

*Landscapes of Care: Photography, Film, Modern Architecture
and Landscape Heritage*



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VISUAL ESSAYS

Walking the Table: Caring-with landscape

Millicent Gunner

Abstract:

Walking the Table is an experimental project that develops a relationship of care, registering and becoming conscious of subtle changes within an Australian landscape. Drawing on Donna Haraway's ideas of 'making-with'¹ and Tim Ingold's concept of 'thinking through making'² this visual essay explores ideas of relational care within a rapidly altering landscape and how one may become an attentive participant, moving with a changing landscape as a practice of care. Understanding 'landscape' to be a layered entanglement of systems, materials and inhabitants (more-than-human and human) movements and projections that are influenced by the past and present, the role of the photographs and two forms of text is to weave three different layers of conversation that are relational and form an overall narrative.

Photography is used to capture the process of a dialogue emerging between the walker and the landscape, facilitated through the camera and the table when walking the table around the site. Landscape and care is an ever-evolving relationship that requires attentiveness and participation. When a relationship with a landscape is built over a prolonged period of time, revealed are the drastic differences in scales of temporal shifts that landscapes undergo, formulating an ongoing dialogue between the landscape and the inhabitant of that landscape.

Keywords: relationship; attentive; participatory; temporality; device

¹ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (USA: Duke University Press, 2016), 5.

² Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (USA: Routledge, 2013), 21.

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Millicent Gunner is a PhD candidate at RMIT University exploring an attentive landscape architectural research practice, in relation to practices of care. She completed the Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and Design and the Master of Landscape Architecture at RMIT University. She has taught in RMIT's Bachelor of Landscape Architecture and Design for the last 2 years, as well as a semester at the University of Tasmania in the Bachelor of Design.

Walking the Table is an experimental project within a creative practice of relational care, registering and being attentive to subtle changes within an Australian landscape. This visual essay explores ideas of caring-with through a photographic method that focuses on relationality between devices that enables oneself to become an attentive participant within the foothills of the Alpine National Park.

Building a table with pneumatic wheels to push and draw in the site enabled an unexpected relationship with the landscape, revealed by the absurdity of walking a table. Drawing on Donna Haraway's *Staying with the Trouble* I am adopting a similar notion of 'making-with'³ a landscape as a practice of care, called caring-with. Caring-with means being consciously present and attentive to the landscape one is in, to listen to and be informed by the landscape. Responsive at a range of scales, this caring-with becomes apparent in the way the wheel rolls over rocks without disturbing the rocks' position, negotiating with the masonry stairs as I struggle to pull the table up them and utilising the camera as a device to register spatial time and changes over time. Caring-with is also situated in relation to Tim Ingold's method of 'thinking through making',⁴ allowing oneself to be vulnerable and open, one can harness unconstrained and improvised movement in response to or influenced by where one is moving and who one is moving with.

Improvisation and absurdity revealed the table and the camera together to be an experimental device, registering the site's temporal shifts and phenomena. Geoff Manaugh argues, 'given the right instruments, humans gain access to and, more importantly, begin to interact with entire systems of objects and landscapes that were present all along but had otherwise been physically unattainable'⁵. Both the camera and walking the table act as a device that enables one to enter into a conversation with the landscape, provoking a consciousness of details and processes that are occurring.

3 Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (USA: Duke University Press, 2016), 5.

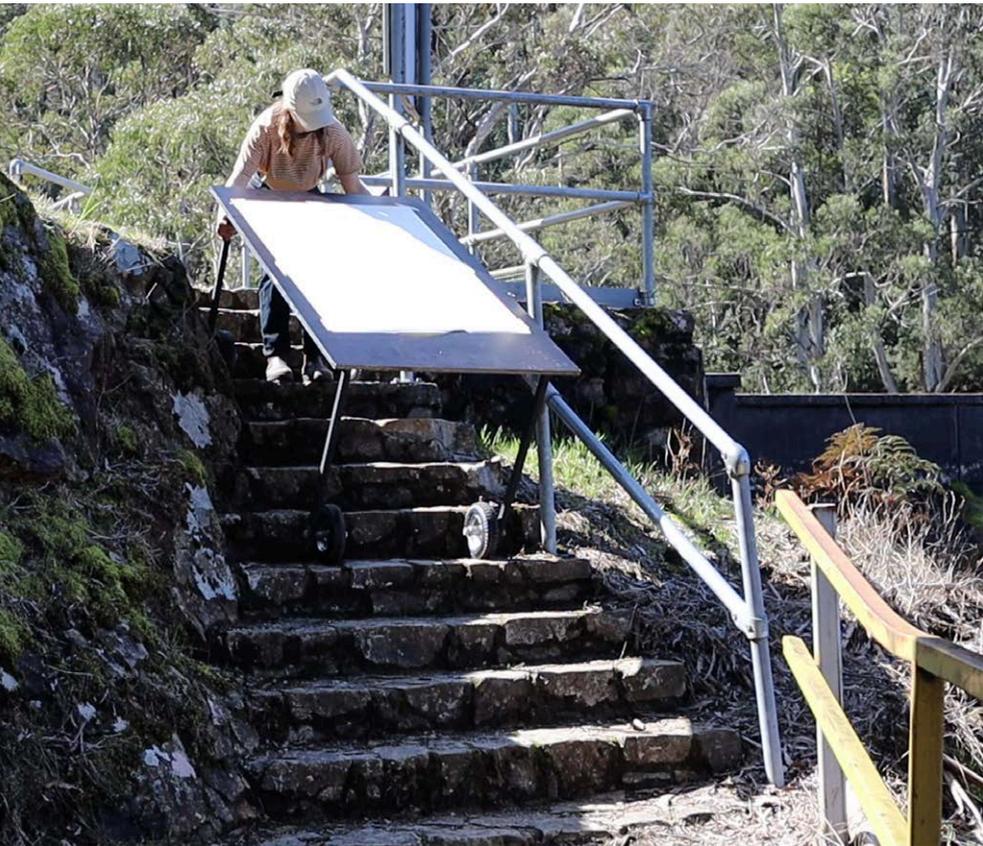
4 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (USA: Routledge, 2013), 21

5 Geoff Manaugh, *Landscape Futures: Instruments, Devices and Architectural Inventions* (New York: ACTAR, 2013), 27.



[Fig. 1]

Walking the table, negotiating with the landscape.



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This photographic series captures a specific moment in time and the process of a dialogue emerging between the walker and the landscape, facilitated through the table when pushing it around the site. There are two layers of the image being produced. Firstly, the table being pushed through the landscape is hosting an interaction between the paper on the table's surface, the sunlight and the landscape matter above, producing and capturing its own image through shadow forms. Secondly, there is me (the human) and the camera, together making images of these shadows captured through the paper and table movement.

'Photography shows, but the very act of framing also takes away, removes and abstracts.'⁶ The photographs from walking the table encapsulate an interaction between the table, landscape, my body and time without the visibility of these actions or devices. This abstract method of capturing the shadows on the table and paper's horizontal surface provides insight into the phenomena of the landscape at that specific moment in time, as well as my body's connection to the camera and table as I stretch over and tilt the camera lens down towards the table's surface. These photographs are telling of a clear, sunny day with vegetation located above me, the table and the camera, their shadows being a reminder to look up, notice and pay attention. Photographer and landscape architect Anne Whiston Spirn speaks of photography being a device to notice and 'discover what cannot be seen directly or only at a different scale... to question, seek answers and find connections among what is seemingly unrelated.'⁷ Intertwined with movements of the table, the landscape and my body's experience in the landscape, the photographs have allowed a shadow transect of a temporal site to be engaged with and prompt questions of larger time scales.

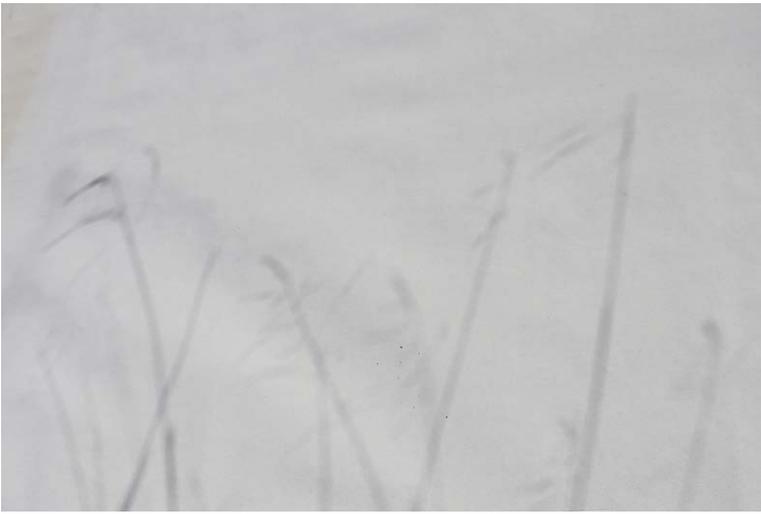
⁶ Anne C Godfrey, *Active Landscape Photography: Theoretical Groundwork for Landscape Architecture*. (UK: Routledge, 2020), 25.

⁷ "Sensing Place: Photography as Inquiry Lecture 8: Anne Whiston Spirn," filmed August 2019 at MIT, Cambridge, MA. video, 1:27, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6BC6zatWVTM&ab_channel=DezignArk.



[Fig. 2-3]

Shadow 01 Shadow 02 Shadow 03, Activated through pushing and shifting the table around the site, the pneumatic wheels respond to the ground conditions. As the wheels turn the hex nuts become loose on the bolts. The washers spin and rattle. I bend down and tighten them again. The shadows are indifferent to their temporal host, merely a projection of what is growing out of the ground below the radiant sun and above me, the table and the camera.





[Fig. 5-7]

Shadow 04, Shadow 05, Shadow 06, Ephemeral are the shadows as the table moves along the transect. Permanent are the shadows on these pages captured by the camera. Standing on the tips of my toes, maneuvering my body as to not interfere with the shadows above, I point the camera down and press the shutter.





[Fig. 8-10]

Shadow 07, Shadow 08, Shadow 09, Growing from the earth's ground. Stretching upwards towards the light and sky. Slightly leaning over the embankments edge towards the lake. Shapes in the shadows share characteristics and habits of the native and introduced species.

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Through a lens of attentiveness and participation, this engagement with the device and landscape is a practice of care that opens up space for 'others' and 'otherness' to reveal themselves and an invitation for myself, as a human participant, to be present, uncomfortable at times, and to move-along-with 'unfinished configurations of places, times, matters, meanings.'⁸ These photographs are a set of relationships, unseen in the images themselves. The shadows are an interaction between the table and paper, landscape and time, capturing phenomenological qualities of the landscape. Though the images distill the shadows at a certain moment in time, the series also represents a part of the process within my practice of caring—with that is being physically present and consciously attentive to the landscape. As Ingold reflects, 'care has lost much of its spontaneity... less personal, less imbued with feeling. It has become a service to be delivered rather than a recognition, in attention and response, of what we owe to others for our own existence as beings in a world.'⁹ Working as a device together, the camera and the table allow the opportunity for spontaneous encounters and draw one's attention to notice 'others' present in the landscape. The tempo and pace between the ground conditions, the table being pushed and the shadows on the surface engaged an attention to certain details I would have otherwise missed. The shadows communicated with the devices and unlocked an otherness of site, expanding my perception and immersion within the landscape and opening up a dialogue and opportunity for responsiveness.

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⁸ Donna Haraway, *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene* (USA: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.
⁹ Tim Ingold, *Correspondences* (UK: Polity Press, 2021), 3.



[Fig. 11]

Shadow 11, Noticing an unusual shadow of a tree branch I looked up. What we humans botanically classify as an *Ulmus* species had a strange growth on its smaller branches. Unknown to me whether the tree has wing-bark disease or is a cork-winged Elm, after this discovery and unsure whether the Elm was sick or not, each time I passed by, I would check on the tree.