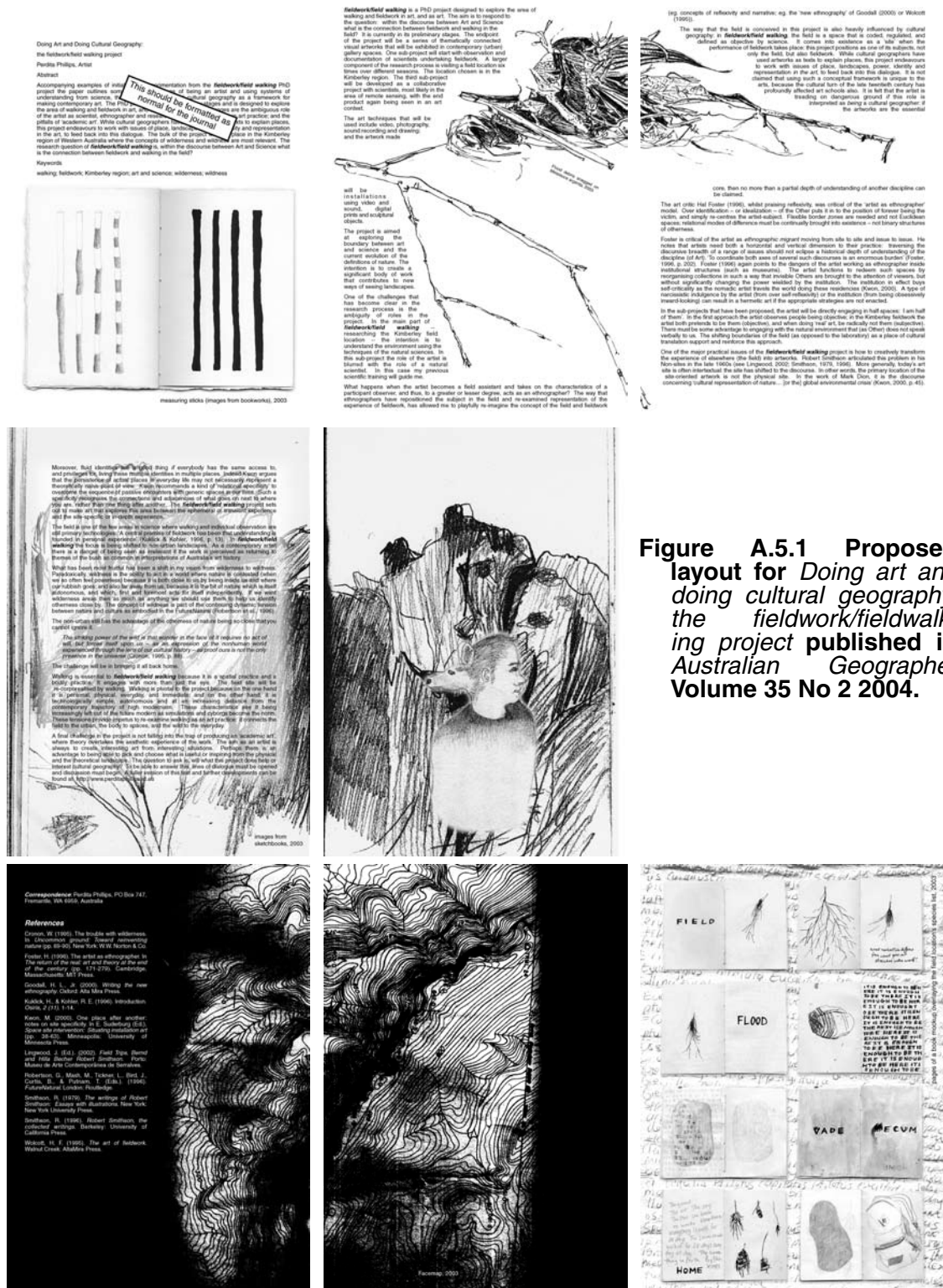


Figure A.5.1 below shows the proposed layout for the ***Doing art and doing cultural geography: the fieldwork/fieldwalking project*** published in **Australian Geographer**. Overleaf is the final layout by the publishers. During the publication process low quality jpegs were substituted for the original illustrations which are re-introduced here. Note: the word fieldwalking has also been altered to field walking during the editorial process.



Doing Art and Doing Cultural Geography: the fieldwork/field walking project¹

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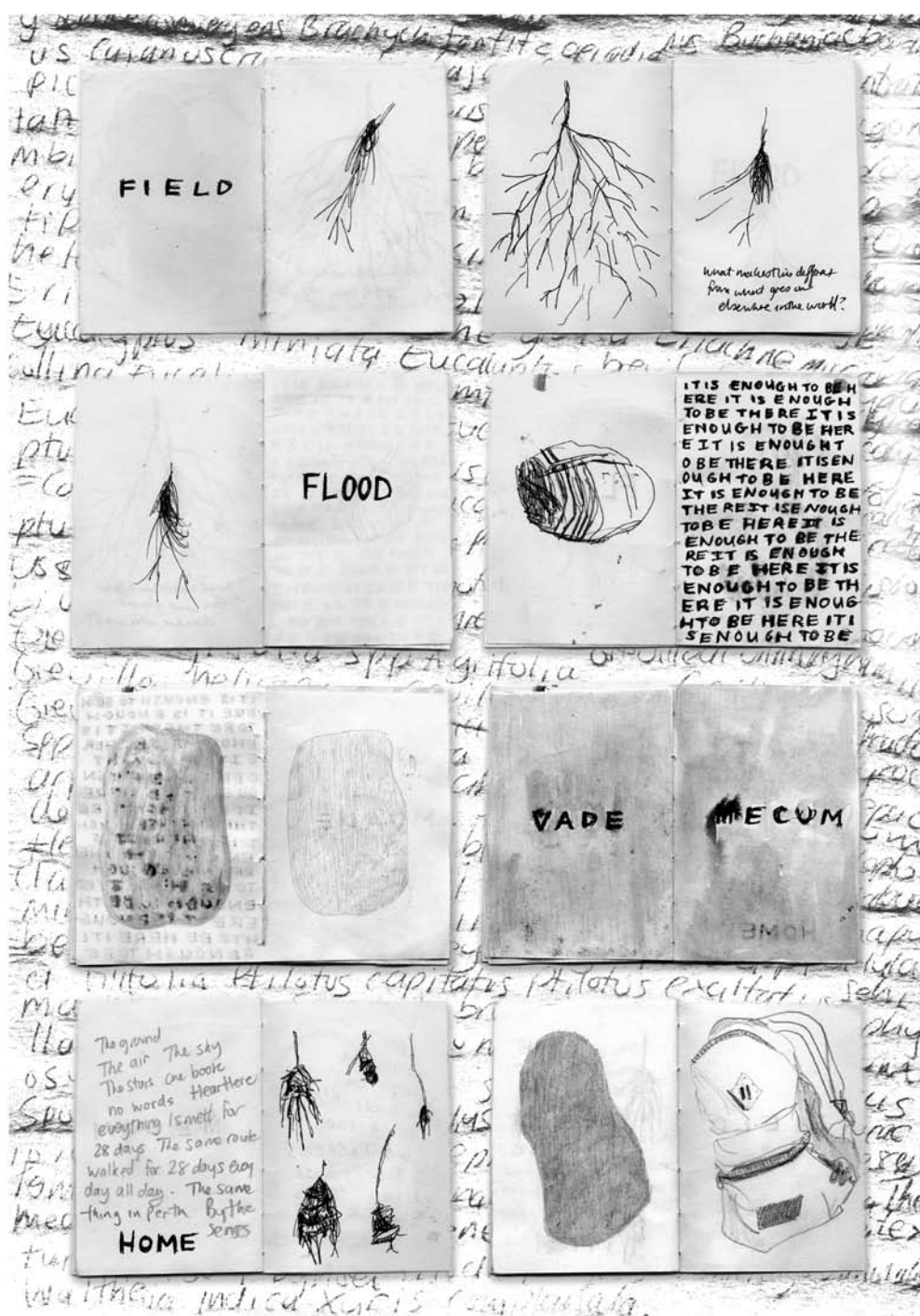
ABSTRACT *With accompanying examples of initial visual experimentation from the fieldwork/field walking PhD project, the paper outlines some of the challenges of being an artist and using systems of understanding from science, the new ethnography, and cultural geography as a framework for making contemporary art. The PhD project is in its preliminary stages and is designed to explore the area of walking and fieldwork in art, and as art. Some of the challenges are the ambiguous role of the artist as scientist, ethnographer and researcher, the role of reflexivity in art practice; and the pitfalls of 'academic art'. While cultural geographers have used artworks as texts to explain places, this project endeavours to work with issues of place, landscapes, power, identity and representation in the art, to feed back into this dialogue. The bulk of the project will take place in the Kimberley region of Western Australia where the concepts of wilderness and wildness are most relevant. The research question posed by the fieldwork/field walking project is: within the discourse between art and science what is the connection between fieldwork and walking in the field?*

KEY WORDS *Walking; fieldwork; Kimberley region; art and science; wilderness; wildness*

Fieldwork/field walking is a PhD project designed to explore the area of walking and fieldwork in art, and as art. The aim is to respond to the question: within the discourse between art and science what is the connection between fieldwork and walking in the field? It is currently in its preliminary stages. The endpoint of the project will be a series of thematically connected visual artworks that will be exhibited in contemporary (urban) gallery spaces. One sub-project will start with observation and documentation of scientists undertaking fieldwork. A larger component of the research process is visiting a field location six times over different seasons. The location chosen is in the Kimberley region. The third sub-project will be developed as a collaborative project with scientists, most likely in the area of remote sensing, with the end product again being seen in an art context.

The art techniques that will be used include video, photography, sound recording and drawing; and the artwork made will be installations using video and sound, digital prints and sculptural objects. The figures included here are all fragments or 'fieldnotes' about natural science and the Kimberley based upon an initial visit to the site. They should be viewed not as reflecting their particular points of insertion but as research running parallel to the text (see Figure 1).

The project is aimed at exploring the boundary between art and science and the



current transformations of meanings of 'nature'. The intention is to create a significant body of work that contributes to new ways of seeing landscapes.

One of the challenges that has become clear in the research process is the ambiguity

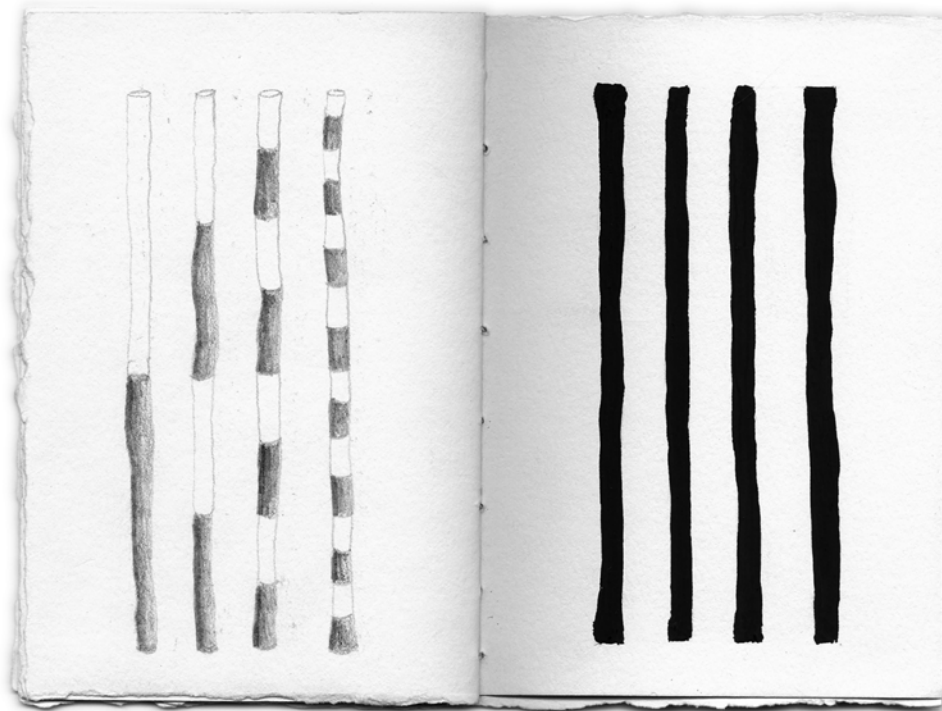


FIGURE 2. Measuring sticks (images from bookworks), 2003.

of roles in the project. In the main part of *fieldwork/field walking*—researching the Kimberley field location—the intention is to understand the environment using the techniques of the natural sciences. In this sub-project the role of the artist is blurred with the role of a natural scientist. In this case my previous scientific training will guide me (see Figure 2).

What happens when the artist becomes a field assistant and takes on the characteristics of a participant observer, and thus, to a greater or lesser degree, acts as an ethnographer? The way that ethnographers have repositioned the subject in the field and re-examined representation of the experience of fieldwork has allowed me to playfully re-imagine the concept of the field and fieldwork (e.g. concepts of reflexivity and narrative; the ‘new ethnography’ of Goodall 2000 or Wolcott 1995).

The way that the field is conceived in this project is also heavily influenced by cultural geography: in *fieldwork/field walking* the field is a space that is coded, regulated and defined as objective by science. It comes into existence as a ‘site’ when the performance of fieldwork takes place: this project positions as one of its subjects not only the field but also fieldwork. While cultural geographers have used artworks as texts to explain places, this project endeavours to work with issues of place, landscapes, power, identity and representation *in the art*, to feed back into this dialogue. It is not claimed that using such a conceptual framework is unique to the arts, because the cultural turn of the late twentieth century has profoundly affected art schools also. It is felt that the artist is treading on dangerous ground *if* this role is interpreted as *being* a cultural geographer: if the artworks are the essential core, then no more than a partial depth of understanding of another discipline can be claimed.

The art critic Hal Foster (1996), whilst praising reflexivity, was critical of the 'artist as ethnographer' model. Over identification with—or idealisation of—the Other puts it into the position of forever being the victim, and simply re-centres the artist-subject. Flexible border zones are needed and not Euclidean spaces; relational modes of difference must be continually brought into existence—not binary structures of otherness.

Foster is critical of the artist as *ethnographic migrant* moving from site to site and issue to issue. He notes that artists need both a horizontal and vertical dimension to their practice: traversing the discursive breadth of a range of issues should not eclipse a historical depth of understanding of the discipline (of art). 'To coordinate both axes of several such discourses is an enormous burden' (Foster 1996, p. 202). Foster (1996) again points to the dangers of the artist working as ethnographer inside institutional structures (such as museums). The artist functions to redeem such spaces by reorganising collections in such a way that invisible Others are brought to the attention of viewers, but without significantly changing the power wielded by the institution. The institution in effect buys self-criticality as the nomadic artist travels the world doing these residencies (Kwon 2000). A type of narcissistic indulgence by the artist (from over self-reflexivity) or the institution (from being obsessively inward looking) can result in a hermetic art if alternative strategies are not enacted.

In the sub-projects that have been proposed, the artist will be directly engaging in half spaces: I am half of 'them'. In the first approach the artist observes people being objective; in the Kimberley fieldwork the artist both pretends to be them (objective) and, when doing 'real' art, be radically not them (subjective) (see Figure 3). There must be some advantage to engaging with the natural environment that (as Other) does not speak verbally to us. The shifting boundaries of the field (as opposed to the laboratory) as a place of cultural translation support and reinforce this approach.

One of the major practical issues of the *fieldwork/field walking* project is how to creatively transform the experience of elsewhere (the field) into artworks. Robert Smithson articulated this problem in his Non-sites in the late 1960s (see Becher et al., 2002; Smithson 1979, 1996). More generally, today's art site is often intertextual: the site has shifted to the discourse. In other words, the primary location of the site-oriented artwork is not the physical site. In the work of Mark Dion, for example, it is the discourse concerning 'cultural representation of nature ... [or the] global environmental crisis' (Kwon 2000, p. 45).

Moreover, fluid identities are a good thing *if* everybody has the same access to, and privileges for, living these multiple identities in multiple places. Indeed, Kwon argues that the persistence of actual places in everyday life may not necessarily represent a theoretically naive point of view. Kwon recommends a kind of 'relational specificity' to overcome the sequence of passive encounters with generic spaces in our lives. Such a specificity recognises the connections and adjacencies of what goes on next to where you are, rather than one thing after another. The *fieldwork/field walking* project sets out to make art that explores this area between the ephemeral or transient experience and the site-specific or in-depth experience.

The field is one of the few areas in science where walking and individual observation are still primary technologies. 'A central premise of fieldwork has been that understanding is founded in personal experience' (Kuklick & Kohler 1996, p. 13). In *fieldwork/field walking* the focus is being shifted to non-urban landscapes. As a contemporary artist there is a danger of being seen as irrelevant if the work is perceived as returning to themes of the bush so common in interpretations of Australia's art history.

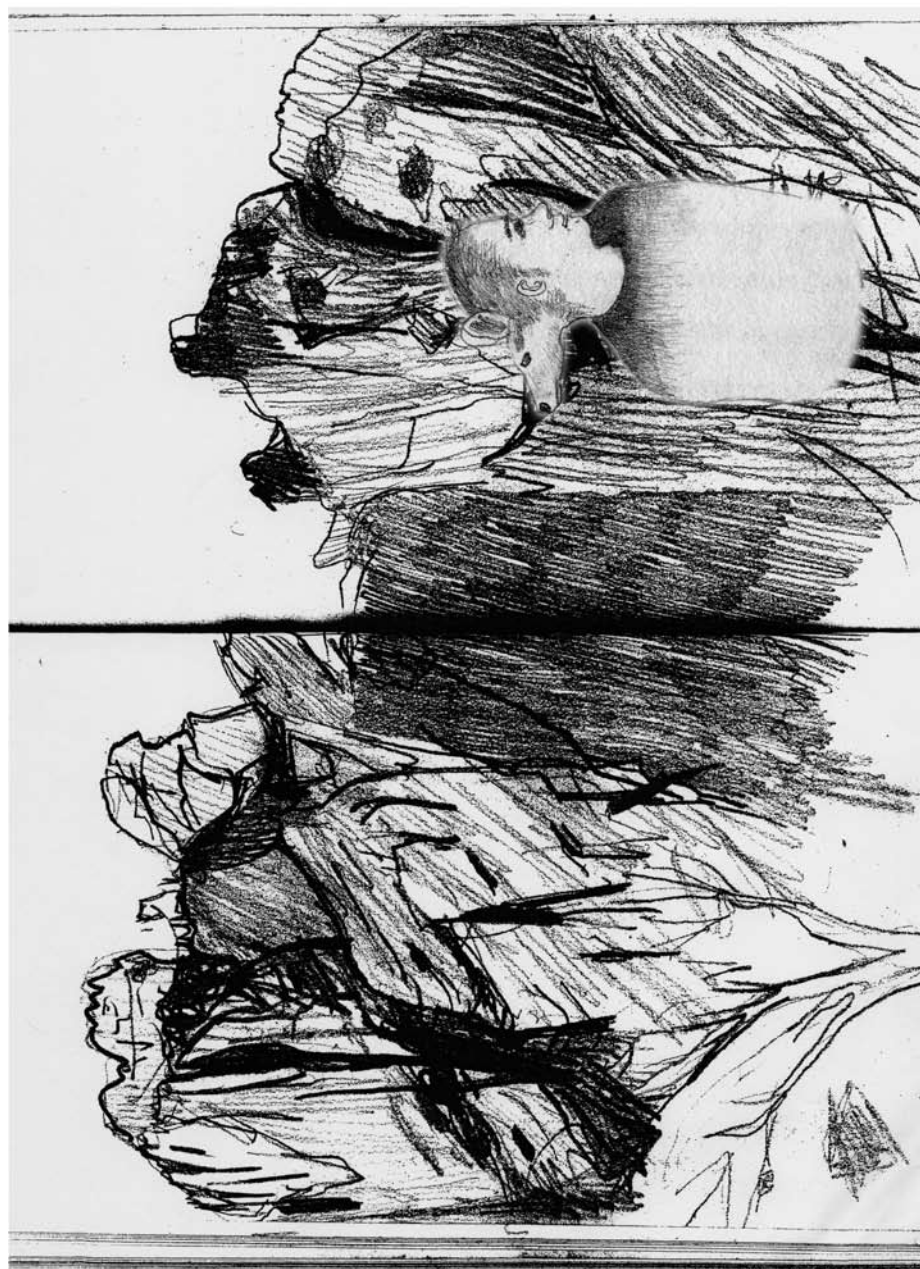


FIGURE 3. Images from sketchbooks, 2003.



FIGURE 4. Flood debris snagged on *Melaleuca argenta*, 2003.

What has been most fruitful has been a shift in my vision from wilderness to wildness. Paradoxically, wildness is the ability to act in a world where nature is contested (when we so often feel powerless) because it is both close to us by being inside us and where our rubbish goes; and also far away from us, because it is the bit of nature which is itself

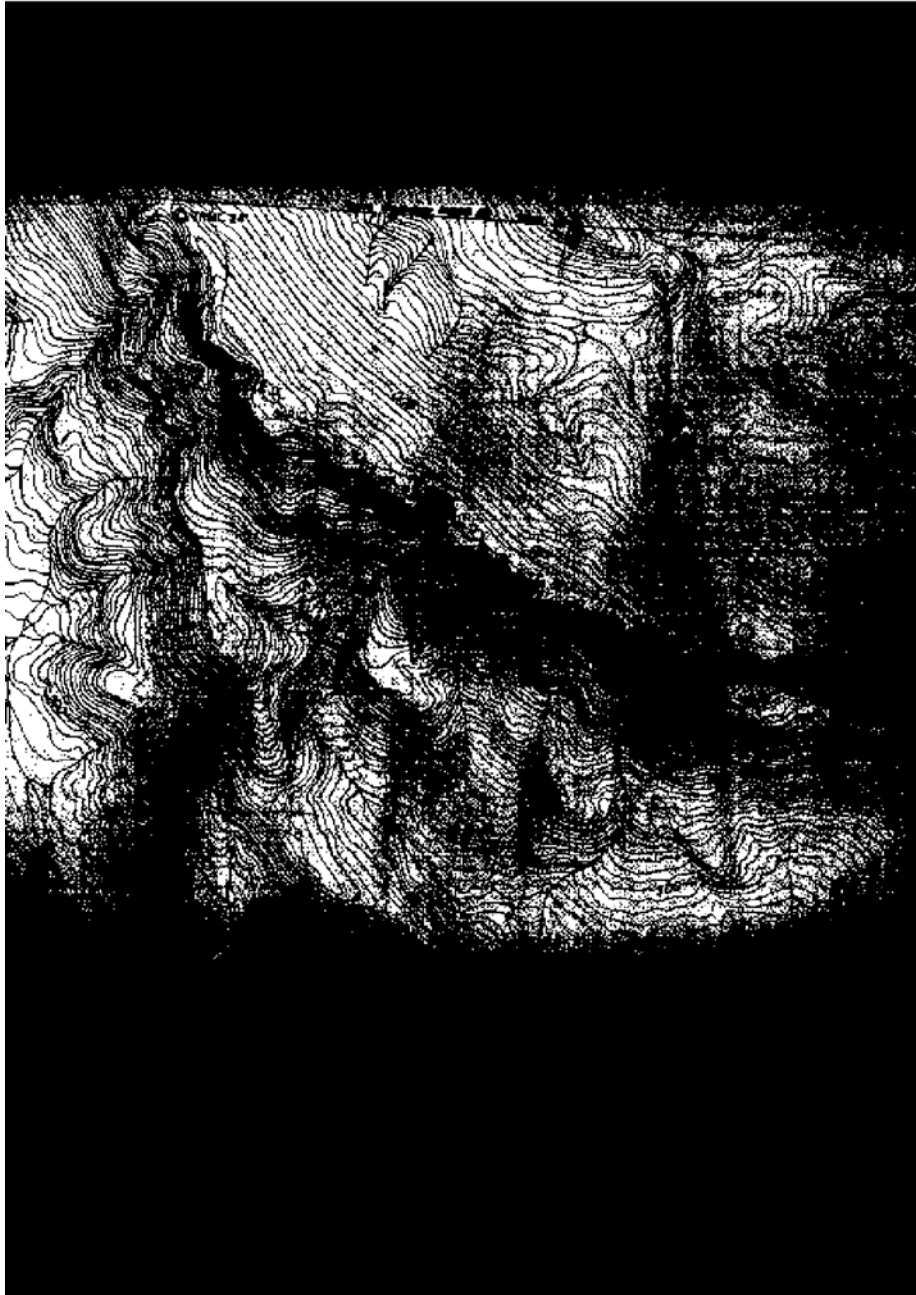


FIGURE 5. Facemap, 2003.

autonomous, and which, first and foremost acts for itself independently. If we want wilderness areas, then as much as anything we should use them to help us identify otherness close by. The concept of wildness is part of the continuing dynamic tension between nature and culture as embodied in the *FutureNatural* of Robertson *et al.* (1996). The latter term includes an acknowledgement of the ways in which nature is constructed, reconstructed and reproduction; of its often troublesome normative aspect; and of a consideration of the impact of new and future technologies on 'nature'.

The non-urban still has the advantage of the otherness of nature being so close that you cannot ignore it.

The striking power of the wild is that wonder in the face of it requires no act of will, but forces itself upon us—as an expression of the nonhuman world experienced through the lens of our cultural history—as proof ours is not the only presence in the universe. (Cronon 1995, p. 88) (see Figure 4)

The challenge will be in bringing it all back home.

Walking is essential to *fieldwork/field walking* because it is a spatial practice and a bodily practice. It engages with more than just the eye. The field site will be re-corporalised by walking. Walking is pivotal to the project because on the one hand it is personal, physical, everyday, and immediate; and on the other it is technologically simple, autonomous and at an increasing distance from the contemporary trajectory of high modernism. These characteristics see it being increasingly left out of the future modern as simulations and cyborgs become the norm. These tensions provide impetus to re-examine walking as an art practice: it connects the field to the urban, the body to spaces, and the wild to the everyday.

A final challenge in the project is not falling into the trap of producing an 'academic art', where theory overtakes the aesthetic experience of the work. The aim as an artist is always to create interesting art from interesting situations (see Figure 5). Perhaps there is an advantage to being able to pick and choose what is useful or inspiring from the physical and the theoretical landscape. The question to ask is, will what this project does help or interest cultural geography? To be able to answer this, lines of dialogue must be opened and discussion must begin.

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NOTE

- [1] A fuller version of this text and further developments can be found at <http://www.perditaphillips.com>

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