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# Re-enchanting Conservation Work: Reflections on the Australian Experience

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## ABSTRACT

The Australian nature conservation movement is effectively entering its second century of existence and this transition has prompted a degree of reflection about the strategies used hitherto. After going through boom years – as part of a broader environmental movement – from the 1970s until the early 1990s, a more difficult political environment in the second half of the 1990s has sparked a semi-public discussion about priorities and future strategies. This article argues that the debate about future conservation strategies needs to tackle two important legacies that have become increasingly problematic: a lingering ‘frontier mentality’ that fosters a separation between people and ‘pristine nature’; and a heavy reliance on scientific expertise and rational arguments for conservation. This dual legacy has blinded the movement to the aesthetic appeal of the romantic philosophical tradition in ecology and the importance of sensuous, embodied experiences of the ‘more than human’ world. In rethinking the legacy of the romantic philosopher Henry David Thoreau, the article argues for a shift of emphasis from wilderness to wildness in order to bring conservation home to more people. It suggests that we can learn from the ability of Australian Aborigines to listen to the land in order to ‘sing up’ the stories that are embedded in landscapes. Learning to read and create landscape stories provides creative ways of building more affective bonds between people and the land. Non-rational approaches to nature conservation can help to re-enchant conservation ‘work’.

## KEYWORDS

Conservation strategies, nature/culture dualisms, sensuous experience, embodiment, wildness, storied landscapes

## INTRODUCTION

The post-colonisation nature conservation movement in Australia is effectively moving into the second century of its existence. It could be said to have begun with the formation of the Field Naturalists Club of Victoria in 1880 – the first of several active, state-based associations of its type.<sup>1</sup> In terms of public impact, it might be traced back to the formation of the Gould League of Bird Lovers, formed first in Victoria in 1909 before spreading nationally. However, the first organisation to campaign for legislative protection for endangered species was probably the Wildlife Preservation Society, formed in Sydney in 1909. Australia had the second national park in the world when the Royal National Park, just south of Sydney, was gazetted in 1879, but it was set aside for human recreation rather than nature conservation. National parks designed to preserve ‘pristine’ landscapes were pioneered in Queensland through the work of pastoralist/parliamentarian R.M. Collins and his protégé Romeo Lahey. Lahey put seven years of intensive, voluntary work into the proposal for the Lamington National Park, which was finally gazetted in 1915. As the champion of national parks and wildlife reserves, Lahey was probably eventually overshadowed by the Sydney-based pioneer bushwalker and conservation Myles Dunphy. Between 1924 and 1968, Dunphy was the driving force behind the establishment of 14 new national parks and wilderness reserves in NSW<sup>2</sup>. When his star began to fade it was replaced by that of his son – Milo Dunphy – who was a major force in the Australian conservation movement from the mid-1960s until his death in 1996.

Through the influence of people like Romeo Lahey and Myles Dunphy, the nature conservation movement came to be strongly focused on the goal of having ‘pristine’ areas protected by the declaration of public reserves. This ‘preservationist’ strategy had much in common with that which had been pioneered by the ‘father’ of the conservation movement in North America, John Muir. This is not surprising, because there has long been a sense of affinity between Australia and the west coast of the USA, particularly California.<sup>3</sup> The aforementioned R.M. Collins was inspired by a visit to the newly-established Yellowstone National Park (the world’s first) in 1878.<sup>4</sup> Colleagues of Myles Dunphy report that he was very interested in John Muir and his ideas, even though he never visited the USA.<sup>5</sup> More importantly, however, the similarity in conservation strategies reflects the fact that both Australia and the US (particularly in the west) were still frontier societies when the conservation movements began. At its best, the concern for preservation of ‘wilderness’ demonstrates an empathy with the other side of the frontier. Unfortunately, it also sets up a conceptual separation between people living mainly in cities and towns and the remote, ‘pristine’ areas deemed worthy of preservation. This helped create a perception that nature conservation is a matter for fanatics, eccentrics and experts; not a concern for ‘ordinary’ people.

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In 1995, the Australian Aboriginal activist and academic Marcia Langton began to openly criticise the Australian conservation movement over its use of the term ‘wilderness’.<sup>6</sup> In a hard-hitting argument, she suggested the term betrays a *terra nullius* view of Australia.<sup>7</sup> The ensuing debate made many more conservationists aware of the fact that all Australian landscapes have been modified in some way by a long period of human occupancy (especially through the practice of ‘firestick farming’<sup>8</sup>). As a leading heritage consultant and council member of the National Parks and Wildlife Service in NSW, Meredith Walker, has put it, ‘[t]he perception of areas as natural is a cultural perception. No area is entirely natural or entirely cultural’.<sup>9</sup>

## THE BOOM YEARS AND BEYOND

Of course, the Australian conservation movement went through some profound changes in the late 1960s and early 1970s. In a radio discussion about the legacy of Myles and Milo Dunphy, biographer Peter Meredith summed up this change rather well when he said:

If there was a difference between father and son, it was one of style. Milo rejected his father’s gentlemanly approach, the polite letters, the friendly contacts with bureaucrats. Milo had the fiery zeal of a radical; he made a lot of noise, ruffled bureaucratic feathers, rattled politicians. In this way he was as much a man of his time as his father had been of his.<sup>10</sup>

Milo’s different style emerged strongly in the campaign, starting in 1968, to prevent limestone mining of the remote Colong Caves in an area much loved by the pioneer bushwalkers. Instead of polite lobbying of the politicians and bureaucrats, Milo urged the Colong Caves Committee to go direct to the public with its demand to stop the mining development and to have the area in which the caves are located declared a national park. It was an intense campaign that eventually gained enough public support to realise all of its goals. It also encouraged Milo to set up a new organisation – the Total Environment Centre – that would continue to build public support for conservation initiatives. In Queensland, poet and conservationist Judith Wright set out to broaden the base of the Wildlife Preservation Society of Queensland by setting up a lot of local branches and by launching a popular magazine called *Wildlife* (first appearing in 1963). Her strategy was put to the test in 1967 when the WPSQ launched a public campaign to prevent limestone mining and oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef. Because of Wright’s prominence as a writer she was able to attract national media interest and the ensuing national campaign achieved a large measure of success when the reef was incorporated into a marine national park in 1974.

In the early 1970s, organisations like Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace arrived in Australia with their global concerns and, slowly, the conservation

movement broadened into an environmental movement with an interest in issues like the nuclear fuel cycle and the role played in it by uranium mining in Australia. A kind of coup inside the Australian Conservation Foundation in the early 1970s shook the conservative political influence of people like Britain's Prince Phillip and the former national Attorney-General Sir Garfield Barwick, enabling the organisation to take up issues like the use of toxic chemicals in agriculture and support for the struggle for Aboriginal land rights.<sup>11</sup> A massive, national, campaign to prevent the flooding of the Franklin River in south-west Tasmania – which was fired by the disappointing failure of an earlier campaign to prevent the flooding of Lake Pedder in the same region – reached its peak in 1983 by demonstrating that the environmental movement had developed an ability to influence the outcome of state and federal elections. One outcome of the Franklin campaign was that the Tasmanian Wilderness Society became the national Wilderness Society, eventually joining ACF and Greenpeace as one of the 'big three' environmental non-government organisations (ENGOS).

Having built its political power in the early 1980s, the environmental movement began to use that power in Canberra by influencing government policies on a wide range of issues, such as the salination of agricultural land in the Murray-Darling basin caused by the removal of trees and extensive irrigation of salt-rich soils. The Canberra lobby of the big ENGOS also played a role in shaping a major policy document on environmentally sustainable development initiated by the Hawke Labor government.<sup>12</sup> The ACF joined forces with its traditional 'enemies' in the National Farmers Federation to convince the Hawke government to launch a national landcare program fostering the creation of local groups dedicated to the task of revegetating degraded land.

A surge of support for environmental organisations in the 1980s inevitably faded during the 1990s, yet the organisations that had broadened their bases of support during the 1980s continued to work on a wide range of issues. ACF, for example, worked on issues as diverse as the shaping of legislation giving effect to 'native title' to land for indigenous Australians, the development of solar energy and other forms of environmentally friendly technology, and concerns about the growth in genetic engineering. The Wilderness Society got involved in negotiations for a land management plan for Cape York peninsula along with organisations representing Aboriginal communities and cattle farmers. Greenpeace focused one of its campaigns on monitoring early promises by the relevant authorities to make the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000 the 'greenest' on record.<sup>13</sup> Many conservation activists focused their efforts on the development of Regional Forest Agreements which were heralded by the Keating and Howard federal governments as a way of 'settling' the competing claims of conservationists and the forestry industry.<sup>14</sup> In 2000, the ACF once again joined forces with the National Farmers Federation to call for an increased effort on the part of government to address the serious problems associated with salination of soils.

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However, notwithstanding the obvious achievements of the environmental movement in the last three decades of the twentieth century, the onset of a new century has found the movement going through a period of introspection and review. A downturn in political influence and public engagement with environmental issues during the 1990s may have been inevitable after the high-water mark reached by the end of the 1980s, but this has also forced ENGOs to reconsider their strategies and priorities<sup>15</sup>. Following criticisms made by Marcia Langton (see above), and others<sup>16</sup> about the cultural blindness displayed by strategies aimed at preserving 'wilderness', efforts have been made to build 'conservation partnerships' between those responsible for managing National Parks and reserves and indigenous communities who either own land or are entitled to make claims under native title legislation.<sup>17</sup>

By the late 1990s, the nature conservation wing of the environmental movement was interested in exploring the problems associated with the legacy of a preservationist strategy that had targeted 'pristine nature' (on the other side of the frontier) for protection. So, for example, in her paper to the 1997 conference on *National Parks: New Visions for a New Century*,<sup>18</sup> hosted by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Meredith Walker strongly criticised the practice of removing all evidence of human occupation from areas now incorporated in parks and reserves on the grounds that this might enable them to appear more 'natural':

T[he] practice of ascribing values to places – natural, cultural, Aboriginal, heritage, etc – has distorted our ability to see the culture in nature and sometimes the nature in culture, and in many places has obscured a very interesting history.<sup>19</sup>

The conference also heard criticisms of the idea of relying on 'islands' of parks and reserves for protecting the nation's biodiversity and it heard that many beautiful places are being 'loved to death' through visitor impacts or by being subjected to intrusive commercial developments. Papers at the conference also reflected a broader debate on the relative merits of publicly-owned parks and reserves compared with some recently established privately owned sanctuaries.

Some of these issues were explored further in a 1999 report prepared for the International Union for the Conservation of Nature by ACF Vice-President Penelope Figgis.<sup>20</sup> In this report, Figgis said that Australian conservationists need to work on three major new strategies: 1) moving beyond national parks as 'islands' of biodiversity protection to embrace a bioregional approach that would encourage the establishment of buffer zones, transition zones, and 'corridors of diverse ownership and tenure'; 2) encouraging broader involvement in the implementation of conservation strategies, including support for privately owned reserves; and 3) building a much stronger strategic alliance between conservationists and indigenous communities who have been successful in reclaiming their rights to 'traditional' lands (covering, by 1999, 14 per cent of the

Australian land mass). Figgis suggested that new strategies must involve a significant shift of mindset from a time when 'saving' natural places simply meant having them incorporated into national parks. However, she also warned that the new strategies must be seen as building on the achievements of having secured 'core sanctuary lands' because '[c]onservation needs to move out from these lands, not multiple-use move in'.<sup>21</sup>

#### TOWARDS A CONSERVER SOCIETY

In opening up debate about future conservation strategies, the ACF has also been keen to dispel some of the most negative images associated with the environmental movement. So, for example, after staff in the organisation's national office explored ideas emerging in the relatively new field of ecopsychology at an internal seminar in late 1999, Campaigns Director John Connor wrote an article for the *Sydney Morning Herald*<sup>22</sup> which acknowledged that a focus on the damage humans have inflicted on Australia has the 'potential to entrench a sense of alienation and despair that many feel at the challenge of restoring our balance with this ancient country'. Rather than continuing to appeal to a sense of guilt, Connor argued, the conservation movement should aim to show that environmental awareness could provide a very attractive alternative to 'joyless consumerism' because 'many of the loveliest, tastiest, most exciting pleasures on earth don't necessarily take a high toll on the environment'. We might, for example, indulge a passion for wines and cheeses by favouring the ones that don't need to be transported vast distances, or we might engage in the 'ultimate indulgence' of 'being belly up on a beach midweek'. Connor acknowledged a particular debt to the pioneer ecopsychologist Theodore Roszak who introduced the term 'sustainable extravagance'.

This effort to stimulate broader public discussion about incentives for conservation is welcome and timely. On one level, the argument mounted by Connor has some similarity to an idea that has been promoted since 1985<sup>23</sup> by the Australian writer and educator Ted Trainer, who has consistently said that we need to make the shift from being a consumer society to becoming a 'conserver society' by realising that a good quality of life cannot be achieved through 'mindless consumerism'. The difference is that Trainer has urged a return to a more frugal lifestyle which contrasts sharply with Roszak's idea that we can sustainably indulge our desire for extravagance. While Trainer argues for a radical shift towards a decentralised society using 'soft' technology, Roszak's notion is more conservatively focused on individual lifestyle choices.

Rozzak's concept of 'sustainable extravagance' is based on the rather glib assessment that 'we all need to have a sense of opulence or extravagance'.<sup>24</sup> It is a populist version of Tim Hayward's more sophisticated call for environmental action to be motivated by 'enlightened self-interest'.<sup>25</sup> On face value, it has

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more appeal than Trainer's call for a rather austere way of living. However, the use of terms like 'extravagance' and 'opulence' bends the stick too far in the opposite direction by trivialising important concerns about excessive, often waste-generating, behaviour. A reliance on enlightened self-interest ignores the potential of self-fulfilling altruism. Whereas Trainer's notion of the conserver society is excessively outcome-oriented (in that it focuses less on how the transition might occur), Roszak's notion of 'sustainable extravagance' has the potential to create complacency about the need to build a movement for social change. This paper argues that both these notions are defective in that they provide no new ideas on *how* more people can be enticed to seriously rethink their personal values and goals, and they offer no new strategies for building a more inclusive conservation *movement*.

To return to our starting point, the notions promoted by Trainer and Roszak also fail to address the problematic conservation legacy in Australia, in particular: 1) a lingering 'frontier mentality' that fosters a conceptual separation of people and 'pristine' nature and a nature/culture dualism,<sup>26</sup> and 2) a heavy reliance on scientific 'expertise' and rational arguments for conservation which alienate many people and reinforce a widespread view (mentioned earlier) that conservation is for 'experts' and 'fanatics'.

We need to focus on processes more than outcomes. We need to help people to decolonise their attitudes towards nature while, at the same time, re-enchant conservation 'work' so that it might become more self-rewarding and enjoyable. A good place to start is by challenging the hegemony of science in order to rehabilitate a romantic ecological tradition that can appeal to an aesthetic sensibility. This encourages a move from an over-reliance on austere scientific arguments to an exploration of the 'magic' that can accompany sensuous, embodied experiences of wild nature.

## RETHINKING THOREAU AND THE ROMANTIC TRADITION

The dominance of science in the field of nature conservation reflects a broader hegemony of science in the field of ecology. While it is true that the German biologist Ernst Haeckel coined the term 'ecology' in 1866 to suggest a way of extending Darwin's theory of natural evolution, it is not true that Darwin's work gave birth to ecology. Historians of ecology – from Donald Worster (1977, 1994) to Robert McIntosh (1985) – agree that it has roots (McIntosh calls them 'antecedents') that go back well before Darwin. They agree that it has origins in the study of natural history and in romantic philosophy promoted by people like William Wordsworth, Johann Goethe and Henry David Thoreau. Worster calls the tradition pioneered by Swedish botanist Carl Von Linné (better known as Linnaeus) an 'Imperial' one because it sought to understand the natural world by naming its components. He counterposes this to an 'Arcadian' tradition pio-



neered by the eighteenth century English naturalist/parson Gilbert White, who explored natural systems as a ‘philosopher’ inspired by the ‘wisdom of God in the creation’.<sup>27</sup> The Arcadian tradition thus began by advocating a more humble attitude towards ‘God’s creation’.

The Imperial tradition was certainly boosted by Darwin’s startling discoveries, but the romantic/Arcadian tradition did not disappear. It has gone through major transformations – particularly in Australia where an English Arcadian ideal became a barrier to an aesthetic appreciation of radically different landscapes. Yet a philosophical commitment to a reconciliation between people and nature has continued to be a driving force for a better understanding of natural systems. It is no accident that the romantic/Arcadian tradition has appealed to poets and painters like Wordsworth and J.M.W. Turner (and Australian painter Arthur Streeton). As a philosophy it has favoured a sensory involvement with the natural world. It also puts humans in the picture while the Imperial tradition insists on a separation for the sake of ‘objectivity’. No doubt the romantics have leaned towards a rather simplistic ‘nature knows best’ reaction to the anthropocentric philosophies entrenched in western cultures by the so-called Age of Enlightenment. However, they have modelled some ways of ‘reconnecting’ with nature that have been largely neglected by science-oriented conservationists.

Many nature lovers have been inspired by the philosophical, place-based, writings of Henry David Thoreau. Yet Thoreau, along with John Muir, has come under sustained fire from some writers for popularising romantic myths about the importance of ‘wilderness’. For example, William Cronon began an interesting essay on wilderness by criticising Thoreau’s famous dictum: ‘In Wildness is the preservation of the World’.<sup>28</sup> However, it is very important to note that in this phrase, first uttered in a public lecture in Concord Massachusetts in 1851,<sup>29</sup> Thoreau used the word ‘wildness’ not ‘wilderness’ and the distinction is important for an understanding of his legacy. As Schama,<sup>30</sup> another critic of Thoreau, has admitted, the philosopher consciously rejected the temptation to travel widely to remote and exotic places in favour of a detailed study of the area surrounding the town where he lived. Late in his life he said, famously, that he had ‘travelled a good deal in Concord’ and that he had indeed ‘reached the new world’ by staying in the same place.<sup>31</sup> As Thoreau’s rich travel stories of Concord suggest, inspirational experiences of wildness can be had in surprising places at almost any time of day or night provided the subject is open to such experiences.

A shift in emphasis from wilderness to wildness has many advantages for promoting a broader public interest in the conservation of nature. For example:

1) You don’t have to drive, trek, fly, or dive into remote places to experience the wildness of the ‘more than human’ world.<sup>32</sup> We can be inspired by a surprisingly good sunset or by the sight of the bush reclaiming an area that was once cleared. Developing their local knowledge and an eye for detail, gardeners can experience the resilience of wild nature in surprising – sometimes frustrating – ways.

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‘Neglected’ areas in the city are soon overrun by plants, although the creative chaos of wildness in such locations can be choked by the dominance of a limited variety of hegemonic ‘weeds’. In recent years, a wide variety of native birds – including parrots and kookaburras – have returned to the inner suburbs of Sydney simply because more people have planted native trees and shrubs in their gardens; thus enabling a ‘return’ of the wild.

2) Wildness can be experienced on different scales, from gazing at a starry night sky to watching spiders and ants at work in a suburban back yard. My colleague Professor Stuart Hill<sup>33</sup> likes to remind his audiences that 80 per cent of living things spend most, if not all, of their lives under the surface of the ground and he has a wonderful slide show to demonstrate just how much life can be found in a single handful of soil. Of course, a deep experience of wilderness can be more intense than watching a slide show or ants at work in the back garden. But, as Thoreau demonstrated, a study of the details can enable us to travel a long way in our imaginations. He once wrote in his journal of the pleasure of being able to hold a hairy, wild huckleberry in his hand while he thought of the remote places where wild huckleberries might also grow and of people who may have stood in the same spot a thousand years earlier contemplating a very similar specimen.<sup>34</sup>

3) Experiences of wildness can be frightening; a salutary reminder that the notion of human supremacy over nature is a dangerous illusion. In April 1999, a wild hailstorm lashed central areas of Sydney causing millions of dollars worth of damage in minutes and in 1994 the smoke from a multitude of bushfires went billowing through the Central Business District. Of course, those who suffer at the hands of such ‘natural disasters’ deserve our collective support, but the impact on the ‘psyche’ of the city can also be positive when people reflect on what they have learnt about human fallibility. Nature deserves respect because it is both inspiring and threatening.

4) A focus on wildness can build a bridge between the preservation of remote wilderness areas and other important work being done to regenerate degraded ecosystems closer to where most people live. Preservation and restoration have sometimes been counterposed as conservation strategies, yet both of them celebrate wildness.

However, an ability to both notice and appreciate wildness in all its manifestations requires a shift of perception that is not widely encouraged in our ‘western’ societies. We not only rely on sight more than our other senses, but we also suffer from tunnel vision. We are destination-oriented, always passing through places on the way to somewhere else. We have to learn how to dwell and focus and cultivate the desire to linger with our experiences. As Abram has pointed out, phenomenology offers a relatively recent western philosophical tradition that enables us to better contemplate our ‘lived experience’.<sup>35</sup> It reminds us that subjective experience is an essential part of our search for meaning.

## LISTENING TO THE LAND

Abram advances the theory that western cultures started to see themselves as separate from the 'more than human' world when they developed a phonetic alphabet that disguised the fact that language itself emerged from the shared experience of that world. He suggests that Hebrew scholars began the process of creating a linguistic and conceptual boundary that was taken much further by the Ancient Greeks, with a transition evident from Socrates to Plato. Of course, literate societies have gained an ability to participate in broad, reflective discourses, informed by a wide range of cultural experiences. However, we have also lost an ability to be alive to the immediate world in which we are immersed. In comparison with oral societies, our senses have been dulled and the 'more than human' world has been muted. We have replaced a detailed understanding of places with abstracted notions of landscapes. We have come to rely on abstracted rationality rather than embodied, sensuous experience.

In Australia, we have the distinct advantage of sharing the land with a culture that retained abilities our culture has lost. Aboriginal Australians are certainly more alive than we are to their surroundings and are acutely aware of the uniqueness of each 'place' they might visit. They orient themselves to the landscapes in which they live through the sharing of stories passed down through countless generations. These stories – which frequently take the form of creation myths – help guide a traveller to sources of food, water, or shelter. However, they also contain strong moral messages about how people should care for the land that supports them. The sharing of stories creates a much stronger affective bond between people and landscapes and, in explaining why Aboriginal people prefer the English word 'country' to 'landscape', the noted Australian anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose has written:

Country in Aboriginal English is not only a common noun but a proper noun. People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person; they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country.... Country is not a generalised or undifferentiated type of place, such as one might indicate with terms like 'spending a day in the country' or 'going up the country'. Rather, country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life.<sup>36</sup>

Aboriginal stories embedded in particular places often took the form of rhythmical chants or songs to make them easier to remember and recite – hence the concept of 'singing up' the 'dreaming' in the land. Furthermore, any one place will have a number of stories associated with it. In accepting a special award at the 1997 conference of the NSW Branch of the Australian Association for Environmental Education,<sup>37</sup> former National Parks and Wildlife Service employee Allan Fox recalled a time when he had been working with a widely

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respected elder of the Gagadju people, Bill Neidjie, on the submission for the establishment of the Kakadu National Park in the mid-1970s. When politicians and other dignitaries came to inspect the area proposed for the national park, it was Fox's job to introduce them to Neidjie and his deep understandings of the area. After a number of such delegations had passed through, Fox had become concerned that Neidjie had told different stories to different people concerning particular places. Fearing that this inconsistency could undermine the proposal for the park, he confronted Neidjie, only to be told that the old man knew many stories for each place they might visit and his responsibility as story-keeper was to decide which story should be told to which people.

## READING STORIED LANDSCAPES

Compared to the Aborigines, white Australians have lived in this land for a blink of history's eyelid. Even if we had been more attentive to what we can learn from the land, we have not had the time to build such a rich treasure trove of stories, myths and legends that help to create affective bonds between people and country. As migrants from other lands we have, of course, brought stories with us. But such stories either remain as frozen artefacts of another culture, or they are reshaped by being embedded in new places.

However, we should not despair about the relative paucity of our 'whitefella dreaming', because what we have *begun* to accumulate is impressive in its own right. We have our own rich store of creation stories, generated in the main by science (a very impressive and powerful story-maker). We have popular legends and myths related to the shaping of an Australian identity and a much larger collection of stories from our place-related social histories. We all have personal stories from the places where we have lived and broader family stories influenced by a number of places and landscapes. If we choose to 'put down roots' in a new place we often check out the local stories, known only to the locals, in order to feel more like a local.

Our best novelists – from Eleanor Dark to Patrick White to Tim Winton – have created powerful interpretations of relationships between people and particular landscapes. Popular poets – from Henry Lawson through to Judith Wright and Les Murray – have done the same. Our most influential landscape painters – from Tom Roberts to Russell Drysdale and Sidney Nolan – have reinterpreted our myths and created new narratives. A desire to better understand unique Australian environments has motivated film-makers, architects, photographers and musicians. While most of us lack deep knowledge of particular places, we have access to a broader sharing of stories at a national level.

We can build more affective relationships with Australian environments by reading landscape-related stories or by seeking out the stories embedded in particular landscapes. Not many of us have the ability to contribute influential

novels or works of art, but we can all add to our personal store of place stories, and sometimes our creations will resonate with the experiences of others. In our culture creativity is often seen as being the preserve of those with a God-given talent. Although a very modest talent himself, the author has enjoyed considerable success in running poetry workshops in inspiring outdoor settings; helping others discover the joy of reaching both inside and outside to capture images and sub-conscious thoughts and bring them into some surprising connections. Creative writing is just one way of reaching beyond the dominant, rational modes of thought and expression. Many other forms of creativity can help people explore their sensuous experiences of the 'more than human' world.

### CONCLUSIONS

The nature conservation movement in Australia will not be able to broaden and deepen its influence by simply doing more and better work in lobbying and policy development, monitoring resource management strategies, or even within existing frameworks for environmental education. Rather it needs to tackle the less tangible and more difficult task of broadening public perception of what it means to be a conservationist. It needs to create more enthusiasm for the personal rewards that can be attained by doing conservation 'work'.

This article has argued for a radical broadening of the conceptual basis of conservation work in Australia; to embrace more of the 'magic' of sensuous, embodied experiences of wildness (rather than the narrower concept of wilderness) and to enhance aesthetic appreciation of the 'more-than-human'. What would this mean in practice? It is not easy to answer this question in a broad way. Different organisations have different opportunities and constraints (often financial). Strategy development requires a careful assessment of priorities and 'investments'. However, the following initiatives could be broadly sponsored by a range of environmental organisations (and other partners) and they would help to create a new public perception of conservation work:

- 1) the establishment of a National Conservation Award for environmental art, poetry, short stories, or photography;
- 2) a programme to foster skills in creating 'landscape stories'; targeted primarily at schools and community groups; and
- 3) an 'Enchanted Nature' education program that suggests some ways to enhance sensory awareness, develop skills in reflective journaling, and foster aesthetic appreciation of the 'more-than-human'.

A more ambitious and resource-hungry project would be the establishment of a broadly-sponsored national magazine for nature conservation that explores issues and challenges and fosters debate. A journal like the ACF's *Habitat*

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already does a pretty good job of reporting issues in an accessible way. However, its aim is to promote the organisation and to convince its limited audience to support existing ACF initiatives.<sup>38</sup> Other movement publications are even more narrowly focused. A magazine that encourages discussion and creative forms of expression as well as reportage would attract a bigger audience and create stronger interest. In an effort to present a 'united front' to government and industry, environmental organisations have often been excessively cautious about public debate. This may not have been a serious problem when the organisations were in a strong growth phase, but it presents a 'closed door' image to potential supporters when the competition for 'hearts and minds' is less favourable to those organisations. The need for a wider discussion of conservation strategies has rarely been more apparent.

Whatever decisions environmental organisations make about strategies and projects, one thing is very clear and that is the need to make more of our opportunity in Australia to learn skills from the indigenous people in being able to 'listen to the land'. Part of our problem is linguistic and it is very interesting to note that Aboriginal people adopted and transformed the English word 'country' to fill a void in the language (regarding affective relationships between people and the land). This does not mean that we should simply replace the word 'landscape' with the word 'country' because this would then dissolve an important and instructive distinction. It may be useful to use the term 'storied landscapes' to approximate the word 'country' in Aboriginal English, but it is probably even more important to encourage people to think about the ways in which the indigenous people have enriched the English language in a two-sided linguistic exchange.

This might also be extended to the word 'dreaming' because, as the noted anthropologist W.E. Stanner once pointed out, Aboriginal people tend to be saddened by the perception that 'whitefellers' have 'got no dreaming'.

As it enters the second century of its existence, the Australian conservation movement is reassessing its strategies and priorities. This is a timely discussion but it needs to be given a broader public 'airing' and new initiatives need to be formulated and trialled. Without putting at risk what has been achieved over the last hundred years, there is a clear need to re-enchant conservation 'work' in Australia.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Information about early organisations taken from Hutton and Connors, 1999.

<sup>2</sup> For information about Myles Dunphy and his son Milo see Meredith, 1999.

<sup>3</sup> Evidence of this was discussed by well-known Australian writer David Malouf in his 1998 Boyer Lectures, *A Spirit of Play: The making of Australian consciousness* (Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney).

<sup>4</sup> See Hutton and Connors 1999: 28.

<sup>5</sup> The author interviewed two of Dunphy's colleagues – Alex Colley and Dot Butler – for a book in 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Langton's position has been outlined in her book *Burning Questions* (1998).

<sup>7</sup> The term *terra nullius* (empty land) was used by Captain James Cook and Sir Joseph Banks to justify claiming the territory in the name of the British crown. This legal fiction was maintained until the High Court finally ruled in 1992 that a form of 'Native Title' did exist prior to colonisation.

<sup>8</sup> The term 'firestick farming' was introduced by the respected prehistorian Rhys Jones.

<sup>9</sup> In her paper in the published proceedings of a 1997 conference, *National Parks: New Visions for a New Century*, organised by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW.

<sup>10</sup> From the transcript of *Ockahm's Razor*, broadcast on Radio National on Sunday May 16, 1999, Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney.

<sup>11</sup> These events have been discussed by Warden (1999).

<sup>12</sup> For a good discussion of the phases in the development of the environment movement in Australia, see Hutton and Connors 1999.

<sup>13</sup> In a revised (2000) edition of her influential book *Global Spin*, Sharon Beder has argued that Greenpeace has been badly compromised by its involvement with the Olympic Games.

<sup>14</sup> While some RFAs were welcomed by conservationists most were seen as being biased towards the interests of logging and woodchipping operations.

<sup>15</sup> In 1997, for example, the Wilderness Society announced that it was abandoning the practice of having a full-time lobbyist working in Canberra, so that the resources saved could be redirected to campaign work.

<sup>16</sup> Including the respected conservation elder Judith Wright.

<sup>17</sup> The case for such 'conservation partnerships' was argued in a report to the Commonwealth department Environment Australia prepared by Dr Dermot Smyth and Ms Johanna Sutherland in 1996.

<sup>18</sup> A publication of the conference papers is available from the Nature Conservation Council in Sydney.

<sup>19</sup> Proceedings of the conference were produced by the Nature Conservation Council of NSW, Sydney.

<sup>20</sup> A summary of the report was published in the ACF magazine *Habitat* in October 1999.

<sup>21</sup> See *Habitat* article, *ibid*.

<sup>22</sup> Published in both papers in January 2000.

<sup>23</sup> See Trainer 1985.

<sup>24</sup> Cited by Connor, in the *Sydney Morning Herald* article.

<sup>25</sup> See Hayward 1998.

<sup>26</sup> For discussion of such dualisms, see Plumwood 1993.

<sup>27</sup> See Worster 1994: 3-8.

<sup>28</sup> See Cronon 1996.

<sup>29</sup> See Schama 1995: 571-572.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*: 576-578.

<sup>32</sup> To borrow a phrase from David Abram (1996).

<sup>33</sup> Foundation professor in Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney - Hawkesbury, Richmond NSW.

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<sup>34</sup> See Schama 1995: 578.

<sup>35</sup> In Abram 1996.

<sup>36</sup> See Deborah Bird Rose (1996).

<sup>37</sup> Held at Port Stevens, near Newcastle.

<sup>38</sup> A recently-completed Honours thesis at the University of Western Sydney–Hawkesbury by Michelle Kluin presented a discourse analysis of *Habitat* that demonstrated the narrowness of its aims and its impact on readers.

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