

Queensland College of Art

Griffith University

Doctor of Visual Arts

APPREHENDING THE VOID

Using animation to interpret the *genius loci* of the Peel Island Lazaret

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research project harnesses the plasmatic nature of animation (Eisenstein 1989) to embody the in-between state of being of the Peel Island Lazaret on the island of Teerk Roo Ra in Moreton Bay, Queensland.

In this project the *genius loci* of this place is expressed through the development of a series of creative works that employs the unique transformative quality of animation to push and pull at the boundary lines between what can be apprehended as the 'real' and the 'imaginary'. Drawing on the physical approach of Czech surrealist animator Jan Švankmajer and cultural theories from Australian writer Ross Gibson, this study re-members and re-imagines the site of the Lazaret as a liminal, uncanny place.

This study investigates how conceptions of place are overlaid by aspects of history, memory and the imagination and these discoveries contribute to the currently limited academic discourse around place and place-making in animation practice in Australia.

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This project is dedicated to the memory of my brother Paul and my father Chris.

DECLARATION

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Chris Denaro

17 November 2014

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background to the Study

This exegesis is an accompaniment to the creative works I have produced during my Doctor of Visual Arts candidature. The writing provides an entry point to the work, and introduces the theoretical position of the research aims.

As an animator, I am interested in the plasmatic nature of animation, the influence of animism in animation practice, and the capacity of animation to interrogate the place between the real and the imaginary.

In this study, I sought to re-member and re-imagine the Peel Island Lazaret through the creation of a series of animated creative works. These works embody an in-between state of being, and investigate how conceptions of place are overlaid by memory, history, and imagination. This discussion contributes to the discourse around place and place-making in animation practice.

Research Aims:

1. To re-member and re-imagine the Peel Island Lazaret
2. To harness the plasmatic quality of animation to express an in-between state of being

1.1 The Peel Island Lazaret

The study is founded on a personal experience that occurred during Teerk Roo Ra artist residencies in 2010 and 2011. Teerk Roo Ra National Park (formerly known as Peel Island) is a small island in Moreton Bay, Queensland, that has an intriguing history; it is the site of a former lazaret and quarantine station. The Peel Island Lazaret treated patients diagnosed with Hansen's disease (or leprosy) between 1907 and 1959. Supported by the National Parks and Wildlife Rangers, the artist residencies were an opportunity to inhabit the heritage-listed site of the Lazaret, and respond to the site in the company of fellow artists from the Queensland College of Art (QCA), Griffith University.

The site of the former Peel Island Lazaret lies on the north-western side of Teerk Roo Ra. The island was intermittently inhabited by the Quandamooka people before non-indigenous intervention in 1859, when settlers proclaimed it as a quarantine station. Subsequent uses of the island included an inebriate's asylum, the Lazaret, a school camp and, finally, a National Park, which includes the heritage-listed archaeological site of the Peel Island Lazaret. Non-indigenous history re-members this island as Peel Island, but in 2011, when its indigenous title was recognised, the island was renamed Teerk Roo Ra, meaning 'place of many shells' (Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing 2011).

The Peel Island Lazaret can be described as having been part-hospital, part-internment camp, and part-paradise. Ethnic groups from across Queensland were housed there, placed on the periphery of Australian society, and rendered invisible, silent and powerless. While they came from a wide cross-section of society, they had one thing in common: they were all removed from their families, friends, and social structures to be transported and re-placed at the Lazaret. They suffered enormous trauma as a result of being severed from their previous lives. In the book *Moreton Bay People* (2000), local historian Peter Ludlow describes many situations of the forced escort of patients from all over Queensland, some even being made to ride in special railway prison wagons; a former patient stated "I was being treated like a criminal, even though I had done nothing to deserve it" (cited in Ludlow 2000, 167).

Such was the fear and hysteria surrounding Hansen's disease that, with news of the diagnosis, people's lives were abruptly cut short; their marriages, their families, and their connection to their homes were all ruptured. Their old lives on the mainland went on without them, and, for the most part, society continued with their absence. The patients were essentially inmates in paradise with an uncertain future. Having arrived at the island, and housed in the Lazaret, they entered a kind of limbo, an in-between transitional state.

Another explanation of this state is the notion of liminality, of being "betwixt and between" all the recognised fixed points in space-time or structural classification (Turner 1967, 48). The term 'liminal' was coined by French ethnographer and folklorist Arnold van Gennep in his book *The Rites of Passage* ([1908] 2013) to describe rituals in small-scale tribal societies. British anthropologist Victor Turner expanded upon Gennep's theories and developed the liminal concept and applied it to a range of social issues. Turner used the example of the tribal ritual in which adolescents transform from boyhood to manhood, and discusses three distinct phases of this process: the exit from the initial state of boyhood; the liminal transformative state; and the return as a man. During the liminal phase, the participants are neither boy nor man, but in between; they don't exist as either, nor do they belong to the other, as Turner states, "This coincidence of opposite processes and notions in a single representation characterises the peculiar unity of the liminal: that which is neither this nor that, and yet as both" (Turner 1967, 42).

The patients' experience of the Lazaret, therefore, can be described as a liminal state of uncertainty. While the island was the patients' residence—in some cases, for decades—it was never their home; only a transitional environment while they waited to be 'cured'. While some did return to their previous lives, many did not make a recovery, and all that remains of the seventy patients who died on the island is the remnants of a cemetery among the gum trees. When a patient passed away on Peel, the other residents described the transition as "going to the gums" (Ludlow 2005, 63). Destined never to return to mainland society, they instead became a permanent part of the island. In this way, they were forever held in a liminal state, having exited from society, and being unable to return.

Living within a liminal state had other consequences for the Peel Island patients.

Turner notes that,

A further structurally negative characteristic of transitional beings is that they have nothing. They have no status, property, insignia, secular clothing, rank, kinship position, nothing to demarcate them structurally from their fellows.

(Turner 1967, 49)

The patients at the Lazaret were devoid of the usual associations of the mainland, and had to be content to live within the insular society of the Lazaret. With the discovery of a cure and treatment for Hansen's disease in the 1950s, the Lazaret was finally closed in 1959 (Department of National Parks, Recreation, Sport and Racing 2011).

The Lazaret site today is evocative of an eerie disappearance that is strangely unsettling. The settlement appears out of place, artificially preserved in the midst of the Australian bush. The old hospital building is full of rusted carcasses of equipment and materials, and the floorboards are dangerously rotten. In contrast, the small renovated church building has a coat of fresh paint and displays no sign of its previous use. The lawns are freshly mown, the standing huts are well kept, the forest is held at bay by clearly defined borders, but there are no people. The absence of the patients and staff is striking; however, the manicured nature of the site makes it seem as though they could return at any moment. It has the eerie quality of a living museum.

In contrast to the apparent order of the Lazaret site, the surrounding forest exudes a strong, almost menacing, presence; this thick bushland contributes to a claustrophobic sense of being watched or observed. There are no cars or sounds of city life, only the odd crash of a branch, the rustle of leaves, or flutters of wings overhead. Instead of the presence of patients, incursions of Golden Swamp and Agile wallabies now inhabit the site during the day and, at night time, the chilling sounds of curlews echo across the compound. The forest and its inhabitants

appear to be attempting to reclaim the Lazaret as their own in a relentless act of re-assimilation.

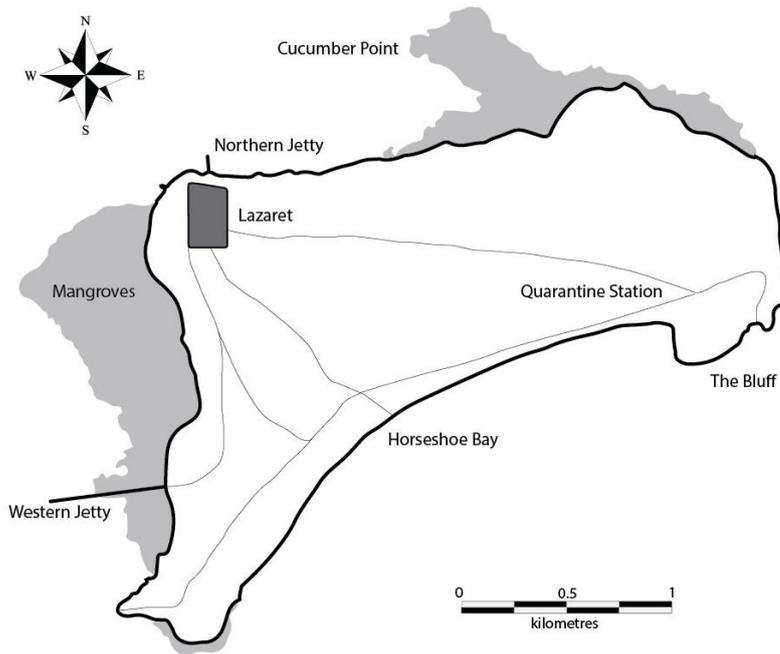


Fig. 1.2: Chris Denaro, *Map of Teerk Roo Ra* 2014, drawing. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

On the southern side of the island is a long beach called Horseshoe Bay, at the southern tip of which a collection of driftwood trees lies half submerged in the sand. The trees have been upended so that the roots are pointing at the sky, lending a haunting, uncanny atmosphere to the otherwise idyllic beach.



Fig. 1.3: Chris Denaro, *Horseshoe Bay series, Teerk Roo Ra National Park* 2010, photograph. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

During my first residency in 2010, I decided to venture to Horseshoe Bay at night, alone, as a way of observing these structures in the quality of moonlight. However, due to sudden cloud cover and a malfunctioning torch, I was unprepared for the total absence of light on the two-kilometre walk back to the huts. The moon was gone, and only an inky blackness remained. I was alone, immersed in a foreign space, with rules that suddenly seemed foreign to me. The noises in the forest were alien and perhaps even unfriendly. The shapes were familiar but in the same instant unrecognisable. There was a depth to the darkness, almost as if a fog of ether had descended onto the nothingness. But there was motion—a sense that out in the forest, things were moving. The friendly forest structures from earlier in the day had transformed: the night shift had clocked in.

Interestingly, the shapes and perceived movement in my peripheral vision were the most disconcerting, as they were the most difficult to identify and categorise. However, once the centre of my attention shifted to the peripheral, the scene would appear rational and logical once again; I was able to identify a tree, a branch, some leaves, and so on. In the fleeting and just-out-of-reach peripheral world, it seems as though anything can happen, and the laws are quite different. It was this unsettling feeling of objects being at once familiar, and then suddenly unfamiliar and disturbing, that provided the inciting incident for the study.

My original experience in the forest at night-time made me anxious and apprehensive. It was not that I saw ghosts or that I witnessed anything at all to promote this feeling. Nothing leapt out at me from the shadows. Rather, the reason for the unsettling feeling that descended upon me was the fact that there was nothing to grasp onto. I was not sure whether I had actually seen 'something' or heard 'something' or felt 'something', or whether my senses were hyper-sensitively turned back onto my own responses. It was as if I had entered that suspended moment when waking from a dream, where there is an uncertainty as to whether events from the dream did in fact occur. For a brief instant, the conscious and unconscious worlds overlapped and co-existed. In that moment, it

seemed possible to exist in two states, or in a zone between two states, which can be pleasurable or alarming. While fully awake, I experienced a physically disturbing sensation that provoked anxiety. It was a visceral experience produced from a mental state; a tangible physical result from what seemed to be an intangible situation. It was such an overwhelming experience that it stayed with me for several years. Teerk Roo Ra was transformed into something more personal and became a place that was forever altered by the residues of that night. The gaps between my conscious thoughts were a place inhabited by the imaginary. As an animator, I sought to 'capture' the objects, shapes and movements that I thought I saw. I wanted to understand the extent to which my imagination projected onto the site, how much the site influenced my imagination, and how much of this experience existed independently of my imagination.

Thus, in this study, I sought to construct a remembrance for the Peel Island Lazaret through creating a series of animated creative works that re-imagine the Lazaret and the island. In relation to attempting to interrogate a site in order to gain some further understanding, American academic Fritz Steele offers a means of apprehending the spirit or character of a place, as "the combination of characteristics that that gives some locations a special 'feel' or personality" (Steele 1981, 11).

I participated in five artist residencies at the Lazaret across the space of two years, and the works I developed from this experience interrogate perceptions of reality, and embody an in-between state of being. The Lazaret is caught between the past and the future and the experience of the Lazaret for the patients was similarly an in-between experience, held in a state of liminality.

1.2 Methods

For this study, I undertook research through creative practice, using a practice-led methodology. This approach used creative practice in the form of studio research, artist residencies and commissions as a means of gathering data in response to

the research aims. The artworks created during this study were used to explore and resolve the inquiry. This method is described by Scottish artist and academic Carol Gray and English academic Julian Malins as such:

When research involves practice, it is likely that some new work... has been developed to explore the research questions. These may be resolved pieces embodying some of the research concepts or they may be experimental 'sketches' or prototypes. (Gray and Malins 2004, 168)

During this study, I produced several bodies of artworks to explore the research aim. This study took a multi-method approach, with practice-led research as the primary methodology. As described by Finnish academics Maarit Mäkelä and Sara Routarinne (2006), in practice-led research, production not only motivates and explores questions within the study, but also inspires directions for future inquiry.

Mäkelä notes that,

In the field of practice-led research, praxis has a more essential role: making is conceived to be the driving force behind the research and in certain modes of practice also the creator of ideas. (Mäkelä and Routarinne 2006, 22)

Thus, as this research practice aims to respond to the initial inquiry through the development of a body of artwork, these artworks promote further inquiry leading to the next body of work. These artworks embody the 'new knowledge', and form the basis for the evidence claims in this exegesis. Indeed, English academic Owain Pedgley states that "the main motivation of practice-led researchers is to elicit and communicate new knowledge and theory originating from their own design practice" (Pedgley 2007, 463). As an animator, my research predominantly contributes to the field of animation.

Integral to the practice-led approach are the processes of praxis, critical reflection and reflexivity, which require the practitioner to act as participant-observer, or as a *reflective practitioner*, a term coined by American theorist Donald Schön (Schön 1983; Gray and Malins 2004). Schön believed that knowledge from reflection on practice was essential to inform future practice. Due to the practical and reflective nature of practice-led projects, the action research model is particularly

appropriate because it utilizes cycles of action whereby existing knowledge is confronted, observed, and then reflected upon. The action research model employed in this study was used as a vehicle to promote and encourage change and evolution throughout the program of inquiry and is the primary process used in creative practice as research projects. This study used a number of action cycles, which used a structured model of Plan, Act, Observe and Reflect, as shown in Fig.1.4.

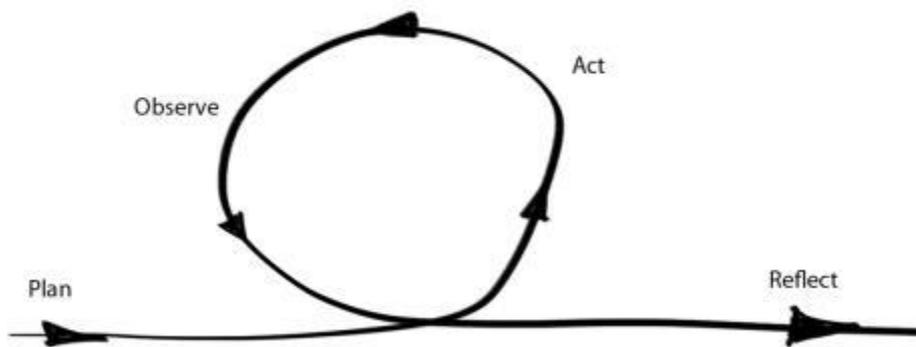


Fig. 1.4: Chris Denaro, *Action Research model* 2014, drawing. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Furthermore, this study used seven action cycles, as demonstrated in a linear diagram Fig. 1.5. I will now outline the remaining chapters.



Fig. 1.5: Chris Denaro, *Linear action research cycles to date* 2014, drawing. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

1.3 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 establishes the theoretical framework for the study. It examines animation’s capacity to push and pull at the boundaries between what can be thought of as the real and the imaginary, due to its inherent ‘plasmaticity’ (Eisenstein 1989). A metaphysical approach to animation process incorporating animism is introduced based on Czech Surrealist animator Jan Švankmajer and

American stop-motion animator Ray Harryhausen. Theories of the uncanny are presented from German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch, Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, South African animation theorist Meg Rickards, and Australian cultural theorists Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs. Conceptions of place from Australian cultural theorist Ross Gibson are discussed in relation to the notion of the liminal state (Turner 1967). *Genius loci* or 'spirit of place' is defined in relation to the Peel Island Lazaret and discussed in regard to the symbolism of the presence of absence in a void, as articulated by German philosopher Martin Heidegger. Finally, the chapter concludes by establishing the theoretical approach for the creative works produced in the study. This definition assists in the analysis of the contextual examples in Chapter 3 and the creative works in Chapter 4.

Chapter 3 probes the theoretical framework developed for this study in Chapter 2 through contextual analyses of Švankmajer's cinematic narrative *Down to the Cellar* (1982), Patricia Piccinini's cinematic artwork *The Gathering* (2007), Ann Lislegaard's installation *Time Machine* (2011), and Robert Seidel's abstract cinematic artwork *_grau* (2004). This analysis further clarifies this study's aims to express a *genius loci* that re-members and re-imagines the Peel Island Lazaret.

Chapter 4 applies the theoretical framework of Chapter 2 to an analysis of the development of the final series of creative artworks for this study, the *Teerk Roo Ra* series (2011) and the *Nocturne* series (2014). These artworks were developed using a practice-led approach based on a series of action research cycles and provide a response to the dual research aims of re-memembering and re-imagining the Peel Island Lazaret and embodying an in-between state of being through animation.

Chapter 5 is a summary of the research outcomes and a reflection on the contributions they have made to the trajectory of my animation practice.

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework

In this chapter, I introduce the definition for animation employed in the study, and the notion that a life force exists independent of our imagination as a form of animism. The 'plasmatic' nature of animation (Eisenstein 1989) is introduced and discussed in relation to a metaphysical approach to animation. The concepts of Liminality (Turner 1967) and the Uncanny (Freud [1919] 2003; Jentsch [1906] 1997) are used to describe the place of the Peel Island Lazaret, and also to describe the intellectual uncertainty that occurs when two states co-exist and overlap, such as the animate/inanimate. The conclusion to the chapter defines the theoretical approach taken for the artworks to satisfy the dual aims for the study.

2.1 Animation

The artworks are created through the process of animation, and taking advantage of the inherently fluid and 'plasmatic' (Eisenstein 1989) nature of animation.

Animation is a nebulous term, symbolising many things to many people. For some, it is Walt Disney and Pixar films, for others it is the fantastical creatures in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, or Hayao Miyazaki and Japanese Anime. German animator Robert Seidel states that "Animation can be experimental, entertaining or explanatory..." (Seidel in Selby 2009, 121), which alludes to how animation can be applied to a wide range of applications across multiple industries: how it can self-reflexively discuss process and form within its own discipline, how it can be utilised in the service of entertainment industries, such as cinema, games and visual effects, and how it can also be employed in the factual fields of visualisation and education.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary states that animation is at once "a lively or excited quality" as well as "a way of making a movie by using a series of drawings, computer graphics, or photographs of objects (such as puppets or models) that are slightly different from one another and that when viewed quickly one after another create the appearance of movement" (Merriam-Webster 2014a). The

Oxford Dictionary similarly describes animation as “being full of life or vigour” as well as the technique of creating an “illusion of movement when the film is shown as a sequence” (Oxford 2014a).

Canadian animator Norman McLaren states that “Animation is not the art of drawings-that-move, but rather the art of movements-that-are-drawn. What happens between each frame is more important than what happens on each frame” (McLaren in Schaffer 2005, n.p.). Rather than a series of photographs or images, which, when strung together, create life, McLaren describes the inverse: the movement exists independently, and animation is a means to record and transpose that ‘life’. Moreover, he argues that the space between the frames contains an essence that might not be immediately apparent, and for him it is the most important part of animation.

Perhaps the simplest definition though, comes from Chuck Jones, arguably one of the most influential animators and directors of animated films, who describes what he does as an animator as “to imbue with life” (Jones in Cholodenko 1993, 17). Therefore, for this study, animation can be defined as the act of imbuing something with life—to make it come alive—whether that thing is a drawing, a photograph, a static and inanimate object, or a puppet. However, the aim of this project is to not only make something come to life as an act of remembrance, but also to flirt with the boundaries of what that ‘thing’ is and what that ‘life’ might be.

Australian animation theorist Alan Cholodenko, in the book *Illusion of Life* (1993), identifies two distinctions of the animation process: “endowing with life” and “endowing with movement” (Cholodenko 1993, 15). The former means using an external force or energy, such as animism and the supernatural, while the latter describes external forces propelling an object into motion, such as transformation, metamorphosis and scientific laws, such as gravity and acceleration. Therefore, ‘life’ in the field of animation can be thought of as an external force propelling the

object into movement, or conversely, an internal energy whereby the object is 'alive' and moves autonomously (Cholodenko 1993).

This study embraces the latter approach, which it shares with influential stop-motion animators Švankmajer and Harryhausen, who view animation as a philosophical and subversive act. Rather than imposing an external force onto the object, whereby the animator 'inserts life', they see animation as a form of alchemy, finding the right process by which to allow the inner life to reveal itself. They treat objects as semi-autonomous sources of life rather than inert canvases on which to project life. Švankmajer asserts that objects retain memories, and that it is the role of the animator to listen and observe rather than to impose:

For me, objects are more alive than people, more permanent and more expressive—the memories they possess far exceed the memories of man. Objects conceal within themselves the events they've witnessed. I don't actually animate objects. I coerce their inner life out of them.
(Švankmajer in Imre 2009, 214)

Like Švankmajer, Harryhausen considers the act of animation as treating objects as entities, with their own sense of identity and purpose. He says of animation, "It's almost metaphysical in a sense. It's controlling another objects life force" (Harryhausen in Clarke 2007, 1).

This metaphysical approach to animation is based on a belief in animism, of an object possessing a conscious life or spirit, which is at the core of many animated films. In the animistic world of animation, inanimate items, such as candles, beds, tables and chairs, and natural elements, like trees, clouds and animals, are all able to become animate, and transact in a conscious relationship with humans and each other. Soviet Russian film director and film theorist Sergei Eisenstein was a vocal admirer of the films that the Walt Disney studios made in the 1930s and 1940s. He thought that the concept of an animated drawing was "a direct embodiment of the method of animism" (Eisenstein 1989, 44).

Eisenstein saw animation as possessing an ability called “plasmaticity”, the capacity for a being to assume any conceivable form dynamically. He saw each being as “primordial protoplasm, not yet possessing a ‘stable’ form, but capable of assuming any form” (Eisenstein 1989, 21). He was enamoured by the capacity of animation to transform and be liberated, of being able to escape from a fixed and static identity—to embody a “rejection of the once-and-forever allotted form” in which we are held (Eisenstein 1989, 21).

Animation begins with no boundaries and no rules; anything is possible, and often expected. A line, or drawing, or character has the capacity to wholly transform and metamorphose into anything imaginable. There are no physical or conceptual restrictions to this change and it is metamorphosis that is a quality unique to animation, and lies at the centre of animation itself (Wells 1998). This project embraces these concepts as part of this philosophical approach to animation practice.

In this study, I sought to re-imagine my experience in the forest, where reality was apparently fluid and mutable, and the objects in my peripheral vision were seemingly in a state of constant transformation. The branches and shadowy trees in the darkness were in a state of flux; at once imaginary creatures, yet still familiar forest objects. The real had collided with the imaginary, and there was no rational way to separate the two. In the case of my nocturnal experience on the island, the familiar forest I trekked through in the daylight had metamorphosed into something disturbingly unfamiliar by night time.

In her paper entitled “Uncanny Breaches, Flimsy Borders” (2009), which analyses Švankmajer’s body of work, South African animation theorist Meg Rickards observes that his use of real objects provokes a kind of uncertainty: “The uncanny—a mysterious experience in which familiar objects or events reference unconscious material and seem suddenly and frighteningly strange” (Rickards 2009).

According to Rickards, this kind of 'frighteningly strange' experience is caused by the familiar becoming foreign. This experience can occur when a real everyday object, such as a shoe or a piece of furniture, is imbued with life through animation, and the familiar inanimate object becomes an unfamiliarly animate object. It is the co-existence of the 'alive' state and the 'unalive' state that provokes an uncanny response. German psychiatrist Ernst Jentsch was one of the first to elaborate on the concept of the uncanny in his essay "On the Psychology of the Uncanny" (Jentsch [1906] 1997). Jentsch described the response to inanimate objects becoming animate as an uncanny effect caused by intellectual uncertainty. He states that the uncanny occurs when the observer is unsure of what they are witnessing. This does not mean it's a simple question of whether something is alive or dead; rather it is the unsettling feeling that occurs when both states exist at the same time, when two opposing states are simultaneously occupying the same space. It is as if one is seen to inhabit the other. As Jentsch notes, the individual is beset by the "doubt as to whether an apparently living being is animate; and, conversely, doubt as to whether a lifeless object may not in fact be animate" (Jentsch [1906] 1997, 11).

Austrian neurologist Sigmund Freud, who is often credited as the father of psychoanalysis, established a slightly different interpretation to that of Jentsch, and describes his notion of the uncanny in *The Uncanny* ([1919] 2003), which elaborates his theory of the concept of *heimlich* and *unheimlich*. *Heimlich* can translate to 'familiar', 'homely' and 'secure', or, conversely, can be translated as 'concealed', 'secret', 'hidden', 'private'. The opposite, *unheimlich*, brings with it the notion of 'unhomely', 'strange', 'uncomfortable' and 'unfamiliar'. For Freud, the uncanny occurs when a familiar object or scenario becomes foreign and unfamiliar (*unheimlich*). 'The Gathering' a short film by Patricia Piccinni (2007), discussed in chapter 3.2, is an example of a site which has transformed from a familiar suburban home into an unfamiliar, unhomely or *unheimlich* place through the overlay of an ominous and foreboding soundtrack combined with cinematic and cultural framing. The doors of the house are wide open, the lights are all on but

there is a lack of life; a distinct presence of absence of the inhabitants. The house looks lived in but there seems to be no life. By allowing the audience into this place, Piccinni disrupts the security of this comfortable family home, making it uncomfortable, strange and *unheimlich*.

Australian cultural theorists Ken Gelder and Jane Jacobs make a similar assertion in their paper entitled *Uncanny Australia* (1998). They believe it is not just the unfamiliar that causes the uncanny reaction, but its combination with these 'known' objects and environments. As Gelder and Jacobs note, this response can engender the anxiety of the uncanny:

The similarity is important to stress since, in Freud's terms, it is not simply the unfamiliar in itself which generates the anxiety of the uncanny; it is specifically the combination of the familiar and the unfamiliar—the way one seems always to inhabit the other. (Gelder and Jacobs 1998, 2)

This notion of the anxiety of the uncanny, caused by two overlapping states, can be seen as an extension of Jentsch's notion of the uncanny generating an intellectual uncertainty (Jentsch [1906] 1997).

This section discussed the field of animation and its relationship to animism, plasmaticness, and to notions of the uncanny. We know that when an object 'comes to life' in an animated film, the object is not really alive; rather, it is the illusion of life we are witnessing. However, when this situation occurs in the 'real' world, it is different, and prompts an uncanny reaction. There is an uncertainty as to whether it will happen again, and whether it was real or imaginary. When our perception of reality is altered within a space, our understanding and interpretation of that space is similarly transformed. In effect, that space becomes a place.

2.2 Place

This study sought to transform the space of the Peel Island Lazaret into a place by responding to the site through a series of animated creative works that embody its memories, histories, and imagination. In his essay "Remembering a Future for

Landscape in Australia" (2008), Australian cultural theorist Ross Gibson notes that this persuasive process of remembering transforms a space into a place: "When you remember persuasively in a space where decay or disappearance has occurred, you are working to make that space a place" (Gibson 2008, 61). In terms of the Peel Island Lazaret, everyday artefacts such as medicine bottles, plates, cans, tools and cups had been gathered together in collections on the site of the former hospital. These historical objects were intended to be incorporated as artefacts for a museum, however, the project was abandoned due to lack of funds, and the objects remained there as middens or cairns, as tangible evidence of a place littered with relics of decay and memory.

The site of the Peel Island Lazaret is a re-membered place that is caught in a liminal state between many overlapping realms: past and present, non-indigenous and indigenous, and life and decay. Place-making in terms of animation practice involves acts of gathering and constructing and combining aspects of site. Gibson discusses this process of re-gathering pieces to construct a new vision of a site, noting that, "When you remember, you put a body back together by coordinating some disaggregated or severed members. You re-member the dis-membered entirety" (Gibson 2008, 61). Similarly, the approach to animation in this study involved listening to and observing this 'place', collecting fragments of site, interrogating the memory of my experience, and considering ways in which to embody these fragments.

My experience of the Lazaret site and the Teerk Roo Ra forest, described above, was imbued with anxiety promoted by the uncanny. The experience involved a mix of personal interpretation and apprehension as well as a sense of the history and geography of the area. Gibson has described an approach to place-making as becoming attuned to ambient rhythms; "...ritual utterances in response to residues and to rhythms that are still stuttering in from a long time ago" (Gibson 2008, 60).

Gibson's notion of apprehending the 'utterances' of a place can be compared to Švankmajer's approach of listening to and observing objects in order to reveal their memories and histories. In this study, 'residues' were voiced through my development of the creative works during the residencies where I actively engaged in re-constructing or re-imagining a new relationship with Teerk Roo Ra through visualising and defining a personal sense of place.

American academic Fritz Steele defines the term 'Sense of Place' as "the particular experience of a person in a particular setting" (Steele 1981, 11). Similarly, 'sense of place' involves a personal orientation toward place in which one's "understanding of place and one's feelings about place become fused" (Hummon 1992, 262). Therefore, in this study, the site of the Peel Island Lazaret and Teerk Roo Ra were transformed from a site into a 'place' through a personal reconstruction involving imagination, memory and history.

The Lazaret's current state as a place denied everyday public access (only selected people are permitted entry to the site) underscores and reinforces the sense of its importance as a site filled with decay and containing persuasive reminders of a disappearance. In this sense it conforms to Gibson's description of a 'persuasively' re-membered place. The memorialisation of the site is constructed and re-created by historians, curators, tourist-archaeologists, and artists, such as myself, who are committed to preserving this important historical site.

However, Steele also elaborates on a 'spirit of place', which is "the combination of characteristics that gives some locations a special 'feel' or personality" (Steele 1981, 11). In the work *Lament* (2012), Welsh animator Sean Vicary similarly sought to re-imagine a stretch of coastline in the south of Wales through animating physical artefacts from the site, which was an attempt to "manifest the various *genius loci* through the alchemy of stop motion" (Vicary in Animate Projects 2012). Like 'spirit of place', *genius loci* is a term meaning atmosphere, or the articulation of the intrinsic character of a place. This is slightly different to a 'sense of place', in

that the spirit may be said to exist outside the imagination, and can be a shared vision among a group. A sense of place is more individual, and operates on a personal interpretation of the place. Conversely, for Vicary, the place is an intersection of dreams, memories, and the physical. Vicary notes it is, "...an attempt to represent and navigate this liminal landscape, half remembered upon waking, where dreams, memories and the physical collide" (Vicary in *Animate Projects* 2012).

In the same way, conceptions of place for this study began as a response to my experience of place. The working definition for place here is a combination of two concepts: a response to a personal experience of place and an expression of the 'genus loci' or character of a place, which resides at the intersection of memory, history and the imaginary. The creative works explore the locus between these, positioned in a plasmatic realm of uncertainty and limitless possibility.

Paradoxically, this place full of meaning is represented through characters in a void—an absence of site.

As a philosophical concept, the void represents nothingness; a complete absence of context. According to German philosopher Martin Heidegger, it is primarily the fear and anxiety of the impending emptiness of death (Heidegger 2008). In the absence of any context, it is the threat of the imaginary that provokes an anxiety of the imagined unknown. It is not the darkness of the void that is frightening, but the anxiety of what might potentially be out there. Emptiness can also embody the *horror vacui*, a term describing the fear of empty space, and the subsequent compulsion to fill that empty space, to construct something to occupy the void.

In animation, this nothingness is an in-between protoplasmic space (Eisenstein 1989) that contains no fixed form. It is a transformational space between life and death and the conscious and unconscious. It is the breach between conscious thoughts where the imaginary lurks, and it is the night-time darkness when one is disembodied and disoriented with no fixed points of reference. As a conception of place for this study, the void represents the eerie presence of absence of the Peel

Island Lazaret represented through the *genius loci* of the Lazaret—the spirit of place.

2.3 Approach for this study

This study developed a philosophy of animation that enables an embodiment of an in-between state of being. My experience in the night time Teerk Roo Ra forest caused disorientation, an uncertainty about the nature of reality, and provoked an anxiety over what was real and what was not real. Similarly, Švankmajer uses animation as a means to subvert certainty and disorient the audience's perception of reality, to blur the lines between what can be considered real and the imaginary; he notes,

In my films, I move many objects, real objects. Suddenly, everyday contact with things which people are used to acquire a new dimension and in this way casts a doubt over reality. In other words, I use animation as a means of subversion.
(Švankmajer in Wells 1998, 11)

Švankmajer's approach to animation allows him to interrogate and disrupt reality in his work. My philosophy also utilises strategies to embody the uncanny through applying a hybrid form of animation that embraces the overlapping and co-existing states of animate/inanimate and familiar/unfamiliar to promote intellectual uncertainty. This hybrid form of animation provokes an uncanny familiarity by transposing residues and fragments from the place onto the form and motion of a 'structure', and this 'structure' is imbued with 'life'.

This study undertook a dual investigation. Firstly, it constructed a place through the combination of a void, which symbolises the limitless primordial protoplasm of Eisenstein, with transposed constructed motion, representing the *genius loci* of the Peel Island Lazaret. Secondly, it developed a style of animation that symbolises the non-return of the patients at the Lazaret, who were caught in a kind of liminal loop, forever stuck in the moment before transformation and return.

2.4 Conclusion

To discover a philosophy of animation, which satisfies the aims for this series of animations, this study began with a discussion about animation, my experience in the forest that caused disorientation and an uncertainty about the nature of reality, and provoked an anxiety over the possibilities of this overlapping state. This uncertainty was caused when the real and imaginary co-existed, and this altered my perception of reality. As Gelder and Jacobs (1998) note, this uncertainty and altered view can generate an anxiety of the uncanny. This led to a discussion about the site of the Peel Island Lazaret and its transformation from a site to a 'place' through a personal reconstruction involving imagination, memory and history—where 'place' in this study is the fusion of experience and the transposed *genius loci* of the site.

This *genius loci* inhabits a re-membered place; one caught in a liminal state between a number of overlapping realms—past and present, non-indigenous and indigenous, and life and decay.

In Chapter 3, the contextual review will discuss artists and animators whose creative outputs can be read as exploring an in-between state through animation, as well as constructing an uncanny 'place' within their artworks.

Chapter 3: Contextual Review

In this chapter, the theoretical framework developed in Chapter 2 is used in a contextual analysis of Czech Surrealist animator Jan Švankmajer's cinematic narrative *Down to the Cellar* (1982), Patricia Piccinini's cinematic artwork *The Gathering* (2007), Ann Lislegaard's installation *Time Machine* (2011) and Robert Seidel's cinematic artwork *_grau* (2004).

The discussion in this chapter extends the notion that the uncanny exists when two realms co-exist in the same space, resulting in anxiety and intellectual uncertainty. In each of the examples, the behaviour of the character renders the place uncanny. These behaviours are a construct, composed of environmental and conceptual influences and transposed motion.

3.1 Down to the Cellar (Švankmajer, 1982)

Down to the Cellar is a short film about a young girl sent down to the cellar of her decrepit old building to collect potatoes. The film portrays a dark, gothic narrative as a realistic live-action scenario. Throughout this film, Švankmajer brings real objects to life, which he does through a combination of live action and animation. Shoes, potatoes and furniture all come to life, and seem to possess an internal life force. South African animation theorist Meg Rickards describes a situation where the uncanny is promoted when the imagined realm is depicted or understood to be lurking within reality and vice versa. She discusses the notion of a blurred zone between the imagined and the real when discussing this work of Švankmajer. This blurred zone is the place where both worlds co-exist simultaneously; she notes that "The implication is that the conscious and unconscious worlds are not separate and discrete, but co-existent and overlapping" (Rickards 2009, n.p.).

Švankmajer's work is characterised by the inanimate becoming animate, and in this instance the two worlds—conscious and unconscious or real and imaginary—are 'co-existent and overlapping', which is also consistent with Jentsch's conception of the uncanny.

Once the girl is down in the cellar, the tone of the narrative becomes disturbing—this realm is one where Jentsch’s conception of the uncanny affect caused by intellectual uncertainty can be used to describe a conception of a place in which no certainties exist. The young girl enters the cellar by walking down a dark subterranean corridor, using torchlight to view the ground. The audience experience this place through the viewpoint of the young girl, and are immersed through the sound of dripping water from a labyrinth of old rusty pipes and antiquated drainage systems. Švankmajer often employs the *genius loci* of the city of Prague in his work. The atmosphere of old, decaying buildings and dark cellars was a familiar, common experience for the residents of the city (Uhde 2007, 66). Švankmajer has created a dank, dark, moist uncomfortable place, and we can almost smell the stench of the rotting structure’s decay. The long cave-like hallway disappears into the darkness, and on either side are stalls with rusty padlocks fortifying old wooden gates.

In the field of torchlight, we can see individual shoes projecting out from under the wooden stalls along the corridor. As they are successively brought into vision by the torchlight, these shoes abruptly retreat back into the darkness. It is clear that this neat young girl in plaits, a pretty red dress and shoes is an intruder in this dark, unhealthy netherworld. In this scene, we are presented with the first hint that this world is not as it appears. The young girl is terrified of this place and drops her bread roll on the ground in fright. The shoes then emerge from their stalls and fight each other to devour the bread, mimicking a hungry pack of rabid dogs. While the shoes scurry and bicker over the crumbs, the girl walks further into the cellar, visibly traumatised by what she has witnessed.

Švankmajer has constructed the cellar as a place where anything is possible and uses animation as a means for the unconscious world to play a strong role within the descriptive realm of this narrative, to penetrate the realm of realism (Rickards 2009). The audience is uncertain about what they may have seen in the cellar, and

are anxious about the potential of what they may see; Švankmajer keeps us unsure about whether we are witnessing the girl's unconscious or whether these events are really occurring. This place is represented as a zone between reality and unreality, where 'real' shoes may in fact be a pack of hungry rabid dogs; Švankmajer's use of real inanimate objects further provokes this uncertainty. This is an important distinction, as *Down to the Cellar* combines a live-action actor with the animation of real objects in the same world at the same time. The real seemingly interacts with the imaginary within a zone that allows two states to overlap. It is rendered all the more disturbing by the fact that we do not appear to have left the real world, but instead, are presented with the possibility that our real world has been augmented and 're-animated' by the uninvited incursions of the familiar shoes made unfamiliar through transposed animation (Rickards 2009). In the cellar, familiar, real, inanimate objects unexpectedly become unfamiliarly animate. It can therefore be argued that these objects have been rendered uncanny and the cellar in this narrative has become an uncanny place. Švankmajer's constructed cellar therefore becomes an uncanny place through the use of inanimate objects becoming animate.

The girl then encounters an old lady who is baking cakes in her dark, dirty pen. The old lady stokes the fire in the oven by adding coal briquettes. We watch the old lady mix cakes and carefully lay them out on the baking tray, but instead of flour, she has used coal dust mixed with eggs. We soon realise that the cakes she is baking are the same cakes she uses to stoke the fire, and she is engaged in feeding her own delusional cycle, re-enacting the same scenario over and over, blissfully unaware of her conceptual entrapment. She seems to compulsively enjoy the eternal act of baking and consuming. The old lady proudly offers a coal cake carefully dusted with icing sugar to the little girl, but the girl backs away terrified, perhaps in recognition that the action of the woman is an unnatural act, and should be avoided, or that her agreement to consume the offer would doom her to the same endless entrapment.

The girl finally reaches her goal—a large wooden chest of potatoes—and, in the unfolding narrative, there is an escalating anxiety about what might happen next. It is as though, at any moment, any object may become possessed with a life force. She attempts to open the chest, which responds by trying to devour her. It is as if the chest did not want to be disturbed, for the action of the lid closing on her is more reprovng than consumptive. The girl then props up the lid with a block of firewood, which displeases the chest and causes an almost infantile tantrum. With her head buried in the chest, the girl carefully places the potatoes one at a time in her basket on the ground. However, when she looks at the basket she realises that the potatoes have disappeared. She continues to load the basket and finally catches a potato in the act of escaping. It scurries away into the darkness and makes its way back into the chest. She finally manages to collect a basket of unwilling potatoes and makes her way out of the cellar.

Before she returns to the real world, she encounters her nemesis—the cellar's black cat that has antagonised her since she entered its domain. She stumbles on the stairs and the entire basket of potatoes rolls back into the darkness of the cellar. Resignedly, she regathers her torch and basket, and slowly descends into the cellar once again. Through this action, it becomes apparent that the little girl has joined the old lady in an inescapable cycle. She is stuck in an in-between state of uncertainty, forced to repeat the same experience over and over.

The motions of the shoes, chest and potatoes seem to imitate scurrying furtive subterranean cellar-dwellers. Even though the scenario is absurd—which is typical of the Surrealist approach to representation—the result produces an uncanny, unsettling effect, mostly due to the use of real life inanimate objects that seem to be supernaturally imbued with a life force and that appear to be consciously performing animalistic acts of survival. Indeed, these objects appear to be acting out the unconscious desires of the cellar itself; as Rickards notes about this film, “It is in this portrayal of the imagined realm as lurking within reality, and the

concurrent blurring of the lines between life and death, that the uncanny is epitomized" (Rickards 2009, n.p.).

In *Down to the Cellar*, Švankmajer has constructed an uncanny place, where the unconscious and conscious worlds overlap, the real is inhabited by the imaginary, and objects straddle the divide between being animate and inanimate. Švankmajer also draws on repressed childhood memories of the *genius loci* of Prague to further portray the cellar as an uncanny place. On its own, the cellar is frightening, but not uncanny. It is only the uncertainty of the animate objects that creates the uncanny effect. As will be shown in the next section, in *The Gathering*, Piccinini similarly uses the familiar site of the suburban house as the place for the uncanny to emerge.

3.2 *The Gathering* (Piccinini, 2007)



Fig. 3.2: Patricia Piccinini, still from *The Gathering* 2007, *The Gathering*, 2007 DVD, 16:9 PAL, stereo 3 minute loop © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

The Gathering (2007) by Australian artist Patricia Piccinini provides further insights into conceptions of the anxiety of an uncanny place. This artwork promotes uncertainty by combining photoreal digital animation with live action, and has an ambiguous ending that prompts the audience to watch it repeatedly in an effort to determine meaning.

Piccinini was born in Sierra Leone, but moved to Melbourne in 1972. Her work is mostly sculptural and deals with critically reflecting on and extending concepts of reality that relate to our changing ideas of what it means to be fully 'human' and the extent to which these ideas separate us from or join us to other species. *The Gathering* is set in the familiar scenario of a middle-class suburban house. The beginning of the narrative employs cinematic conventions to create tension by guiding the audience through the front doors of a suburban house that appear to have been left uncharacteristically open in the early evening. Once inside the house, it is apparent that all the lights have been left on; however, there are no people and little sound - only the background reverberations of insects. The house appears lifeless, and there is a disconcerting presence of absence.

The narrative focuses on mundane elements in the house until we are confronted with a small child lying face-down, inert, fully clothed, splayed on the carpeted bedroom floor. The scene has an uneasy quality and we are uncertain as to whether she is dead or simply asleep. We are also unclear as to whether she is a real human or a mannequin, as we can't detect her breathing or see any signs of life. This house could be a site of horror but there are no signs of violence.

The floor-length curtains begin to move and we anxiously observe a small rodent-like creature slide across the carpeted floor towards her. From under the bed, more creatures slowly emerge. As these creatures begin gathering around the girl, we notice that she is indeed breathing. As more creatures join the gathering, we become aware that they are not of this world; they appear to be hybrids of familiar harmless household pets except they possess an otherworldly gliding motion, a construct of a bizarre form of propulsion resembling rabbit-like back legs hopping and skipping.

Australian arts writer Sarah Hetherington describes the proximity of the familiar and the strange in Piccinini's construction of the uncanny in this artwork; she states, "what is uncanny is also unbelievably familiar in a completely natural manner" (Hetherington 2009, 84).

However, this 'familiar' and 'natural' quality is disrupted when one of the creatures convulses to reveal a vagina-like opening in its chest, which erupts to expose a collection of mucus covered beings in a cavernous pouch. While we are repulsed and disturbed, we also experience an ambiguity as to what we are watching. This intellectual uncertainty creates a very unstable relationship with these creatures that is compounded by the fact that we are in such a familiar, *homely* (Freud [1919] 2003) setting. The meaning created from this artwork can be read as drawing on Freud's concept of the *heimlich/unheimlich* (Freud [1919] 2003), where this familiar scenario of this house has become foreign because it is inhabited by these beings. Initially, it is the appearance of the creatures that is uncanny and almost familiar,

but this is then combined with an unfamiliar, yet hauntingly familiar, movement which embodies the disturbing hybrid form of motion.

In this way, the suburban home—the central locus of the *Heimlich*—has been re-imagined as an uncanny place by Piccinini, where now these real and imaginary realms overlap. Piccinini has constructed this uncanny place by drawing on the anxiety of the imagined threat expressed through a sequence of unfamiliar events—from the open doors, the inert vulnerable girl, and the indecipherable intentions and origins of the hybrid creatures.

Both Švankmajer and Piccinini use the realistic form of live-action cinema as the site for the uncanny to occur. This site is disrupted by otherworldly, supernatural animistic beings, which leads us to question the perceived reality of this world.

As the next section will evidence, Lislegaard's *Time Machine* develops the same uncanny affect, but it doesn't rely on a real world setting. Instead, the focal point is a character isolated in a black void, and the uncanny is embodied in the mannerisms and movements of the character itself. This is a crucial difference in relation to this study: a total absence of context that provides a disembodied and disoriented place for the uncanny to occur.

3.3 *Time Machine* (Lislegaard, 2011)



Fig. 3.3: Anne Lislegaard, still from *Time Machine* 2011, mirrorbox, 3D animation, sound, video duration: 5 minutes 26 seconds. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

Time Machine (2011) by Norwegian artist Ann Lislegaard is a video installation that was exhibited at the 2014 Sydney Biennale, *You Imagine What You Desire*. *Time Machine* portrays an animated representation of a fox-like creature that appears dishevelled and “on the edge of collapse” (Guy 2011, n.p.). The fox speaks in a human voice about a futuristic journey and frequently slips between coherence and nonsense in its utterings, as well as sliding between English and Norwegian. The work is striking in that the creature is a black-and-white 3D digital character that exhibits a fidgety style of movement, which is uncharacteristic of typical computer-generated imagery.

The presentation of the work is striking; the character is situated within a black void and the animation is projected onto an unfolded mirror box where the image is reflected onto multiple planes which sit above a mirrored floor. At the Biennale, the work occupied the middle of a darkened room, requiring the audience to walk around the mirror structure – forcing observation of the fox from multiple perspectives. The physical presentation combined with the context of the black void promoted a sense of spatial disorientation and weightlessness.

The erratic monologue delivered by the fox also disorients the audience's experience of time. We are unsure of when the events took place or where we might be situated in relation to this moment in time. The fox's behaviour resembles the time traveller character from the H.G. Wells' novel of the same name, who returns from the future, fitful and traumatised, with fantastic tales of adventure (Wells 1895). According to American art critic Jacquelyn Davis, Lislegaard's intention is to explore science-fiction as an "inquiry into time, place and imagination" (Davis 2014, n.p.).

The animated character in the work seems detached from reality; he is alone with his stuttering ramblings, devoid of any connections to a specific time or place. He is disembodied, located on the edge of rationality. His erratic movements portray him as almost threatening due to his unpredictable fitful speech and dishevelled manner. The fox seems trapped in the liminal state between irrational and rational, and the real and the imaginary. We are unable to decipher whether he has really travelled in time or simply lost connection with reality. In this case, the void acts as a signifier of this separation and the statelessness of the liminality.

Initially, we feel the fox may be dangerous because he is operating with no logic; however, nothing happens—the fox just keeps rambling, and we are left in a continual state of anticipation. Therefore, the affect is an unsettling, disturbing, anxious, almost contagious response to his stuttering ramblings. As the audience, we avoid meeting his gaze, because we are uncertain of where this may lead.

In *Down to the Cellar* and *The Gathering*, audiences are led through environments that are rendered as uncanny places through a series of events within their respective narrative structures. The presentation of *Time Machine* shifts the site of the uncanny from a real environment to the gallery space, and forces the audience to physically engage with this uncanny place. The viewer experiences disorientation in both time and space, and is left with an uncertainty over the ambiguous imaginary nature of the work. This absence of context allows the form

and motion to embody the anxiety, and, in combination with the void, constructs an uncanny place.

Time Machine is a looped animation, with no narrative structure or beginning and end. This further disorients the viewer, and symbolises the fox's inability to stop the rambling; he is stuck in this compulsive state, unable to see outside of his bubble of mania. *The Gathering* requires multiple viewings, but still operates within a conventional linear narrative. However, in *Time Machine*, the looping narrative structure of the work further embodies the manic state of the fox. Similarly, the next work to be discussed, Seidel's *_grau*, embodies the notion of the uncanny place, and also uses the void as a site for an unsettling, disorienting experience. *_grau* plays on the instability and fluidity of memory to slide between representation and abstraction in an investigation of the plasmatic nature of animation.

3.4 *_grau* (Seidel 2004)



Fig. 3.4: Robert Seidel, still from *_grau* 2004, video duration: 10 minutes 01 second. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

_grau (2004) by German animator Robert Seidel is an abstract cinematic artwork that deals with the malleable structure of memory to re-imagine a traumatic near-

death experience from the animator's past where he was almost crushed in a car crash. Seidel visualises a series of moments between life and death, and he notes that, in this artwork, he attempted to challenge the audience's "spatial and temporal perception" and to portray the fluidity of memory (Seidel in Selby 2009, 121).

The title *_grau* means 'grey' in German, and signifies the place that exists between the binaries of life and death, which is expressed through the use of alternating black and white voids as metaphorical backgrounds. These voids are a place of transformation between these two states of being. Therefore, these states are not limited to absolutes such as life and death but are more fluid conceptions of the relationship between life, death, re-birth, sleep, waking and the unconscious.

_grau is an abstract 3D interpretation of memory and imagination, and can be described as an "unconscious biographical flow" (Selby 2009, 121), moving through biomorphic sculptural forms. The structures continually transform into a crystalline biological form which constantly avoids classification. The metamorphic structures hover in spatial indeterminacy and move in a hybrid algorithmic style of motion, an amalgam of hand keyframed animation and automated digital interpolation. In this sense, there is an uncertainty about the origin and nature of the motion, and how we might engage with it. It is at once robotic and inhuman, while conversely intimate and personal. The pace of the artwork is subtle and graceful and countered by abrupt, almost violent, framing and animation.

Similar to Lislegaard's *Time Machine*, the structures in *_grau* exist in a void, a total absence of context. By situating the animations in both white and black voids, Seidel visualises the moments between life and death, or perhaps the moment after death, when caught in-between worlds and forms, where there are no fixed points of reference. This is a primal place, a state of flux stuck on the verge of transformation. In this way, the forms of the objects in *_grau* embody a type of liminal uncanny, and exist as a protoplasmic transitional being.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I elaborated on the notion of place and also on approaches to embody the liminal and uncanny in animation based on the theoretical framework established in Chapter 2. I discussed these concepts in an analysis of *Down to the Cellar*, *The Gathering*, *Time Machine* and *_grau* to provide a visual conceptual framework to be applied in my final creative series.

With regard to animation, *The Gathering* provoked a sense of repulsion because of the hybrid creatures that had slightly familiar mammalian features and alien systems of propulsion; a hybrid amalgam of hopping and sliding, balancing on the edge of believability. Both *Down to the Cellar* and *The Gathering* use hybrid blends of transposed motion; however, Piccinini's is perhaps less literal than Švankmajer's. The movements of the creatures in *The Gathering* use a form of motion that is constructed by combining several sources of transposed movement into a singular hybrid form, which vacillates between the familiar and the unfamiliar, as opposed to Švankmajer's, which mimics subterranean creatures like rabid dogs and vermin. Piccinini's approach of a hybrid motion, the jitteriness of physical stop-motion animation of Švankmajer, the stuttering franticness of Lislegaard's fox, and the perpetual state of indeterminacy used by Seidel represent the motion aspiration for the study.

With regard to place, *Time Machine* uses a void or an absence of context to isolate and destabilise the figure and disorient the viewer in order to focus purely on the imaginary. This approach can be contrasted to those used in *Down to the Cellar* and *The Gathering*, which insert the imaginary into the real by combining animation with live action to interrupt the audience's conception of reality. The void is symbolic of the liminal place between life and death, where beings are held in a transitional place and are neither alive nor dead but in a state of transformation. The void is also evident in *_grau*, which is aligned with the aspiration of this study as it attempts to apprehend an autobiographical experience. *Time Machine* is a looping gallery installation that uses multiple screens and an isolated character to

disrupt the audience's sense of reality. In contrast to *Time Machine*, the other works *Down to the Cellar*, *The Gathering* and *_grau* employ linear cinematic narratives to develop an uncanny place and subsequently promote a sense of anxiety. *Time Machine* mirrors the internal state of the character, which, in his mania, seems unaware of being trapped in a liminal state, stuck between the past and the future, and the rational and irrational worlds.

Further to these analyses and comparisons, Chapter 4 traces the development of the final series of creative works, which created a form of animation that embodies an in-between state of being and also develops a conception of an uncanny place based on the *genius loci* of the Peel Island Lazaret.

Chapter 4. Critical Reflection on My Studio Practice

In this chapter, I discuss the development of the final series of creative artworks I produced during the study, which aimed to re-member and re-imagine the Peel Island Lazaret. The works sought to achieve this by, firstly, developing a hybrid form of animation that embraced the overlapping and co-existing states of animate/inanimate and familiar/unfamiliar, and, secondly, by embodying the atmosphere, or *genius loci* of the site, by combining fragments of memory, history and the imaginary.

In the final works, the void was used to describe a liminal place devoid of context, which allows animation and material form to fuse and embody the anxiety of the uncanny. Lislegaard and Seidel use the void as a means to express the presence of absence and the anxiety of the fear of death to further destabilise their characters in order to create an uncanny place. This differs from the approach of Švankmajer and Piccinini who combine real environments with uncanny beings to generate uncanny places.

In this chapter, I discuss two series of artworks: the *Teerk Roo Ra* series and the *Nocturne* series. The *Teerk Roo Ra* series was developed immediately after the first artist residences, and was shown at the *Teerk Roo Ra Residencies* exhibition in 2011. The *Nocturne* series represents the culmination of the various experiments and action cycles for the entire study.

As discussed in Chapter 1, the project methodology aimed to arrive at the final body of work through reflection on a series of discrete iterative action research cycles involving studio practice, commissions and exhibitions. The *DNA exhibition* (Gympie Regional Gallery 2011) used hand-drawn digital illustrations and animations to begin the response to the site of Teerk Roo Ra, and in particular focussed on responses to the flora of Teerk Roo Ra. This exhibition contributed directly to the *Teerk Roo Ra Residencies* exhibition (PoP Gallery 2011). Multi screen installation was used to engage the audience, which was further explored in a

commission for the Sunshine Coast Council (Tanawha Arts and Ecology centre 2012). This work utilised photography of native flora, combined with rear-screen projection techniques and sensor controlled looping animation as another means to include the audience in the artworks through proximity. The rear projection technique was also used in the Crane Arts residency (Philadelphia 2012) and subsequently exhibited in the *Philadelphia Connection* exhibition (PoP 2012). In 2013 I completed a commission for UrbanScreens.tv, which provided an animated response to the score *The Planets* by *Gustav Holst* (Holst 1918). This project utilised studio green screen photography of natural elements such as branches, sticks and forest floor objects. The green screen photography was also employed in the *[D]Generate* exhibition (Gympie Regional Gallery 2013). Throughout the study these approaches were used as a means to progress ideas and techniques, however the final series of works discarded many of these techniques and settled on a particular approach in order to achieve the project aims. The two action cycles which were the most important to the final outcomes were the *Teerk Roo Ra* series (2011) and the *Nocturne* series (2014-2015) and these cycles form the discussion in this chapter.

4.1 Structure #24 (Denaro, 2011)



Fig. 4.1: Chris Denaro, *Horseshoe bay series*, *Teerk Roo Ra National Park* 2010, photographs. © The artist. Images courtesy of the artist.

This section discusses two works from the *Teerk Roo Ra* series, titled *Structure #24* and *Structure #19*. Both of these artworks were prototypes I developed as a means of progressing the investigation, which included submitting the works as part of the *Teerk Roo Ra* exhibition in 2011.

Horseshoe Bay is several kilometres long, and butts up against the forest through a buffer zone of river casuarinas. The high-tide mark on the beach is littered with assorted debris: leaves and organic matter, driftwood, plastics whitened by the sun and salt, and sundry items offered by the ocean. The beach possesses many of the attributes of a natural liminal space, the most important of which is transformation—of having a constantly changing boundary line due to the nature of tides and the perpetually shifting distribution of beach debris. As Steven Allen writes, “the beach is perhaps nature's greatest expression of the liminal, as the physical space has a shifting status between high and low tides, neither land nor sea” (Allen 2008, 56).

This transitional space on *Teerk Roo Ra* contained many upright sticks, branches and exposed roots lying immersed in the sand. I photographed many of the stalactite structures along the beach, and digitally isolated them when I returned to

the studio on the mainland. The technique used for the series involved creating digital collage constructions from still photographs, and subsequently digitally animating these.



Fig. 4.2: Chris Denaro, still from *Structure #24* 2011, video duration: 55 seconds. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

The motion design focused on building an unsettling hybrid style of movement, reminiscent of larvae or an invertebrate spirit inhabiting the dead wood. This transposed motion was based on the insects inhabiting the rotting carcasses of the buildings at the Lazaret, and also in the fallen tree trunks in the forest that meets

Horseshoe Bay. When exhibited, the subtleness of the motion in *Structure #24* forced the audience to move close to the work in an attempt to glean the meaning of the moving conglomeration of wood and bark. There is a tension between wanting to engage with the struggle of the entity, of wanting to understand its plight, but also of being repulsed by the alien nature of the motion.

The animated photograph appears to have been impaled while its feeble ineffectual limbs struggle helplessly. The situation compels the audience to look on it as a character and to imbue it with human traits, but at the same time the movements are alien and distinctly non-human, similar to the creatures in *The Gathering*.

The subject in *Structure #24* is represented as though on the edge of the familiar and the unfamiliar. The rubbery, spongy other-worldliness of the construction simultaneously invites empathy and repulsion. The transposed motion became uncanny due to the fact that it had become only faintly recognisable; it was almost subconsciously present in the work. Similar to *_grau*, the motion inherent in the character combined with the void created an uncanny place.

During the exhibition, I compared this work to others in the series, such as *Structure #19*, and discovered noticeable differences in the composition of the artworks that were more successful in portraying the aspirations of the project.



Fig. 4.3: Chris Denaro, *Structure #19* 2011, photograph. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

The branches in *Structure #19* are displayed so that none of the limbs are cropped by the frame. This allows the character in *Structure #19* to float with no fixed points of reference, untethered in the void. *Time Machine* (Lislegaard 2011) promoted a disembodied feeling which is more aligned with the liminal uncanny aspirations of the study outlined in Chapter 2. Conversely, *Structure #24* appears attached or anchored to the frame, which is contrary to the conceptions of the void. Therefore, plans for future artworks involved using untethered and disembodied characters completely framed by the void.

On reflection after the exhibition, I found that *Structure #24* was successful in exhibiting an uncanny style of motion that embodied an in-between state of being. However, when comparing the digital animation of *Structure #24* to Švankmajer's stop-motion animation in *Down to the Cellar*, I noted that the digital motion of *Structure #24* was unnaturally smooth, and almost sterile—contrary to the invertebrate, alien and unpredictable style of motion desired to embody the in-between state.

According to Švankmajer, real objects have had a previous identity either as a functional object or a natural living thing. Once this inanimate object is re-animated, this brings about an intellectual uncertainty (Jentsch [1906] 1997). When reflecting on this series, I found that the digital photography that I had used as a

means of bringing these beach objects to life felt cold and detached. Even though these were inanimate objects that possessed a previous identity, it seemed as though working with the intermediary photography process had severed their connection to the site somehow. I had employed a process of animation that involved digitally manipulating photographs of the object rather than the object itself. While this is a valid technique, this approach contributed to a lack of liveliness in the work. Pixels that were not necessarily in motion in one frame were simply dead points of light that remained inert. While some parts of the construction moved effectively and contributed to the sense of the uncanny, as a whole, it was not sufficiently imbued with life. Also, the 2D photography precluded the 3D tactile nature of the original structure. As a result, the study subsequently adopted a physical stop-motion approach, animating real objects rather than bringing to life photographs from the site. This approach is further in line with Švankmajer's and Harryhausen's metaphysical and animistic approach to animation. This tactile style of animation was subsequently applied in the *Nocturne* series. In summary

4.2 Nocturne Series (Denaro, 2014)



Fig. 4.4: Chris Denaro, *Remains of the Northern Jetty, Teerk Roo Ra National Park* 2010, photograph. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

The *Nocturne* series, which speaks of isolation and our fear of emptiness, used physical stop-motion animation to embody the aims of the study. This series was inspired by the remains of the Northern jetty on the north side of Teerk Roo Ra. The remnants stand at the furthest edge of the island, about 100 metres out from the mangroves. All that is left are two decaying wooden posts and some rusty light rail tracks covered in oyster shells and assorted debris. At low tide, they are isolated upon a vast expanse of mudflat, and they stand like guardians on the perimeter of the island, exhibiting a presence of both warning and welcome. The jetty is a man-made structure negotiating a liminal space, but it is also a liminal space on its own, a zone of transition. The jetty is between land and water, between the habitable and the unpredictable. It is a space with the potential for becoming, a transition between arrival and departure; as Hazel Andrews notes, "The ambiguous and unstable state that liminality provokes invites transformation and potential for becoming" (Andrews 2012, 163).

Nocturne #4 is a liminal kinetic assemblage constructed from bark, sticks, branches, shells, wire and assorted beach cast-offs. When placed together, these elements form a fragile, organic conglomeration that resembles the tentacles of a skeleton-like being. This construction stands alone, isolated within a void, illuminated by a single light. It projects itself out of the blackness, emerging from the shadows into a shallow pool of focus, isolated on the threshold of an inky blackness. It is simultaneously a collection of loose objects held together in a temporary pact and a character with an internal life force.



Fig. 4.5: Chris Denaro, still from *Nocturne #4* 2014, video duration: 25 seconds. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

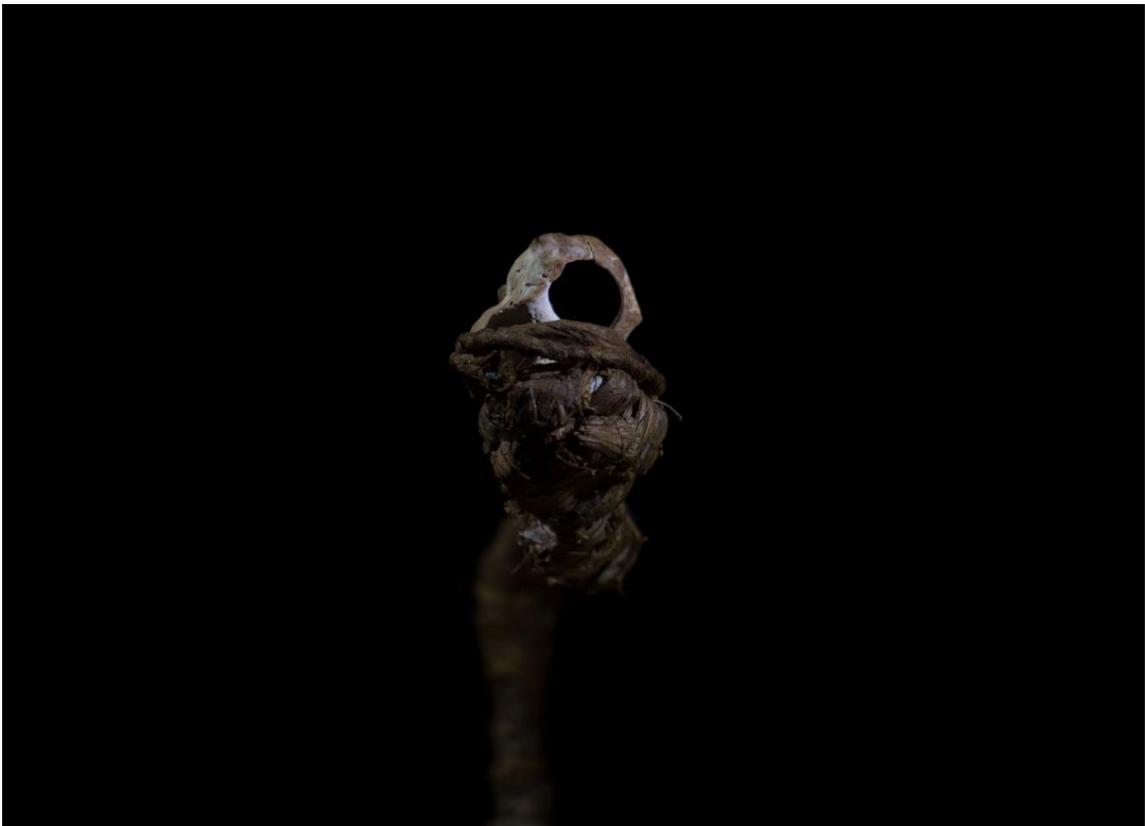


Fig. 4.6 Chris Denaro, close up still from *Nocturne #4* 2014, video duration: 25 seconds. © The artist. Image courtesy of the artist.

The structure exhibits a stalled metamorphosis, stranded in a liminal state on the anxious frantic verge of liberation. It is held in this emptiness, striving to achieve its transformation, and caught in a looping cyclical in-between form, which embodies a liminal state of being.

The assemblage moves in an erratic and unsettling manner, bobbing up and down with an awkward desperation. It has an unhealthy and frenetic rhythm and at once appears to demand our attention while simultaneously warding us away like the fox character in *Time Machine*. The motion design re-imagines a caged, distressed bird that has been kept in an unnatural environment for too long and exhibits an obsessive compulsiveness. The character appears to be alive, to have been imbued with life; however it is not driven with an intent or consciousness. It is instead inhabited by a transposed motion, possessed by fragments of transposed avian memories that are only faintly perceptible.

The animation used for this series is physical stop-motion, whereby armatures are animated by hand, frame by frame. The artwork exudes a staccato jitteriness, lacking the unnaturally fluid interpolation of digital animation, and displays a type of movement or noisiness between the frames due to the tactile nature of stop motion. The structure is moved by hand and photographed twelve times a second, and this process leaves behind traces of the animator's hands, in the form of fingerprints, sweat, dirt and assorted human remnants and cast-offs. In a way, this method adds fragments of the animator into the structure as a form of life and propulsion. This 'bubbling' of the structure contrasts with that of *Structure #24*, which used one photograph from the site, and the animator engaged with this digital canvas through a digital medium. In this sense, *Structure #24* was a cleaner, more computational, interpretation of the site, devoid of any tactile engagement with the animator.

Drawing on McLaren's theory of the illusion of life occurring between the frames, this artwork resides in the gap where the imaginary lurks—between conscious thoughts. The structure both attracts and repulses us, the compulsive cyclical motion is mesmeric and the anxious rhythm draws us into the void at the centre of the assembly.

In summary this project investigated how a particular form of animation might be used to depict the invisibility of presence at a unique site such as Teerk Roo Ra. The *Nocturne* series combined traditional forms of stop-motion animation such as loops and ball and socket joints into a physical form of animation which occupied both the real and the imaginary within the gallery setting in order to construct an uncanny place. In this instance the typically concealed metal joints were important visual elements of the artworks and the formal qualities of the loop was the final piece rather than merely one aspect of a linear narrative. In this way both traditional and non-traditional forms of animation co-exist in the same gallery space by harnessing the juxtaposition of sculpture, animation and sound.

Through this juxtaposition within the gallery, the *Nocturne* series sought to build deliberately ambiguous relationships between the audience and these artworks. In the case of the *Nocturne* exhibition the movement of the audience through the space was crucial to develop connections with the works. The use of physical animation produced glitches and jittering in order to give rise to a type of movement 'between the frames' (McLaren in Schaffer 2005, n.p.), and are reciprocated and repeated by the cadence and stuttering of the combined soundtracks. While the sound for each artwork had a specific relationship to that work, the sounds from each work combined into an overall connected soundscape within the gallery space. The armatures also occupied an ambiguous space between sculpture, animation artefact and performer. Within the gallery the armatures inhabited the same space as its animation, leaving the audience to occupy and consider the space between the inanimate object and its animate form. This was not possible with *Structure #24*, as this artwork was based on a

photograph of a performer from another space. In this way the *Nocturne* series was more in line with Švankmajer's and Harryhausen's metaphysical and animistic approach to animation, favouring a personal, physical relationship with the performers.

4.3 Conclusion

The broad similarities of the two creative series are evident. Both series use transposed, mesmerising *genius loci* motion; the subjects are composed of natural objects to resemble skeletal-like characters; and a high contrast palette is implemented in both, with the black void in the background. However, on closer scrutiny, these similarities become contradictory.

The transposed motion and visual form of the two subjects are quite different. *Structure #24* uses a subtle, subdued repetitive motion that acts as a mesmerising lure. In contrast, *Nocturne #4*'s motion is frantic and erratic, demanding our attention and then directing it to the void at the locus of the construct. The form of *Structure #24* is based on a digital photograph of a submerged branch from Horseshoe Bay. It is composed only of wood, unlike *Nocturne #4*, which is a physical conglomeration of a number of natural ingredients. In contrast to the artificial, digitally manipulated and animated pixels of *Structure #24*, *Nocturne #4* is a physical re-remembering of natural fragments, which was animated frame by frame. The stop-motion approach allows a 'real' apprehension of a 'real' subject. Because of this physical process and 'real' nature of *Nocturne #4*, this series creates a higher degree of intellectual uncertainty.

The difference in the framing of the two series has already been discussed but the subject's spatial relationship and treatment of depth in the void is also different. The stake in *Structure #24* is stationary, and the subject appears to gyrate on it, which creates a sense of separation between the stake and the moving subject, thus rendering the stake a contextual element. However, in *Nocturne #4*, all of the

visual elements of the subject move, which creates a single character floating in the void. When viewed together, the subject in *Structure #24* appears in front of the void, while in *Nocturne #4*, the subject is embedded within the void as the structure moves in and out of the shadows.

This chapter has discussed the development of the final series of creative artworks I produced during the study, which aimed to employ a philosophy of animation in order to develop a hybrid form of animation that embraces the overlapping and co-existing states of animate/inanimate and familiar/unfamiliar, and embody the *genius loci* of the Peel Island Lazaret. This hybrid form of animation provokes an uncanny familiarity by transposing residues and fragments, or *genius loci*, from the site onto the form and motion of a 'structure', to imbue this 'structure' with 'life'. The creative works exist in a void to portray this transitional, in-between place. In my work, the notion of the liminal state is conveyed through the representation of stunted transformation in the form of looping animation, which symbolises incomplete return, and a thwarted liberation.

For this study, I created a re-remembered, re-imagined place; one caught in a liminal state between a number of overlapping realms—past and present, non-indigenous and indigenous, and life and decay. The *Nocturne* series represents the culmination of experimentation and discovery as a result of the action cycles for the study.

Chapter 5. Conclusions

This exegesis aims to present the theoretical framework of the doctoral study that participates in the discourse around place and place-making in animation practice. The study simultaneously examines the capacity of animation to push and pull at the blurred zone between what can be apprehended as the 'real' and the 'imaginary' and investigate how conceptions of place are overlaid by aspects of history, memory and the imagination. The study's point of departure was an experience I had on the island of Teerk Roo Ra when the presence of the uncanny overwhelmed me. I sought to undertake a sustained investigation, as part of a practice-led project, to conduct a series of open-ended experiments, and examine the extent to which animation is capable of evoking associations that run across boundaries that normally separate experiences. Among these boundaries are history and the present; indigenous and non-indigenous; day and night; the familiar and unfamiliar; and the alive and dead.

However, the main transformational achievement of this doctorate study has been what I have learned about myself as a result of my relationship with this place, the artworks, and its influence on my animation practice. My five-year relationship with the place of Teerk Roo Ra in South East Queensland, Australia, was significant because it allowed me to investigate areas of history, philosophy and academic discourse around place and place-making. This relationship with the site embodied an approach of gathering and distilling the accumulated experiences and knowledge, and then producing a range of responses as practice-led, physical, bodily declarations. This approach was enacted during each iterative action cycle, as described in the methods section in Chapter 1.

My original intention for the research project was to redefine my animation practice, and push myself into producing work that was challenging to me, both conceptually and technically. I sought to survey the field of contemporary animation practice with fresh eyes. In essence, I was testing the bounds of animation and interrogating what is and what is not animation. Perhaps the most

interesting and challenging definition of animation is by the Association of International Film Animation (ASIFA), which may be summed up as "not live-action" (Denslow in Pilling 1998, 2).

This is a fitting way to think about the range of creative research that occurred while I tried to construct an appropriate form of animation with which to satisfy the study's aims. The outcomes of the research project include the development of a significant body of work shown at exhibitions, local artist residencies, one international artist residency, and two conferences. The approaches include public rear-screen projection, large-scale gallery projection, green-screen studio photography, electronic sensor-controlled looping animation using Arduino and Processing, 2D hand drawn animation, still-photograph animation using 2.5D digital motion graphics, high-resolution print work, and, finally, the culmination of this research into a method that fuses motion and form into a style of stop-motion animation that embodies an in-between state of being and that subsequently re-imagines the experience of the Peel Island Lazaret as well as my experience in the forest of Teerk Roo Ra.

This project was an opportunity to apprehend the site of the Lazaret on Teerk Roo Ra and combine these responses with conceptions of the void, the uncanny, liminality, the *genius loci* and the discourse around place, and the dynamic discourse of the plasmatic nature of animation. These discoveries contribute to the currently limited academic discourse around place and place-making in animation practice in Australia.

IN the margins, art gallery projections/armatures sculptures, actions in the video building deliberately ambiguous – animations and armatures

Ghosts\residues\memories\traces of Teerk Roo Ra

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