

THESIS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (EDUCATION)  
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AN EMERGENT METHODOLOGY FOR CREATING  
A TRANSCULTURAL SPATIAL NARRATIVE

RECONCEPTUALISING THE NGUNAWAL  
SOCIO-CULTURAL LANDSCAPE AS INTERACTIVE SPACE

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## ABSTRACT

This thesis is about creating a synthesis of emergent methodology with empathic understanding through transforming, as researcher, my ways of knowing and worldview. I use a transcultural spatial narrative about achieving that synthesis to demonstrate an emergent methodology. I present the theoretical underpinnings of my emergent methodology by exploring the process of transforming self. A transdisciplinary approach to history, ethnography and the visual arts is used to interact with Ngunawal ways of knowing and to reconceptualise the meanings of territory, line, space and the boundaries of the Ngunawal socio-cultural landscape. I discuss my redefined concepts and permeable boundaries with reference to Tindale's 1974 map of tribal boundaries, which became a catalyst in my creation of a transcultural perspective (endorsed by the Ngunawal Elders) of Ngunawal territory. My methodology and empathic understanding emerge from my transformation. The movement and change, communicated by a series of exegeses, can be traced as I create the transcultural spatial narrative.

The purpose of the thesis is both to develop, as an empathic researcher, a methodology for temporarily suspending my established knowledge base and to challenge my preconceptions in order to better understand the ways of knowing and perception of others. That purpose is achieved using a case study of the relationship between Ngunawal Aboriginal Australian culture and my own Euro-Australian culture. I create an interpretative narrative of territory as a means of validating my understanding.

An interpretive narrative of Ngunawal territory means working with the Ngunawal Elders and their perspective of territory, but not appropriating their culture. However, since *Mabo 2*, research on Native Title has increasingly focused on the material dimensions of culture. The current focus is on defining the boundaries of 'place' as lines on maps, and on the material connection of people to places between those lines. Given our original perception of Australia as *Terra Nullius* was so badly flawed, I have challenged the perceptions and ways of knowing that led to it. Therefore, I work toward creating a transcultural narrative that focuses on physical and non-physical aspects that define territory.

The Ngunawal Elders taught me that ways of knowing territory depend on recognising the different emphasis generally placed on the interaction of personal and environmental space by my own culture compared to Ngunawal culture. Differences in the perception of boundaries between mind, body and environment are key. The general view of my culture perceives

mind, body and environment as separate and opposing. This challenges the coherence of a narrative of territory. The difference in perception caused me to rethink the role of self as I reconceptualised Ngunawal territory in terms of interactive space (a hybrid space of social, cultural and environmental interaction). Reconceptualising self in interactive space enabled me to perceive Ngunawal culture empathically without appropriating it. I created a spatial narrative using a hybrid system of signals and symbols that were open to new and changing experiences and perceptions.

## CERTIFICATE OF AUTHORSHIP OF THESIS

Except where clearly acknowledged in footnotes, quotations and the bibliography, I certify that I am the sole author of the thesis submitted today entitled –

*An Emergent Methodology For Creating A Transcultural Spatial Narrative.*

*Reconceptualising The Ngunawal Socio-Cultural Landscape As Interactive Space.*

I further certify that to the best of my knowledge the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

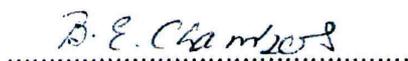
The material in the thesis has not been the basis of an award of any other degree or diploma except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

The thesis complies with University requirements for a thesis as set out in Gold Book Part 7: Examination of Higher Degree by Research Thesis Policy, Schedule Two (S2).

Refer to <http://www.canberra.edu.au/research-students/goldbook>.



Signature of Candidate



Signature of Chair of the Supervisory Panel

Date: 15 December 2011

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I have come to understand that the thesis process is not about arriving at correct answers but learning to ask the right questions, and the life journey that involves. I acknowledge the Ngunawal community for sharing their culture and showing me the way.

I use this opportunity to particularly thank Ngunawal Elders Don and Ruth Bell and their family. Don and Ruth showed me how to understand what I felt about the environment I lived in, how to overcome the boundaries of separation. They helped me find who I was. I'll never forget the sound of Don's laugh when, during one of our chats, he said to me 'I always knew you were an earth girl'. It had only taken me something like 15 years to work it out. Don and Ruth seemed to spend most of their time with me waiting for me to catch up, but they were always very patient. This thesis is a tribute to their teaching, patience and, especially, their trust.

Don died in 2008, leaving a great hole in all of our lives. Don was not a man of many words, but what he did say had great wisdom. There are many things that Don told or showed me, but the one thing that has influenced both my personal and working life from the very moment he spoke the words, is to work from within – to feel and be the spirit from within yourself. That was the way Don lived and worked, which would be why he was so highly respected by archaeologists and other heritage professionals, and children and adults alike. He was the real thing. Don recognised Ngunawal culture from the deep sense of knowing that only comes when someone is connected to that culture in a genuine and profoundly spiritual way. Don was proud of his Ngunawal heritage and, at the same time, he was very humble; so that when we walked the land together, there would be an exchange of knowledge both ways. He never tried to belittle my contribution, even when it must have been old news to him. We were both interested in pathways, and I am grateful we followed the same life pathway for a time, were able to meet and explore each other's questions.

Similarly, I am grateful to have met, along that same pathway, my various supervisors. I thank them all for their questions and their individual insights into my learning process - Barbara Chevalier, Barbara Pamphilon in the earlier stages, (briefly) Jennifer Craik and, in the later stages, John Spriggs. To my primary supervisor Barbara Chambers I owe a great deal. Barbara patiently listened to, viewed or read all of my incoherent searchings, maintaining faith throughout, judiciously stepping back or nudging where necessary; walking with me on

my journey even when there was no path to follow. I acknowledge John Spriggs especially for his editorial overviews and his remarkable ability to ask the right questions.

Thank you to my friends (and sounding boards) Ann Gugler, John Bruggeman, Joan Goodrum, Rebecca Lamb and Jill Waterhouse for sharing their knowledge and experience of the overlap of colonial and Aboriginal Australian socio-cultural landscapes with me. Thanks also to Marcus Chacos and Robyn Barraclough for sharing my exploration of the interconnection of mind, body and environment.

I thank my family for their loving support. This thesis would not have been completed without them. Having begun the process in 2004, my children Paul and Alice have lived with ‘mum’s thesis’ (which started life as a Masters) throughout most of their teenage years. I learnt a lot over those years from their insightful comments (and also, more recently, their partners’). Finally, my profound thanks and gratitude goes to my husband/partner/best friend Terry. Terry not only lived the thesis journey with me, he was my primary editor during the raw floundering stages, right through to the polishing. Words fail me in my appreciation of his perseverance and commitment, but especially in his belief in my work and in me.



# BURU NGUNAWAL ABORIGINAL CORPORATION



ABN : 24 059 704 833

9 May 2010

## To Whom It May Concern

This letter is in regards to the recommendation of Ms Karen Williams. I met Ms Williams through consultation works that are undertaken by our organisation for the protection and conservation of our Aboriginal cultural heritage. Ms Williams has been known to us for many years.

Our most recent contact was in January 2010 when Ms Williams contacted us to make arrangements to discuss a draft of her thesis that she is writing on Recognising and Working With the Intangibles of a Community Context in particular the documentation that relates to my people the Ngunawal.

Ms Williams introduces her definition of the landscape being an interaction of social, cultural and environmental space which she interprets as the landscape being a living history, that is, interpreted through a personal sense of place and identity. She then introduces the idea that it is important to recognise the different emphasis (from Western culture) placed on the interaction of personal and environmental space by Aboriginal Australian cultures generally. Ms Williams' thesis is presented from her point of view as the researcher.

Ms Williams provided documentation for our members to look over and to make comment on as it relates to the Ngunawal peoples perspective.

She openly discussed her draft to clarify and confirm the documented statements made by our Elders. I wish to state that she conducted herself in a professional manner at all times. She displayed qualities of respect and understanding in her dealings with us and always sought clarification about cultural practices when necessary.

If you have any further questions please contact me.

Yours faithfully

Wally Bell (Ngunawal Traditional Carer)  
Chair

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