

Landscape in Lockdown

Yorke Peninsula & Dhillba Guuranda-Innes National Park

September 2021

As you sped north from Adelaide towards Port Wakefield, through misty rain and roadworks and seemingly vast fields of land cleared for industrial development, you felt that some sudden violent interplay between oppositional forces had produced the scene before you. The barrenness of the land at the edge of the city and deadline-speed of travel along the highway suggested the landscape was in a rapid and conflicted process of becoming – in an untenable position between what it once was and what it was “meant to be”. It was landscape as the tension between “the here and now” of the viewer and an “imagined world of being and potential”.¹ At the ego level, the highway landscape involved a rushed and uneasy dialectic process of leaving the city, with its apparent danger, noise, artificiality, crowded and confined conditions of social life, and entering the rural, with its imagined idyllic conditions of safety, authenticity, isolation, silence, and open space. On a broader spatial scale, the establishment of the highway and cleared allotments worked to diminish the power of landscape, leaving it subjugated to human demands for efficiency of movement through it. In using the highway, under the conditions of an impending lockdown, you felt complicit as an element in this landscape’s subjugation.

Driving south now in the mid-afternoon, the scale of agriculture on the peninsula came into view as you passed expanses of cattle and sheep pastures and immense croplands bearing wheat grain. Near the port of Ardrossan, a huge pile of excavated soil served as a tourist lookout over the settlement. A few kilometres down the road, a sign had been pinned to a grain silo in a pasture – “Say No to Hillside Mine, Save Yorkes, Save Our Food”. Again, there was an impression of marks of violence on the landscape – the legacy of colonial agriculture on indigenous vegetation, and remains of a newer conflict between generational farmers and the big business of resource extraction. At this point in your travels, landscape was not only a scene onto which values could be projected, but now appeared to be an actor in its own conflict, offering up its potential – soil, minerals, ocean, climate, and space – to different socio-political forces. Through its offering of itself, the landscape of the Yorke Peninsula seemed to exert its own sense of chaotic agency through imbuing its elements with competing identities – conservationist, tourist, farming family, port worker, mine worker, business manager, and the non-human – as it was delineated according to ownership by highways, wire fences and gravel roads.

Arriving in Marion Bay an hour before sunset, your experience of landscape suddenly slowed down. In lockdown, the present moment lingered for longer, between a stable past and an unpredictable future, and there was an awareness of a fateful possibility that it may never end. In contrast to driving to meet a deadline, aimless and slow

walking amongst the empty streets and holiday homes in the harsh coastal winds involved embodiment of a feeling of estrangement and an encountering of finer textures of the landscape's forms – the caw of sea birds, the pungency of seaweed, rippling puddles in the road, the glow of a few lights in houses, and the sounds of cars on the highway left behind. Solitary coastal walking involves new and mutual configurations of self and landscape, of “shifting moods, colour, tenor and intensity of places and situations”. This more intimate experience, of isolation and suspended spatiotemporality, pointed to a perspective of “dwelling” within a place – as “occupation of a place already built” with “forms arising within the current of involved activity, in the specific relational contexts of practical engagement with (your) surroundings”. Your specific experience of the landscape of Marion Bay was possible only because you were being compelled to “dwell” within it under capricious and unfamiliar conditions of place and time.



The Yorke Highway stopped at the boundary of Dhillba Guuranda-Innes National Park, ending the transition between cropland and heathland, although a sealed (and then gravel) road cut through the native vegetation to reach the park's outermost beaches. Later in your stay, the drive took you past the inactive port of Stenhouse Bay and the ruined mining township of Innes, past the shipwreck of the Ethel, and onwards to the functioning stainless-steel lighthouse at West Cape. In walking amongst these features, the landscape again suggested that its elements had moulded

oppositional intentions, guided violent interactions, and both provided and destroyed. The unpredictable agency of the non-human was sometimes constrained by the human will to build towns, deplete the land of gypsum, and navigate the seas, and sometimes unbounded through unleashing lightning, thunderstorms, jagged rocks, and disease. The marks of conflict encountered during the drive into Marion Bay existed within the park as well, but as you walked, you observed these marks were older and partly healed over, as though the struggles had now given way to a landscape that encouraged a certain future-oriented type of dwelling, where conditions suggested human history had become frozen and natural history would take on a faster pace.



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