 7, no. 1, pp. 233-249