



Memories and Idylls: Urban reflections on lost places and inner landscapes

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Transformations, No. 2 (March 2002)

<http://www.cqu.edu.au/transformations>

ISSN 1444-377

Abstract: This paper considers two ways in which urban-based Australians (re)create personal connections with rural and 'natural' landscapes: Mulcock's material on the alternative health and spirituality movement in Australia, and Toussaint's research with urban conservationists involved in restorative tree-planting projects in rural Western Australia provide the context for this exploration. Through the adoption of everyday rituals, city-based supporters of the Landcare movement and participants in the alternative health and spirituality movement attempt to preserve sacred spaces in their daily lives. These spaces symbolise a metaphorical and ongoing flight from the city, a desire for emotional, rather than physical, distance from urban lifestyles. We argue that these contemporary Australian engagements with 'nature' and the 'rural' perpetuate an Arcadian vision, a longing to recover a personal, national, and mythic Golden Age, interwoven with a desire for the 'lost places', remembered and imagined, that lie beyond the city 'walls'.

Key terms: urban and rural identities, memory, belonging, Landcare, flower essences, restoration, lost places, domestic spaces, Australian Bush

Introduction

In front of a window seen from inside a room, I placed a painting representing exactly that portion of the landscape covered by the painting. Thus the tree in the picture hid the tree behind it, outside the room. For the spectator, it was both inside the room within the painting and outside in the real landscape. This simultaneous existence in two different spaces is like living simultaneously in the past and in the present, (Rene Magritte, *The Human Condition/ La Condition humaine*, quoted in Calvocoressi, 1979: 33)

The idea of lost paradise, a onetime Golden Age, a long-past era of wholeness and perfection, is to be found in the lore of most people and also appears in the fantasies of persons who imagine a golden time in the recent past. (Moore 1996: xvi-xvii)

In a sense, the colonisation of Australia can itself be understood as a mythic flight from the city. From the earliest days of European discovery through to the present, the Great South Land, Australia, has been imagined as containing all the possibilities, wonders and terrors denied to the inhabitants of Europe's weary, paradoxically new-old world. Seddon (1997), Carter (1987), Powell (1977) and others have documented how nineteenth century settlers were drawn to Australia by the edenic and utopian visions presented by promoters of the fledgling Swan River settlement and other colonies, the promise of a life better than they could hope for in the industrial cities of Britain. On arrival, free settlers joined convicts, soldiers and ticket-of-leave-men in trying to comprehend and adjust to the undreamed-of conditions they found themselves in, their physical and cultural isolation from all that Europe and its cities represented. Later they were joined by other migrants trying to come



to terms with a sense of the scale, peculiarity, and potential of an unfamiliar landscape filled with a unique flora and fauna. It was a process marked by the misunderstandings that underscore a shameful history of Aboriginal-settler relations and environmental devastation, concerns that figure prominently in contemporary debates in this country. Part of this process was the creation of what Russell Ward referred to in 1958 as the Australian Legend. Ward argued that this pervasive version of the national character emerged from a belief promoted by local writers that '...the "Australian spirit" is somehow intimately connected with the bush and that it derives rather from the common folk than from the more respectable and cultivated sections of society' (1992: 179)¹.

Rene Magritte, *La Condition humaine*, 1933²

Australians continue to privilege rural and bush settings in the national imagination, with elements of the landscape, flora and fauna co-opted into a kind of 'eco-nationalism' that validates (white, male) settler histories (Morton and Smith 1999). Yet, for many Australians, urban as well as rural, these landscapes are re-configured

¹ It is worth noting, in light of the themes of this paper, that many of the nineteenth century Australian writers well known for their heroic depictions of the bush and its hardworking folk were city dwellers who had grown up in rural settings and whom, whilst living in cities such as Sydney and Melbourne themselves, became part of a strong anti-urban movement (Davison 1992. See also White 1992).

² Image available at Mark Harden's Artchive website, http://www.artchive.com/artchive/ftptoc/magritte_ext.html. © 2000 Charly Herscovici, Brussels / Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York.

in deeply personal ways, with significant numbers of people looking for ways to connect to the 'bush' or the 'farm' in their daily lives. In doing so, many suggest that these non-urban settings are deeply spiritual, moral and eternal places possessing rejuvenating powers, unlike the frenetic, soulless space of the city. They are places of dwelling and being, in a Heideggerian sense, diametrically opposed to Auge's 'non-places' (1995), the impersonal airport terminal, the department store, the car-oriented grid, that typify the modern city. As such, these characterisations of the rural owe almost as much to ancient Greek visions of Arcadia, or to the Romantic poets' celebrations of the English countryside, as they do to any past or contemporary Australian reality³. The case studies presented in this paper provide two examples of attempts by urban Australians to incorporate 'the bush', both physically and metaphorically, into their city-based lives. While both studies draw, sometimes explicitly and sometimes implicitly, on anti-urban discourses that celebrate the rural and the natural, both also simultaneously challenge these discourses by revealing the real presence of the latter, in memory, imagination and practice, in urban Western Australian settings.

Belonging to the bush

In writing predominantly about the experiences of rural peoples, Lovell (1998: 4) has argued that 'belonging itself ... appears at least partly predicated upon locality or a memory of locality'. Anthropologist Michele Dominy (1997, 2000) and historian Peter Read (1996, 2000) have also written extensively about the ways that rural non-Indigenous Australians have articulated a deeply felt sense of belonging to certain landscapes that have become imbued with personal significance. For farming families in particular, such attachments can span generations and those who articulate them consciously, if uncomfortably, often do so whilst also recognising the prior claim of Indigenous peoples. However, in strengthening their claims, farming folk may argue that urban people can only ever manage a 'false connection to the land' when compared to their own 'much more intimate knowledge and understanding' (Hodges, 1993: 79). Yet, urban people also demonstrate deep attachments to a real or imagined rurality that go beyond the aesthetic or merely recreational 'consumption of countryside' (Lawrence 1995, Darby 2000).

It is important to note that for many older Australians the categories of rural and urban are not as clear cut as might be imagined. Many spent their childhoods in the bush or on a farm. For others, their suburban childhoods in Perth, a 'big country town' in the memories of several of the people who contributed to this research, were characterised by chooks in the backyard⁴, an active dairy or stables at the bottom of the street and wildflower pickers selling fresh sprays of *Boronia* in the city center. Others recall youthful periods in the country as teachers, nurses or public servants, while many more had, or have, country cousins, relatives who provide direct links to the foundational histories of the nation and the myths it generated. Thus, for a significant number of urban Australians, the bush and the farm are

³ Such ways of regarding nature are, of course, not confined to Western traditions. Yi-Fu Tuan has written extensively about the ways in which rural or 'wild' landscapes have, for centuries, been appreciated in Taoist, Buddhist and Shinto traditions and are replicated within urban homes and gardens.

⁴ Gaynor (1999) reflects on the process of urbanisation whereby chicken runs ceased to be a common component of Perth backyards. She suggests that this change contributed to a greater sense of distance, for city-dwellers, from rural or natural environments outside of the metropolitan area.

equivalent to the 'lost places' described by Read (1996). Such places are created and recreated, in some way transformed or eroded by time yet still deeply significant as the perceived basis upon which Australian personhood is constructed. These places are the junction at which personal memories and larger myths come together; the memories may be joyful, painful or, as is the case for most of us in recalling the places of our past, they might be bittersweet. Yet, in a profound way, these memories evoke a sense of belonging, of home.

Bringing the bush to the city

According to Bhatti and Church (2001: 365), the intimate domestic spaces of home and garden are where most city dwellers find the greatest scope to 'produce complex and personalised connections with nature'. In the following case studies we suggest that exploring the everyday rituals and practices conducted within this private sphere yields fresh insights into the ways that contemporary urban Australians engage in ongoing attempts to 'flee the city' whilst remaining firmly anchored to it. These strategies for bringing the bush to the city complement more obvious, episodic sojourns in rural or bush settings.

Toussaint's account of a ceremonial Landcare planting in the Wheatbelt region of Western Australia demonstrates how, for some city-based conservationists, suburban gardens can provide a way of connecting to rural and bush sites. The urban-dwellers who contributed to this study raised seedlings in their backyards which were then used to revegetate damaged areas of the Western Australian countryside. Toussaint also draws attention to some of the hesitations expressed by rural-based people who feel that urbanites have a tendency to 'appropriate their most significant political symbols of identity ... [namely] the landscape they inhabit' (Dominy, 1997: 257).

Mulcock writes about the use of Australian wildflower essences in the alternative health and spirituality movement⁵. She considers how the personal beliefs and practices associated with these products, and the ways that they are incorporated into the routines of home life, also reflect attempts to bring the bush into the city, thereby 'fleeing' the stresses of city life. As in the case of the urban conservationists, the people in Mulcock's study evoke remembered and imagined connections with 'the bush'. Within this framework the bush itself is also 'imagined' as part of a pure and golden past that transcends individual experience.

'Trees for Life'

These seedlings, I suppose I think of them ... (laughs) ... well like my children really. Now that the children have left home ... well they're all so busy now and I find myself thinking a lot about how it was, not just for me

⁵ Perhaps better known as the 'New Age Movement', this phenomenon began to emerge in the 1960s and 1970s in North America as part of a search for alternatives to mainstream healthcare and spiritual direction (see Ferguson 1982 and Heelas 1996). It quickly gained an international following and has experienced a resurgence in popularity in the 1990s (Ray and Anderson 2000). While the 'New Age' is very urban-based, it is also strongly informed by anti-urban discourses. In this sense the movement itself can also be understood as a metaphorical 'flight from the city', in a similar tradition to the Romanticism of eighteenth and nineteenth century British writers such as William Wordsworth and Percy Bysshe Shelley.

but for mum too. My life's been very different to how hers was and in many ways I'm happy about that and the decision my husband and I made ... I think it gave the kids opportunities. But I wonder sometimes what it would have been like if we stayed on the farm ... I mean, in the end we couldn't have stayed on, but you do wonder ... I still miss it and the neighbours we had, it was different, you know. So these little trees ... it's like when your children leave home and a little bit of you leaves with them, but then it's different because when you plant them in the earth it's like they're really going back home, like you're taking them home ...and it makes you feel good (woman, mid-60's, reflecting on her rural childhood and the importance that growing seedlings holds for her).

Rival (1998: 2) states that '[t]he popularity of treeplanting is such that it cannot simply be explained in terms of people wanting to "do something for the environment"'; rather it should be understood as 'a life-giving action', one that augments the planter as much as it does the landscape. This case study reflects on the ways in which urban members of a community-based tree-planting organisation, Trees for Life, talk about the personal significance of contributing to a large Landcare planting intended to reduce the effects of salinity in a farming region which had been badly affected as a result of over-clearing. There has been a significant increase in the number of such mass-participation plantings in recent years, many of which are sponsored by large companies keen to promote a clean, green image, or linked to nation-building events such as the Olympic Landcare program.⁶ Although these events do result in much-needed tree planting, they also receive criticism, from some farmers and conservationists, as being media stunts that consume enormous resources which could be better utilised if given directly to Landcare organisations themselves. As such, they are sometimes seen as having greater symbolic or entertainment value for urban participants than they do real conservation value, especially given the shortfall of seedlings available to Landcare groups when nurseries are contracted to grow for these one-off events. Yet to adopt this perspective uncritically risks underestimating the real value of the experience for urban dwellers.

The urban conservationists in this study each grew between 300 and 3000 seedlings per year in their backyards for the purposes of land rehabilitation. They then planted

⁶ The 1990s were declared 'the decade of Landcare' in recognition of the strong support the Landcare movement received from rural communities threatened by rapidly spreading salinity. This 'decade' was also promoted in an effort to mobilize urban support for a problem of grave national importance but which was, and perhaps remains, largely invisible to city dwellers. The movement has led to the creation of numerous support projects and partnerships with government agencies and other organizations, including conservation groups, some of whom have in the past been critical of farming practices. Although a focus on the provision of on-ground solutions to local problems has been especially characteristic of Landcare groups, and is seen by many to be the movement's greatest strength, there has been a recent shift towards co-ordinating Landcare projects at the catchment level or on a regional scale (Lynch, Jenkins & Kilair, 2001). To some extent this reflects a pragmatic response to the increased emphasis on biodiversity conservation by many funding bodies, but it also reflects, perhaps, recent changes in the ways many farmers perceive nature and their own role in its conservation. The Landcare movement has had significant successes beyond its stated goals of slowing or reversing the rate at which arable land is being lost to salinity. These successes include reinforcing a sense of place and community at a time when depopulation threatens many rural centers. For more detail on the history of the Landcare movement and the partnerships that it has engendered see Campbell and Seipen, 1994 and Baker, 1997.

the seedlings, either for individual farmers⁷, or, as happened in the project described below (which I participated in as a grower), in co-operation with a rural Landcare group.

The planting site, chosen by the urban planters in partnership with the local Landcare group, was located at the edge of a salt scald in the central wheatbelt of Western Australia. On the day of the planting, a Trees For Life representative reminded some fifty assembled urban planters of the organisation's aims in an address that invoked Churchill's Battle of Britain speech. Noting the attendance of the Governor at a previous planting, he spoke about 'the war on salt' being the 'duty of all Australians, city and country folk alike', declaiming at length on the threats that spreading salinity represented to homes and roads, farmers' livelihoods, and urban peoples' food supplies. He concluded by praising the planters for 'their commitment to the countryside', for raising such healthy seedlings, and for demonstrating that the health of rural communities and landscapes was indeed a shared concern.

A representative from the local farming community extended a formal welcome and spoke briefly about the history of the region, which was settled during his grandfather's time; about the government imperative to clear native vegetation as a condition of the land being allocated; and about the changes he had seen during his own lifetime. In welcoming the planters, he drew on the image adopted by Landcare Australia as its logo, a map of Australia created and framed by a pair of hands, to indicate that urban and rural people alike were indeed 'joining hands' in the face of the salinity crisis. Yet, while acknowledging the contribution of the urban planters, he gently suggested that the country remained a different world to the city. For him, the greatest value in the collaboration was that it served to remind city dwellers about where their food came from, who produced it, and the environmental problems those producers encountered in doing so.⁸

Many of the urban tree growers in attendance also talked about their involvement as an exchange, suggesting that in 'putting something pure back into nature' they were gaining something in return. Many used medical metaphors - salinity was described as 'a creeping cancer', landscapes and rural communities were said to be 'dying' and the act of planting trees was seen as 'healing the land'. To do so 'did the heart good'. As one elderly planter (now deceased), who spoke at length about his rural past, explained; 'it gets me outdoors, makes me feel like a man again!'⁹. Another woman, who lived in a small unit, reflected that she felt 'proud at really getting [her] hands dirty' something she felt unable to do in her daily life.

In linking their lives to eternal symbols - the trees - many older planters suggested that they took comfort in the idea that their Landcare work would result in some sort of personal transcendence. One woman saw environmental restoration projects as

⁷ Many of the growers had built up strong personal relationships with 'their' farmer. Some had returned to the same farm to plant their seedlings, or to collect seed from nearby remnant vegetation, for eight or more years, timing their annual leave to do so.

⁸ The importance of these links between rural and city-dwellers was also emphasised in research that Mulcock undertook in another Wheatbelt town in 2000. See Beresford et al. (2001), Chapter 5.

⁹ In a eulogy delivered at this planter's funeral, the organisation's president spoke of 'the living monument' that this man's tree planting activities had created for him. Such statements, like the act of commemorative tree planting itself, invoke the 'vitality and self-regenerative power ... which make trees so amenable to life-reaffirming and death-denying cultural representations' (Rival, 1998:3).

'setting things right again', linking the kinder world of her remembered childhood with the world that she hoped 'her grandchildren's grandchildren might inherit', a world that contrasted sharply with her negative view of contemporary urban life. For her, the countryside was a place of moral value. Her engagement with the project can be understood as a flight into the past as much as a flight from the city, with trees symbolising 'historical continuity' and structuring a 'moral community' for those who appreciated it as she did and as she imagined the farmers also did (Rival, 1998: 18-19, Fernandez, 1998).

Others spoke more simply of the planting as being 'a nice day out', a chance to meet 'like-minded folk' amongst both their fellow planters and the farmers whom some described, seemingly without regard for irony, as being 'the salt of the earth'. In doing so, several spoke of the resourcefulness of the farmers in continuing to farm under conditions of environmental and financial adversity, 'the sort of pioneer qualities which made this such a great country' as one planter put it, adding that he felt 'proud to make a small contribution to restoring the land'.

For many, raising seedlings for the project gave them 'something to look forward to' and provided a tangible way of giving expression to their deeply held environmental concerns on a daily basis. As the quote which introduces this section indicates, several described the seedlings as their 'children' or 'babies' and one (childless) man reflected on the pride he experienced in seeing the 'teenage trees, now taller than I am' which he had planted on previous visits. Like a number of other planters, he had an exclusively native garden in Perth and raising native seedlings represented another way of 'bringing the country into the city'.¹⁰ In speaking of his garden as 'an oasis in the suburbs' and making an association between this and the 'oases' that he was helping to create through raising and planting seedlings, this planter and many others invoked Edenic metaphors. As Cohen (1999) has suggested, such metaphors abound in conservationist discourses and betray a sense that the world was once a better place. At the same time they seem to imply that an imagined, pristine 'Nature' can be recovered through careful management, thereby creating a privileged position for the (urban) observer in the landscape.

For both the urban tree growers and rural landholders, plantings such as the one described here are about the recovery of 'lost places', places transformed by time and human intervention but integral to maintaining a sense of belonging (Read, 1996). For the urban participants, helping to maintain or restore rural landscapes is more than an expression of the adage 'think globally, act locally' - it is a means of establishing a real connection with the land in the midst of urban domesticity. In doing so, many seek to affirm their childhood connections to rural areas, thereby

¹⁰ In an interesting reversal of this experience, a woman living on a farm near the planting site recounted how a visiting urban-based environmentalist told her she should pull down the wall surrounding the homestead, dig out the rose bushes she lovingly cultivated and plant natives in their place. She reflected that the environmentalist from the city 'didn't see that's exactly why I put the wall up and planted the roses in the first place, to keep the bush out, to keep a bit of space around the house'. This could perhaps be interpreted as an attempt to 'civilise' or domesticate the 'bush' around the house by planting imported species that are commonly associated with suburban gardens. A rural Landcare worker made a similar observation during an interview with Mulcock in 2000; acknowledging that the plants she kept around her house were ill-suited to the local environmental condition, she pointed out that she wanted, and perhaps even needed, to maintain a 'green oasis' for herself in the middle of the grey and brown 'bush' during the dry summer. Such sentiments actually suggest a *lack* of belonging or comfort amongst people living in the bush settings so commonly idealised by urban-dwellers.

sustaining an idealised image of Australia as a moral community built on eternal values that are symbolically located in a countryside which evokes a shared past. By contrasting the countryside with the ills associated with urban living, growing and planting trees can be understood as a metaphorical flight from the city, with trees being celebrated 'not only for what they represent but also in themselves, as sources of actual and sensual involvement in the world' (Rival, 1998: 17).

Wildflower essences, urban stresses and personal rejuvenation

Like the urban tree-growers and planters described above, the participants in Mulcock's study share narratives of healing, rejuvenation, the nourishment of soul and the memory of places lost. These people however, have chosen, in their explorations of the alternative health and spirituality movement, to focus on healing themselves rather than directing their energies into healing the landscape. All the same, in the case considered here, the bush itself – constructed as a counterbalance to the stresses of urban living - is the major source of that personal healing.

Susan's story

Now, looking back, although I grew up in the city, we had a lot of bush. We were surrounded by bush – I lived just in the city – but I am 45, so going back to when I was kid, there was a lot of bush around. We didn't have a car until I was about 12... there weren't a lot of streets around, so, to me, looking back now, we lived in a similar environment perhaps to some of the Aboriginal people and the way that they lived, you know, going back a few years, before things became so industrialised. I used to spend a lot of time in the bush, just looking at the flowers and being really quite... I just loved them (Susan, interview, 1997).

Susan grew up in an outer suburb of Perth in Western Australia. She told me about some of her childhood memories of being in the bush during an interview conducted in 1997 as part of my doctoral research into the significance of Indigenous imagery in the Australian New Age movement.¹¹ Susan had become increasingly interested in Aboriginal culture and spirituality after she started learning about the healing powers of Western Australian wildflowers. Her adult experiences of using bush flower remedies to deal with stress and emotional trauma, combined with her memories of spending time in the bush as a child, evoked an 'innate feeling of belonging' to the Australian landscape that Susan compared with the attachments to land described by Aboriginal Australians. She explained that using Western Australian wildflower essences had helped her to recognise her own attachment to place, and her desire 'to belong to the Indigenous people' of the area where she was born and raised.¹² This 'search for an indigenous self' (Mulcock 2001 c. See also St John, 2001) coincided with, or perhaps grew out of, Susan's search for her 'inner self', a search that took shape as part of her efforts to cope with the increasing pressures of a busy urban lifestyle. Susan believed that using and learning about Western Australian

¹¹ See Mulcock 2001a, 2001b & 2001c.

¹² One of the recurrent themes in New Age discourse relates to the importance of 'reconnecting' to 'Nature', to the Earth and to the primal, autochthonous part of ourselves often imagined to exist beneath the supposedly modern and sophisticated exteriors we exhibit in our daily lives. For most of the people whom I interviewed this sense of lost indigeneity was general rather than place-specific. Susan's search was unusual in that she linked her feelings of indigeneity very directly to the South West of Western Australia, the place of her birth.

wildflower essences helped her to 'come full circle', to re-establish the connections that she had with 'the bush' during her childhood. She believed that her ability to overcome stress-related depression and fatigue, and to recover from a serious suicide attempt, was closely related to, if not dependent upon, being able to reconnect with the healing powers of the local bush.

Flower essence therapy is one of many natural therapies¹³ to have achieved popularity in the late twentieth century under the auspices of the alternative health and spirituality movement. Ian White, the founder of Australian Bush Flower Essences, attributes ancient origins to this healing system, claiming that Aboriginal, Egyptian, Malay, African and European cultures 'have used flowers to treat emotional states and imbalances' for thousands of years (White 1991: 27, see also Harvey 1996). Recent forms of flower essence therapy, however, are generally traced to Edward Bach, an English Physician who gave up his medical practice in 1930 to develop his thirty eight flower remedies (Drury 1981: 52, White 1991: 27, O'Malley and Reinhold 2000: 18). Practitioners and users of flower essences believe that the life force or energetic essence of a plant can be captured by floating its petals in spring water for several hours in full sunlight.¹⁴ The flowers are then removed and the energised water is preserved with brandy. The mixture can then be 'dropped onto the tongue, rubbed onto the forehead, lips, wrists, soles or palms, or added to ... bathwater, moisturizer or body lotion' (Body Shop 1998: 192). White also recommends that flower essences be sprayed throughout the house and added to the washing machine (Drioli 1995: 58-9). In this way, 'the power of the Australian Bush', he claims, can be brought to bear on urban lives, not only in Australia, but throughout the world.¹⁵ In an interview with Golden Age magazine, White explained how his essences worked:

[I]n extracting the "healing" of the flower, we're getting the healing of the whole plant. The Bush Essences are drawing on the unique energy of

¹³ 'Natural therapies are those which do not rely upon synthetic, artificial or pharmacological medicines or technological methods for healing. There are a wide range of healing practices under this umbrella including aromatherapy, Chinese medicine, flower essences, herbal medicine, homeopathy, acupuncture [and] iridology... Natural therapies are based on six fundamental principles; the healing power of nature, treat[ment of] the cause rather than the effect, [the importance of doing] no harm, treat[ment of] the whole person, the [role of the] physician [as] a teacher, and [the premise that] prevention is better than cure... [Many] natural therapies involve touch or other techniques to detect imbalances or sensitivities which affect our physical, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.' (Conscious Living Directory 1998, p.6).

¹⁴ White (1991:28) emphasises the importance of 'sensitivity and reverence' in the preparation of flower essences. He also draws attention to the need for purity, stating that flowers should be 'grown in an environment away from pollution and power lines' and should never be touched directly during preparation in case of contamination from other energy sources. White also identified the need for 'an ideal environment of blue sky and sun' when creating the essences (Drioli 1995:59, see also Daw 1997:12). He takes this even further in his promotional material for Australian Bush Essences, pointing out that the Australian landscape itself is 'one of the most unpolluted countries', that, 'metaphysically, it has a very wise, old energy', that it is 'the first continent' and therefore contains very 'ancient flowering plant forms' that 'tap into [the] power, strength and vitality' of that landscape. Such statements proclaim the primary rhetorical importance, within these discourses, of virtuosity and origins.

¹⁵ Flower essence therapy is an international industry. It is also possible to purchase essences made from plants native to Africa, South America, Europe, India and North America (Harvey 1996:40).

Australia: the spiritual wisdom of the land... There is this purity in Australia; and this all comes out in the magic and potency of our individual flowers... they tap directly into the spiritual and physical quality of the land (quoted in Drioli, 1995: 58).

Flower essences are said to 'address the mental and emotional roots of disease' (O'Malley and Reinhold 2000: 18), thereby restoring 'balance' to the physical body and eliminating physical symptoms. Like most holistic therapies, flower essences aim to treat body, mind and soul simultaneously; they do their work at the level of 'inner landscapes'. The Australian Bush Essences are reported, amongst other things to 'revitalise and renew your inner self', 'to assist in finding inner peace', and to facilitate 'inner knowing' (O'Malley and Reinhold 2000: 20-24). Throughout our conversation Susan implied that the Western Australian wildflower essences worked for her in these very ways, calming, soothing, re-energising and facilitating important insights into herself and the people around her.

Like Susan, the founders of the two Australian Flower Essence companies, Ian White (Australian Bush Flower Essences), and Vasudeva Barnao (Living Essences of Australia), link their interest in bush flowers to childhood experiences or significant memories. White's advertising material, for example, contains the following account:

Ian comes from a long line of herbalists and grew up in the Australian bush. His Grandmother, like her mother before her, specialised in using Australian plants and when Ian was a young boy she would often take him for walks in the bush. From her deep understanding she would point out the many healing plants and flowers. Ian learned a profound respect for nature through her and he too, became a practitioner and started working with native plants.

Barnao's memories, mythologised like White's in publications promoting his products, are of illness and healing. One article reports that Barnao, 'a severe asthmatic', discovered the effects of flowers when he 'suddenly became aware he felt better when standing among plants in his backyard' (Evans 2001: 22). Another article locates the origins of the essences, more specifically, in 1977:

Barnao was experiencing great emotional turmoil and discovered an interesting phenomenon when he went into the bush. He noticed that all his problems seemed to disappear when he stood near a certain flower. Away from the bush, he found that the problems would return but each time he came back to this plant, they would resolve again. (Daw 1997: 12)

Susan recounted a similar story, a memory that seemed to play an important part in consolidating and confirming her adult experiences with the Western Australian wildflower essences:

I can remember coming home from school one day, and these yellow wattles out in the yard. I was feeling really down, and I just had this urge to go and sit under the wattle tree. I just sat there for a while and it just was like all the sunshine yellow that was in there had just flowed right through me and had lifted my whole spirit - I had been completely lifted by that flower (Susan, Interview, 1997).

Each of the accounts above speak of a kind of healing directly linked to the experience of being in a particular place, in the bush or in the garden. White explains for example, that 'if you are feeling tired [and] you go into the hills and have a wander through the bush, you'll start to get rejuvenated because [the] energy coming out through the flowers... touches us and uplifts us' (Drioli 1995: 58). Bottled flower essences are intended to recreate the feeling of 'being there' in the presence

of particular wildflowers, only the bottled essence experience is available anytime of the day or night, all year round, anywhere in the world.¹⁶

Clare Harvey (1996: 41), co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Flower Remedies*, writes, in an article for an English 'New Age' magazine, that 'flower remedies are needed now more than ever'. She justifies this statement with a discussion of what she describes as 'the stress epidemic', due, she believes, to 'our'¹⁷ increased media exposure to 'horrific events such as wars, famines, tragic accidents, and natural disasters'; to the effects of working in offices 'full of anxious frazzled people'; and to 'the pressures of feeling hemmed in due to overcrowding, the constant noise of traffic and the almost stifling levels of pollution in some cities'. 'Stress', Harvey states, 'has become the twentieth century ailment' (p 41). She goes on to make the following statement:

Just as escaping to a place of stunning natural beauty leaves you feeling that your problems and worries back home are less daunting than you had imagined, some of the flower essences, such as Living Essences of Australia's Ilyarrie, help one to realise that situations won't overwhelm you and that you have the strength and insight to deal with them (p 41-2).¹⁸

Susan's story, in its details, many of which can not be included here, and in its overall form, bears a close resemblance to Harvey's narrative.

The bush in a bottle

Many alternative or 'natural' therapies include discourses about the importance of becoming more attuned to the natural energies of the landscape in order to be 'healed' or otherwise assisted by those energies.¹⁹ These therapies focus on the need to 'get in touch with nature', and can be comfortably interpreted as innovations for everyday life designed, in part, to enhance personal experiences of 'belonging' in the landscape, in both its urban and rural forms. Alternative therapies frequently invoke 'Nature' as a remedy or enhancement to urban lifestyles and as such they offer a means of escaping the 'symptoms' frequently associated with city life such as stress and anxiety.²⁰ In doing so however, they consolidate idealised images of nature,

¹⁶ Freeman (1997:14), for example, tells the story of how Tanmaya, the founder of Himalayan Flower Enhancers, re-experienced 'the same state of deep peace' whilst taking Himalayan flower essences in India as he did whilst 'sitting meditating on the rock gardens of Kyoto' in Japan.

¹⁷ Harvey appears to be addressing middle class 'Westerners' here.

¹⁸ Harvey (1996:40) lists 9 remedies specifically designed to treat 'city stress', including a Himalayan essence called 'Urban Stress Remedy'.

¹⁹ People living in rural settings also make use of alternative therapies, such as flower essences, to deal with daily stresses and anxieties. However, given the 'New Age' construction of physical and metaphysical proximity to 'nature' as the cure for all ailments, along with obvious economic factors relating to population densities, it is not especially surprising that the alternative health and spirituality literature is almost exclusively directed at urban dwellers.

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that, in the Australian setting, tap into mythologised notions of 'The Bush' as a place that belongs to a golden age, an Arcadian past where everyone was free of stress and life was good.²¹ This imagined past provides a mental space for healing and escape from the pressures and disappointments of contemporary life – as such, this idyll is, and perhaps always has been, a necessary 'place' of retreat.

Conclusion

I think of two landscapes – one outside the self, the other within.
(Lopez, Arctic Dreams, 1986)

Ever since material links with rurality and all its accoutrements (such as chicken coops and wildflower pickers) have begun to disappear from city spaces, urban dwellers have sought ways to bring the bush back in - whether physically or metaphorically – through a variety of everyday innovations and through the creation of sacred spaces within the bounds of domestic and/or personal domains. In a similar vein to urban conservationists and private gardeners who engage in daily rituals of cultivation and nurturance, people like Susan, and the flower essences practitioners introduced above, find ways to re-work the urban spaces they inhabit in order to incorporate elements of wilderness and rurality into their lives, in order to recreate the feeling of 'being there'. Perhaps such ordinary endeavours should be understood as examples of what former Professor of Religion and Psychology, Thomas Moore (1996), refers to as 'the re-enchantment of everyday life', a kind of alternative 'flight from the city', as deeply and irrevocably embedded within the daily requirements of urban living as it is within sweetly remembered and gloriously imagined rural pasts.

The act of environmental restoration through the growing and planting of trees may be read as an act of faith, a means by which urban dwellers and newcomers can establish a link to the land, a sense of belonging in the landscape. Likewise, the use of wildflower essences can be understood as a very personal attempt to tap into the landscape, to expand individual connections to place, but to 'the earth' in a general sense rather than to any one place in particular. Both are couched in terms of a 'flight' from the negative effects of urban spaces and both are heavily informed by memories and/or imaginings of idealised bush settings.

In the way that urban environmentalists talk about their tree planting activities, it is possible to see that there is also a personal restorative process at work for them. In participating in the daily rituals of sowing, raising, watering, and tending native seedlings destined for Landcare plantings, many participants suggest that they are gaining a 'depth', 'an empathy for life', or a sense of 'inner peace' that they believe can be found in 'Nature' or in the countryside. It is this quality, as much as the

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²¹ Both White and Barnao directly link their flower remedies to Australian Aboriginal healing traditions, which they seem to associate with a more romantic past. Advertising brochures for 'Living Essences of Australia', for example, state that '[f]lower essence therapy, using whole, live flowers, has been used by the Nyoongah [A]boriginal people [in the south-west corner of the state of WA] for thousands of years' and is 'the oldest known flower essence tradition existing today'. Such associations imply a certain kind of authenticity, itself dependent upon the mobilisation of a commonly held set of ideas about Aboriginal people and 'traditional' culture. These representations are often problematic for Indigenous people themselves. For further discussion see Behrendt 1998 and Mulcock 2001b.

meditative exercise of propagation, that they claim helps to sustain them against the rigours of an urban existence and that constitutes a 'flight from the city' in the midst of their daily lives. Bush essences work in similar ways for Susan and others who use them for personal healing. By claiming to bring the energies of the bush into urban homes, and into urban bodies, wildflower essences help to counteract the stresses commonly ascribed to city-based lifestyles. In this sense 'the bush' becomes an active force in everyday suburban routine.

The role of memory and imagination evident in the above case studies suggests that the Australian bush idyll is the product of distance and 'lost places', as much as it is the product of direct experience in or of the landscape itself. René Magritte's painting, *La Condition humaine*, included at the opening of this paper, reminds us of the relationship between what we see in the landscape and what is really there, what is past and what is present. In keeping with the quote beneath this image, landscape historian Simon Schama (1995: 12) re-produces another of Magritte's telling reflections on this painting: 'This is how we see the world, we see it as being outside ourselves even though it is only a mental representation of what we experience on the inside'. Similarly, Lopez' reflection on the existence of two landscapes, one inner and one outer, included at the beginning of this final section, alludes to the gaps between the landscapes that exist independently of human interpretation and those that we experience through the prisms of memory and imagination. To ignore the gaps that emerge between these inner and outer landscapes is a flight of another kind, a flight that forms part of the metaphorical flight from the city that is present in the anti-urban discourses of both city-based conservationists and proponents of bush essences. In this way, these two case studies contribute to a growing awareness that urban/rural dichotomies become increasingly difficult to sustain when blurred by the ethereal presence of remembered and imagined pasts.

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