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Old Space and New Place: The Pilbara [1]

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Abstract: This paper examines how spatial concepts of a region change over time and focuses on the Pilbara region in Western Australia as an example. Spatial concepts of 'old space' and 'new place' are employed to demonstrate how space gets re-written in the course of time. Re-writing of spatial concepts implies ontological shifts. By juxtaposing 'old space' and 'new place' concepts, questions of cultural values, the meaning of place – and of a region's identity – can be explored. In the Pilbara region a specific cultural clash of Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions and use of space is evident. This paper theorises the culture and identity of the Pilbara region spatially. It employs the concept of spatiality that is one element in the 'trialectic model of being', as suggested by Henri Lefebvre, which consists of spatiality, historicality and sociality. Arguably, knowledge of 'old space' and 'new place' can enrich and inspire Australian culture, enhance cross-cultural understanding and break new ground in establishing a unique reconciliatory and conservation ethic.

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I. Old space and new place

The terms, 'old space' and 'new place' suggest, on the one hand, an oppositional element; on the other, they may be understood as progressive concepts. This progressive view allows for a discussion of the ways in which space is 're-written' – how 'old space' is produced as 'new place'.

The term 'space' originates from the Latin word *spatium,* referring to expanse, orbit, distance.[2] This attribute of dimension (which is less evident in the term 'place') is the reason for employing this term with respect to 'old spatial concepts' associated with the Pilbara region in Western Australia. The term 'place' in its most generalised definition implies an understanding of a specific location.

An understanding of place derived from post-structuralist theory and associated with the notion of identity conceives of place as *process*. Such a progressive concept reflects a variety of experiences of people living in a particular location, their relations to other places and – derived from those experiences – notions of identity. The geographer Doreen Massey regards places 'as the complex intersections and outcomes of power geometries that operate across many spatial scales from the body to the global. …, places are thus constituted of, and the outcome of, multiple, intersecting social, political and economic relations, giving rise to a myriad of spatialities'.[3]

David Harvey proposes a progressive understanding of the term space in his paper 'Space as a key word'.[4] His tripartite division suggests an understanding of space as absolute, relative and relational – or material, discursive and lived. He states:

> The relational view of space holds there is no such thing as space outside of the processes that define it. Processes do not occur *in* space but define their own spatial frame. The concept of space is embedded in or internal to process.

Harvey proposes further, that '[t]he question "what is space?' is [therefore] replaced by the question 'how is it that different human practices create and make use of different conceptualizations of space?"'. Hence the positioning of a subject in space allows for a discussion of identity in the context of spatial concepts.

The sociologist and philosopher Henry Lefebvre proposes an ontological model of human-environmental interaction which he terms the 'trialectics of being' that is composed of 'historicality', 'sociality' and 'spatiality' (summary terms for the social production of time, being/living and space).[5] The postmodern political geographer Edward Soja further developed Lefebvre's ideas and emphasizes the progressive nature – the making of – history, society and geography. He writes: 'We are first and always

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[2] cf. *Stowasser* Dictionary

[3] Hubbard, Phil; Kitchin, Rob; Bartley, Brendan; Fuller, Duncan. *Thinking Geographically. Space, Theory and Contemporary Human Geography,* New York, London: Continuum, 2002, 17.

[4] Paper for Marx and Philosophy Conference. Institute of Education. Draft Version only. London. 29 May 2004. <www.marxandphilosophy.org.uk/harvey2004.doc> Accessed 2 July 2008.

[5] Cf. Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith. Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishing, 1991. [*la production de l'espace,* 1981].

historical-social-spatial beings, actively participating individually and collectively in the construction/production – the "becoming" – of histories, geographies, societies'.[6] Soja especially advocates the notion of spatiality as a crucial third dimension in an ontological discussion besides historicality and sociality.

The way in which people interact with an environment and, in turn, the way in which the environment impacts on people's lives raises questions about the meaning of a place, space and spatial practises. The human geographer Tim Creswell states:

> Meaning is invoked in space through the practice of people who act according to their interpretations of space, which, in turn, gives their actions meaning. This is a fluid process that changes over time. Any given set of interpretations of space can be and have been overthrown historically.[7]

Creswell further raises the question: 'How do places (and actions in them) get the meanings they do (…)?'[8]

Using these questions as a directive, I will look into ways in which productions of 'old space' get overthrown – how space gets re-written over time and transitions to a 'new place'. Re-writing spatial concepts implies particular ontological shifts. I will look into the ways in which the Pilbara region assumes different meaning for different people in the past and in the present.

II. The Pilbara: Old Space

The Pilbara region (Figure 1) comprises an area of about 505,000 km² with a population of circa 46,000 people.[9] It is located about 1,600 kilometres north of Perth. Until land explorations by Francis Thomas Gregory in 1861 the Pilbara was basically '*terra incognita'* to non-Indigenous Australians.[10] Even today, the Pilbara region is referred to as an area 'still not opened up.'

Geologically, the Pilbara represents an 'old space' as it is the earth's oldest land mass. The Pilbara region is an ancient seabed over 2.5 billion years old. It hosts some of the oldest forms of simple microbial life that formed stromatolites and date back about 3.5 billion years. The world's oldest evidence of meteorite impacts (3460 to 2490 million years ago) can also be found in the Pilbara.

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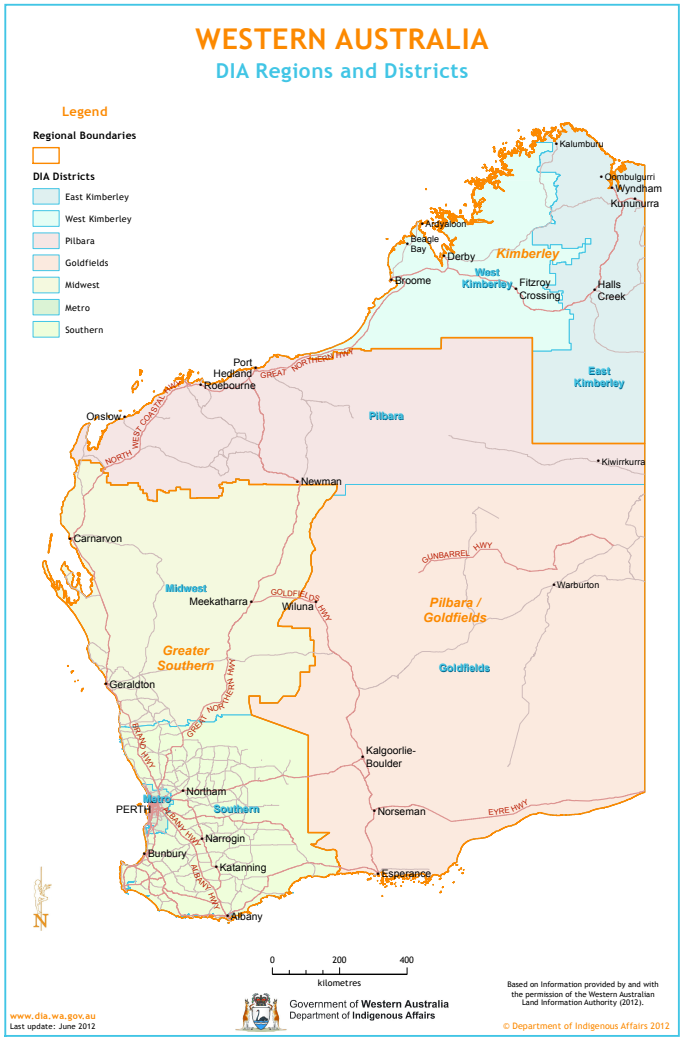
[6] Soja, Edward. *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*. Oxford, UK and Cambridge, Massachusetts: Blackwell Publishers, 1996, 73.
[7] *In Place/Out of Place. Geography, Ideology, and Transgression*. Minneapolis, London, University of Minnesota Press, 1996, 17.
[8] ibid., 61.
[9] Estimated resident population in 2008. Cf. 'Spotlight on the Pilbara', Australian Bureau of Statistics, http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/1367.5Feature%20Article1Sep%202009?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=1367.5&issue=Sep%202009&num=&view=. Accessed 7 October 2012.
[10] Seddon, George. 'Perceiving the Pilbara: Finding the Key to the Country.' *SAGE Publications*, Thesis Eleven. Vol. 65.1 (2001): 78.

Figure 1: Department of Indigenous Affairs regions in Western Australia (Department of Indigenous Affairs, 2012; www.dia.wa.gov.au)



Geographically, three distinct formations prevail: the vast coastal plain, inland ranges and an arid desert region extending inland towards the Northern Territory border. A number of gorges and the highest mountains of Western Australia, Mount Bruce (*Bunurrunna*, 1235m) and Mount Meharry (*Wirlbiwirlbi*, 1251 m) are located in the Pilbara. The most distinctive topographical features are gabbro and granophyre boulder piles of an orange to deep purple colour, spinifex grasslands (*Triodia*), snappy gums (*Eucalyptus leucophloia*) and river red gums (*Eucalyptus camaldulensis*). There is a diversity of aquatic and terrestrial habitats which in turn produce a diversity of flora and fauna. There are 1,730 described plant species, of which 150 so far have been identified as endemic to the Pilbara (estimated number of endemic species 250).[11]

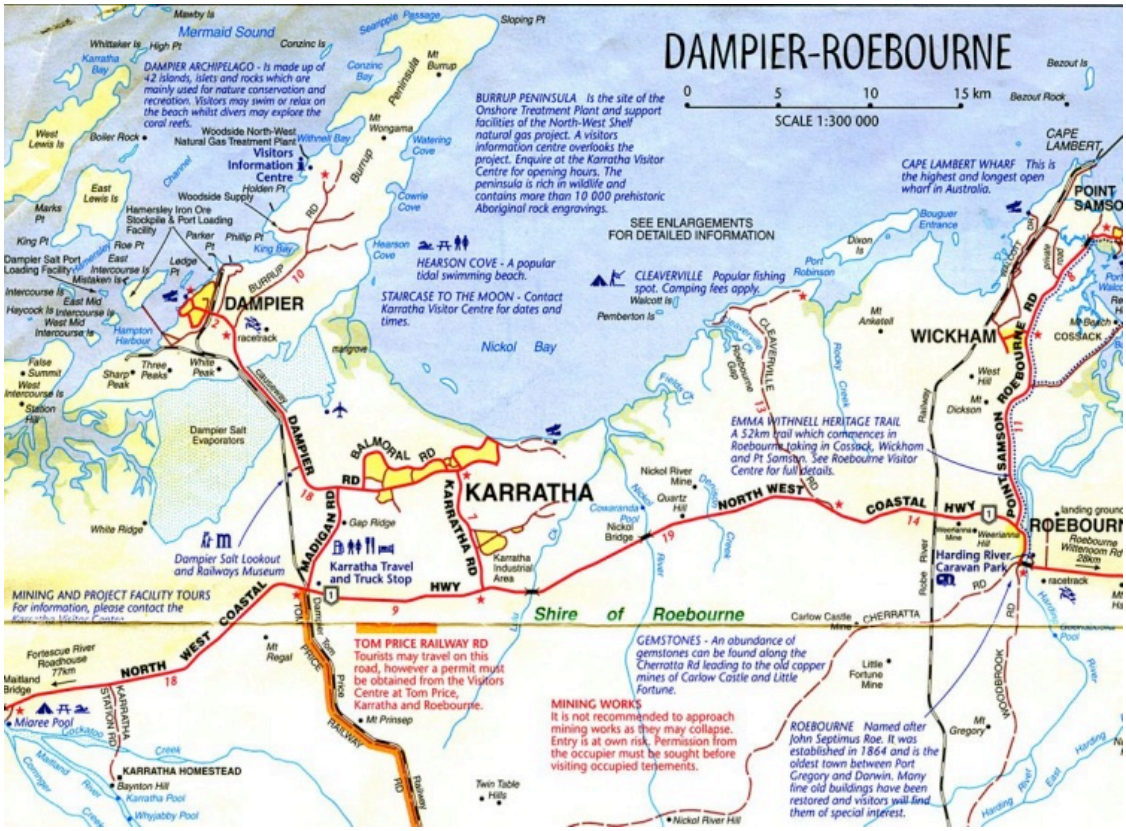
Culturally, the Pilbara contains some of the most prolific Aboriginal rock engravings on the Burrup Peninsula (Figure 2), once known as Dampier Island and before as *Murujuga* to the *Yaburrara* people, which means 'hip bone sticking out'.

[11] Burbidge, Allan, et al. 'Between Rock and a Hard Place: Rich Biological Patterns Amongst Ancient Red Rocks.' *Landscope*. Pilbara Special. Vol 21.3 (2006): 14.

The peninsula is part of a ridge of Archaean igneous rocks (formed between 2.5 and 3.6 billion years ago). The basement rocks here are distinct from surrounding basaltic units, which have weathered to 'rockpiles', a characteristic feature of the Pilbara. The carvings on the Burrup portray a wide range of subjects, for instance, of natural resources, such as marine animals (e.g. fish, turtle, dugong), birds, and land animals, but also abstract patterns and geometric shapes (Figure 3). The Burrup is a spiritual site for the *Yaburrara* people and for other groups attracted to the site due to its ceremonial and spiritual importance. In 1868 many *Yaburrara* people were killed in a sequence of raids known as the Flying Foam Massacre.

The Pilbara's geology, topographical formation and evidence of Aboriginal occupation and land use identify the Pilbara as 'old space'.

Figure 2: Map of the Northwest of Western Australia showing the Burrup Peninsula (StreetSmart Touring maps, Pilbara, Western Australia, Third Edition, 2005; reproduced by permission of the Western Australian Land Information Authority, CL06-2013).



III. The Pilbara: New Place

In more recent history, the Pilbara has been constructed as a 'new place'. The Pilbara has represented wealth – actually and symbolically – since the 1940s, due to the growth of the wool industry. In the 1950s prosperity was derived from gold, tin, and columbite. Iron ore was discovered by Lang Hancock in the 1960s. Goldsworthy Mining was the first company and mining town (Goldsworthy) set up in the Pilbara. The name is indicative of the Pilbara's new identity. Successively solar salt fields were set up and offshore natural gas was found in 1971 which led to the establishment of the North West Shelf Project in the 1980s, owned by Woodside Energy Ltd, which exports LNG and LPG and is Australia's biggest energy resource development (Figure 4). Most recently (in 2010), an algae plant has been set up near Karratha to produce clean biofuel. Circa 90% of Australia's iron ore, 85% of Australia's LNG and 80% of Australia's crude oil and condensate are produced in the Pilbara.[12] The Dampier port is the busiest in Australia, distributing millions of tons of iron ore around the world.

Figure 3: 'Rockpiles' with petroglyphs on the Burrup Peninsula (photographs by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

[12] 'Presentation: Future Development of the Pilbara August 2012.' http://www.pdc.wa.gov.au/publications. Accessed 22 September 2012.

Figure 4: Woodside North West Shelf Gas Venture on the Burrup Peninsula (left) and stockpiles of iron ore and salt on the Burrup Peninsula and on an offshore island (right) (photographs by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

There are slogans assigned to the Pilbara, such as 'sun, sea and salt'[13] or 'supplying the world, growing the Pilbara'.[14] They draw on its physical geography and highlight resources, actual and potential, as a key feature of the Pilbara. Current media headlines stress the role of the Pilbara as a 'powerhouse' that prevents Australia from sliding into a recession. The functional role of the Pilbara as a 'new place' is further stressed by references to the region as the 'engine room' of Australia, which 'drives' the country economically. The German term *Inwertsetzung* which is frequently used in geosciences in the context of capitalizing on nature's resources implies a sense of value derived from human gain and illustrates a 'new place' association even further. In an article entitled 'Culture Clash', the northern correspondent of *The Australian*, Nicolas Rothwell, states: 'What was once an austere wilderness rich in ceremonial sites is now an industrial zone, dissected and divided, reshaped and tamed'.[15]

The Burrup Peninsula is a particular example of an area where the tension between 'old space' and 'new place' is played out – where 'old space' is overwritten as 'new place'. It is an example where a clash of values, meaning and significance of this space occurs, in particular between Indigenous and non-Indigenous 'users' of that space.

IV. The Burrup Peninsula

On the Burrup Peninsula some rock carvings located in the vicinity of a pool of water more or less adjacent to the Woodside gas plant (Figure 5) date back about 25,000 years. These petroglyphs can be read as a palimpsest, not in terms of superimposed texts, but rather as references to times past, to cultural practices and to the surrounding landscape. President of the Australian Rock Art Research Association and leading archeological specialist on the Burrup carvings, Ken Mulvaney, points out the Burrup's

[13] Joynson, T., 'Power of the Pilbara—Sun, Sea and Salt.' *The West Australian*, 19 February 2003, 18.
[14] 'Power of the Pilbara.' *The West Australian*, Editorial series. 19 February 2003. Author unknown, 19.
[15] Rothwell, Nicolas, 'Culture Clash', *The Australian*, 14 March 2009. http://www.theaustralian.com.au/news/culture-clash/story-e6frg8ox-1111119087923. Accessed 20 October 2012.

significance in terms of 'old space'. He states: 'Here we can look at cultures through time, a vast body of art from the whole landscape'.[16]

However, the petroglyphs face major threats, such as pollution – acidic emissions from the Burrup industrial plants – and vandalism. Nicolas Rothwell elaborates on the material and ideological nature of threat to this area:

> This threat stems from the peculiar atmospherics of the area, which is best seen not as a variegated stretch of country but as a single monument, a collective human creation, the work of thousands of hands through hundreds of generations. The peninsula, from this perspective, is more than just a carved record of humanity's social revolution in the remote northwest, or an index of shifts and sequences in engraving styles, or changes in climate and fauna down the millennia. Rather, its artworks are a kind of extended, disseminated commentary on and completion of the surrounding environment, a sculpted and religious space without obvious parallel or equal anywhere on earth, and this total artworks suffers when any part of it is compromised or changed.[17]

Figure 5: Location of spring and rock art in relation to Woodside plant (photograph by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

Rothwell and Mulvaney both stress the meaning of the site in relation to the surrounding environment. A lack of understanding of such an interconnectedness of individual sites in the landscape poses a threat – and potentially completely destroys – a unique space.

[16] ibid.
[17] ibid.

A case in point took place in the 1980s when the Western Australian Museum relocated approximately 1800 engraved or carved boulders. Although the cultural heritage value of the Burrup Peninsula is referred to as a 'gallery' of petroglyphs and its art value is thus acknowledged, a majority of non-Indigenous people seem to be unable to see a significance of the rock art beyond its isolated artistic and 'historical value'. Neither is the site itself signposted[18] – let alone protected – nor is there an on-ground management presence. Merely a small sign identifying the place as an Aboriginal site has been put up at the start of an access path (Figure 6).

The proposal to have the Dampier precinct included in the National Heritage List sparked a debate about the 'use' of the Burrup Peninsula site. On the one hand, there is the concern for Australia's economic future, on the other, a concern for the conservation of the unique ancient rock art. In July 2007 the Dampier Archipelago was included in the National Heritage List, but it is unlikely that it will be World Heritage listed. National heritage listing does not provide overall protection of the site. The leased area for the Woodside LNG plant is excluded from heritage protection. As it happens Woodside has plans to relocate more petroglyphs.[19]

Figure 6: Signage indicating rock art on the Burrup Peninsula (photograph by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

'The Burrup debate' demonstrates the ways in which a lack of understanding and consequently appreciation affects preservation of Indigenous cultural practices and places of significance. The Burrup Peninsula, an 'ancient place of worship', is 'overwritten' by new 'places of worship', such as mine sites and industrial plants. A filmic example is

[18] Site visit in 2006.
[19] Weber, David, 'Govt announces heritage listing for Burrup Peninsula rock art,' 3 July 2007, PM on ABC Local Radio. http://www.abc.net.au/pm/content/2007/s1969048.htm. Accessed 22 September 2012.

Japanese Story[20], shot in the Pilbara, where the male protagonist, a Japanese businessman, looks at an iron ore excavation site and compares it to a Mayan Temple (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Photo of iron ore mine site (photograph by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

The urban designs of towns in the Pilbara are a further example of the ways in which 'old space' is overwritten as a 'new place'.

V. Pilbara Towns

Towns in the Pilbara, built in the 1960s and 1970s, are very young, both in their demographics and history. Pilbara towns' 'new place' layout conforms to the grid structure, which the cultural geographer John A. Jakle describes as 'archetypal landscape':

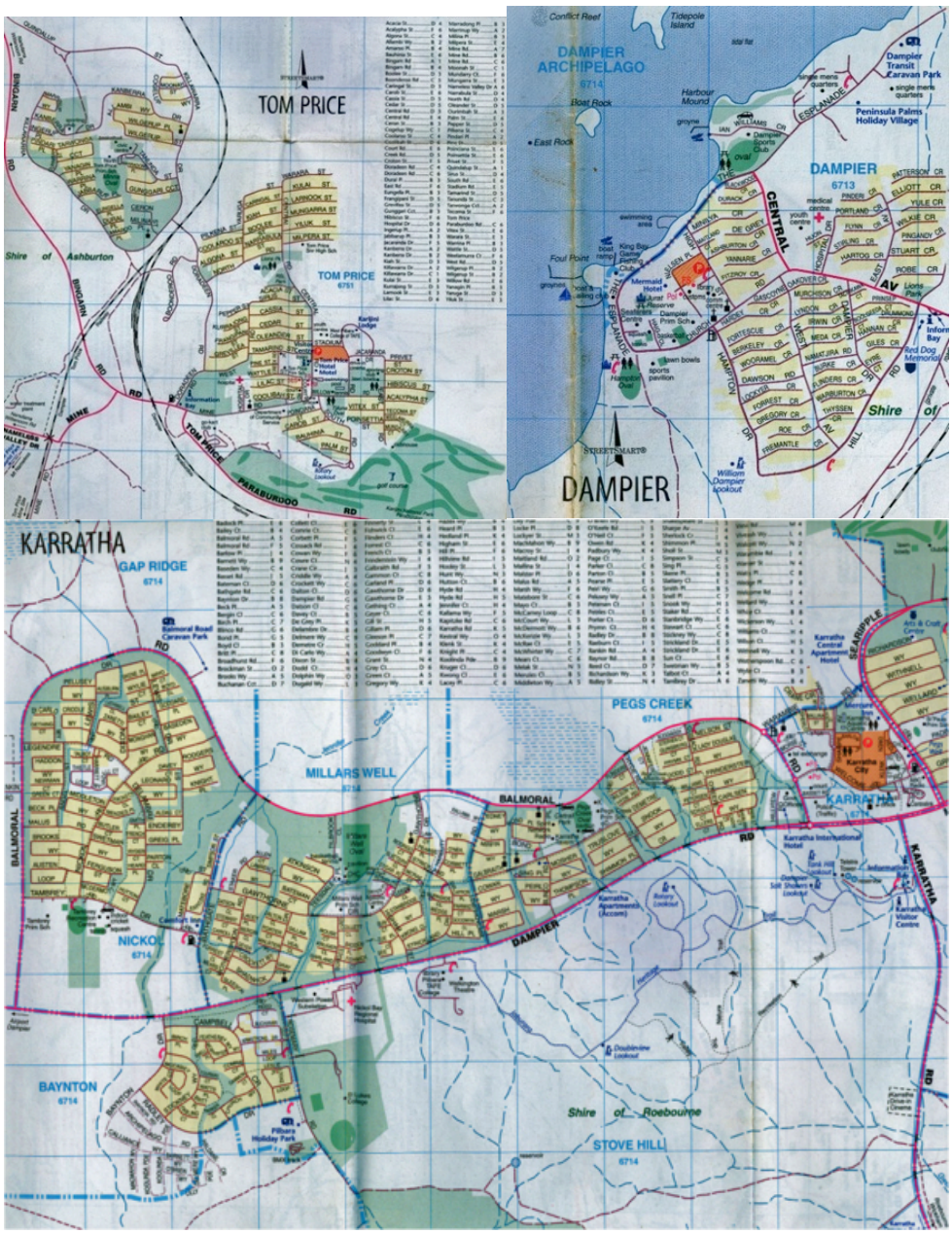
> It [the American city] is a carpentered world replete with straight lines, right angles, and rectangular objects. It is a world dominated by what Nairn calls 'axial formality' as streets stretch to horizons as straight lines. It is a world of axes meeting right angles, and the street grid so formed is everywhere dominant as an integrating mechanism easily conceptualized.[21]

Jakle's observations are in reference to the American city, but they also apply to Australian cities. Jakle refers to Bloomer and Moore who argued that the grid structure is both an authoritative system, as it is a geometric structure imposed on space, and democratic, because elements are interchangeable. It suggests spatial (and social) order.

[20] Dir. Sue Brooks. Fortissimo Films. 2003.
[21] *The Visual Elements of Landscape*. Amherst: U of Massachusetts P, 1987, 90.

However, urban structures like this are resonant with certain monotony, a characteristic that is often associated with the surrounding arid environment. A lack of variety in urban design and of a location-specific character prevails. Place experiences of Pilbara towns seem more or less exchangeable (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Town maps of Tom Price, Dampier and Karratha (StreetSmart Touring maps, Pilbara, Western Australia, Third Edition, 2005; reproduced by permission of the Western Australian Land Information Authority, CL06-2013).



The uniform design of towns in the Pilbara foregrounds functionality – which in turn constitutes a town's (lack of) identity – such as Newman, Karratha, or South Hedland, where the shopping centre is the hub of the town. The urban grid structure forms a contrast to the 'old space' organic pattern of Indigenous Dreaming pathways criss-

crossing the landscape. The materiality of 'new place' versus 'old space' illustrates the divide between imposing a structure and reading a structure of the land. A geologist working with the Department of Environment and Conservation in Karratha criticised the town in terms of its realisation. Karratha has been built in a coastal cyclone flood plain potentially subject to hazards. The town's layout is inconvenient for its population as it is located in between industrial areas thus industrial traffic is constantly running through the town. Karratha is stretched out, which means that people are dependent on a car to fulfil their daily needs.[22] Somewhat ironically, the Aboriginal word 'Karratha' means 'good country'.

VI. Memorials

A frequent feature in urban, non-urban and industrial spaces in the Pilbara are memorials in the form of plaques, cairns or sculptures. Memorials in the Pilbara are dedicated to a variety of causes, such as celebrating town settlements; e.g. Marble Bar Memorial to the Graves of Pilbara Pioneers, erected 13 July 1993, commemorating victims of war; e.g. in Port Hedland and Whim Creek (Figure 9), or adverting to accidents; e.g a sculpture at the Woodside gas plant commemorating workers who were killed in the process of building the plant (Figure 10). As much as memorials can be read as records of failure and hardships of settlement and economic enterprises in this region, it can also be argued that they serve to meet needs for a monumentalisation of achievements as part of the construction of a 'new place.'

Celebration of one aspect of history may well involve erasure of another: The majority of monuments in the Pilbara celebrate colonial and economic achievements and overlay embedded Indigenous history. In this way, colonial and economic enterprises dominate spatial discourse. Monuments displayed in (essentially) public spaces seem to construct the Pilbara as a place of struggle and success—the quintessential non-Indigenous association with desert space. Although Indigenous people constitute about 15%[23] of the Pilbara population, which is notably higher than the percentage for entire Western Australia (3.3%),[24]'monumentalised' events of Indigenous history or achievements and other forms of information on Indigenous history are not commensurate with these numbers. However, there are some examples, such as the memorial on the premises of the iron ore company Robe River in Point Samson, paying reference to traditional landownership (Figure 11).

Town planning, building, and the display of memorials are tangible ways in which the Pilbara as an 'old space' is reconstructed as a 'new place'. The Pilbara region is further reconstructed by 'new place' rhetoric that draws, for instance, on 'old space' rhetoric of the desert as an empty space.

[22] Pers. Comm. Karratha, 30 August 2006.
[23] 'Water and Indigenous People in the Pilbara.' http://www.csiro.au/Organisation-Structure/Flagships/Water-for-a-Healthy-Country-Flagship/Water-and-Indigenous-People-in-the-Pilbara.aspx. CSIRO study, published: September 2011. Accessed 6 October 2012.
[24] 'Population Structure.' http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/states-territories-home/wa/reviews/our-review/population-structure. Accessed 6 October 2012.

Figure 9: War memorial in Whim Creek[25] (photograph by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

Figure 10: Sculpture at Woodside gas plant[26] (photograph by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

[25] Three brothers from the local Aboriginal community are commemorated for their war service. They died in 1943 in the Papuan Campaign of World War II.

[26] Text on a plaque nearby: 'This sculpture serves as a reminder of those workers who lost their lives or were seriously injured on the NORTH WEST SHELF GAS PROJECT. In addition, the sculpture recognises the skills and experience of the workers from many nationalities whose input has achieved safety standards unparalleled in Australian construction history (A community arts project designed and constructed by the Burrup workforce with local artist, Jane Bailey).'

Figure 11: Memorial on Robe River premises recognising *Ngarluma* land ownership, Cape Lambert (photographs by Britta Kuhlenbeck).

VII. The Desert

The Pilbara is an arid to semi-arid region – in other words a desert – and arguably represents one of the 'two seemingly infinite geographical voids', the other being the ocean.[27] In critical cultural, literary, philosophical and historical studies, it is often claimed that the desert serves as a 'substitute for history' – meaning social history – in Australia. This attribute reinforces a construction of the desert as 'old space'.

Notably, the desert has been subject to diverse projections, some of which become apparent by looking at views of this space by European philosophers:

> As *terra incognita* the global deserts were a challenge to human knowledge to be explored ('conquered' for science), their secrets to be captured for the benefits of mankind. To the Rationalists their existence was an anathema, to be denied as irrational useless land. To the Evolutionists their existence was also a challenge – to be developed, to be made productive as part of the march of human progress. To the Romantics the austere landscapes were a source of spiritual experience and inspiration – from the desert the prophets came, and in the deserts mankind could slough off the impedimenta of civilisation and commune directly with God.[28]

As a side note, perhaps it is no coincidence that the liquefied natural gas project Woodside Energy is running on the Burrup Peninsula is named Pluto, the classical god of the underworld.

The desert connotes heat, drought, disorientation, death expressed in synonyms for the Australian interior such as 'the dead heart' and in locutions such as the 'terror of the

[27] Malouf, David. *Blood Relations*. Sydney: Currency, 1986, 16.
[28] R.L. Heathcote. 'Popular and Official Appraisals of Natural Resources: Some Evidence from Australia.' *Nature and Identity in Cross-Cultural Perspective.* Eds. Buttimer, Anne and Luke Wallin. The GeoJournal Library. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1999, 167.

void'. Andrew McCann (referring to Australian literary culture) argued that the prevailing experience of emptiness of the Australian interior is the 'toxic legacy of colonialism'.[29]

The colonialist myth of the 'empty land', which is drawn on for the Pilbara's construction as a 'new place', seems to be perpetuated in resource 'development'. The word development itself not only suggests that Pilbara space needs to be filled, but also legitimizes control – first and foremost in the form of economic control. For example, in the film *Women of the Iron Ore Frontier*,[30] about the discovery of iron ore in the North West, the voice-over asserts that 'mines bring houses to *once empty* areas'.

At the same time, and somewhat contradictorily, the Pilbara is still depicted as a wilderness in the sense of uncivilized and untamed space. For instance, in 2008 *The 7.30 Report* covered the first shipment of iron ore to China from Fortescue Metals. An interview with the CEO, Andrew Forrest, was introduced as follows: 'This is the Chichester Ranges in Western Australia's Pilbara. It's a wilderness being transformed into a mining metropolis'.[31]

Rhetorical examples as mentioned above suggest that the Pilbara as a 'new place' is brought to life through mining. Such rhetoric clearly defines the value, potential and identity of the Pilbara region in financial terms.

It could even be argued that the (new place) 'myth of an empty land' is created out of necessity. William Lines states in his book *Taming the Great South Land* that:

> The view of Australia as entirely fungible commodity, devoid of intrinsic beauty or worth, suited economic rationalists who advocated Australia's transformation into a sector of the international market. Australia thus became not a homeland, not a land loved, but a field of investment, the profitability of which increased in proportion to the continent's tethers to the rest of the world.[32]

Concurrent with the perception/construction of the Pilbara as an 'empty space', its potential and opportunities as a 'new place' are stressed – most prominently its potential in terms of mining – as mentioned. Secondly, its potential in terms of tourism is highlighted. For instance, both the chairman of the Pilbara Area Consultative Committee and the former president of the Karratha Tourist Bureau describe the Pilbara in similar terms, such as 'untouched and untapped' and as a country that 'creates opportunities'. The manager of the Karratha Visitor Centre is tapping into promoting 'seeing nothing'. 'Nothing is the biggest attraction', he said.[33] Both industries tourism and mining assign a commodified value to 'empty space'.

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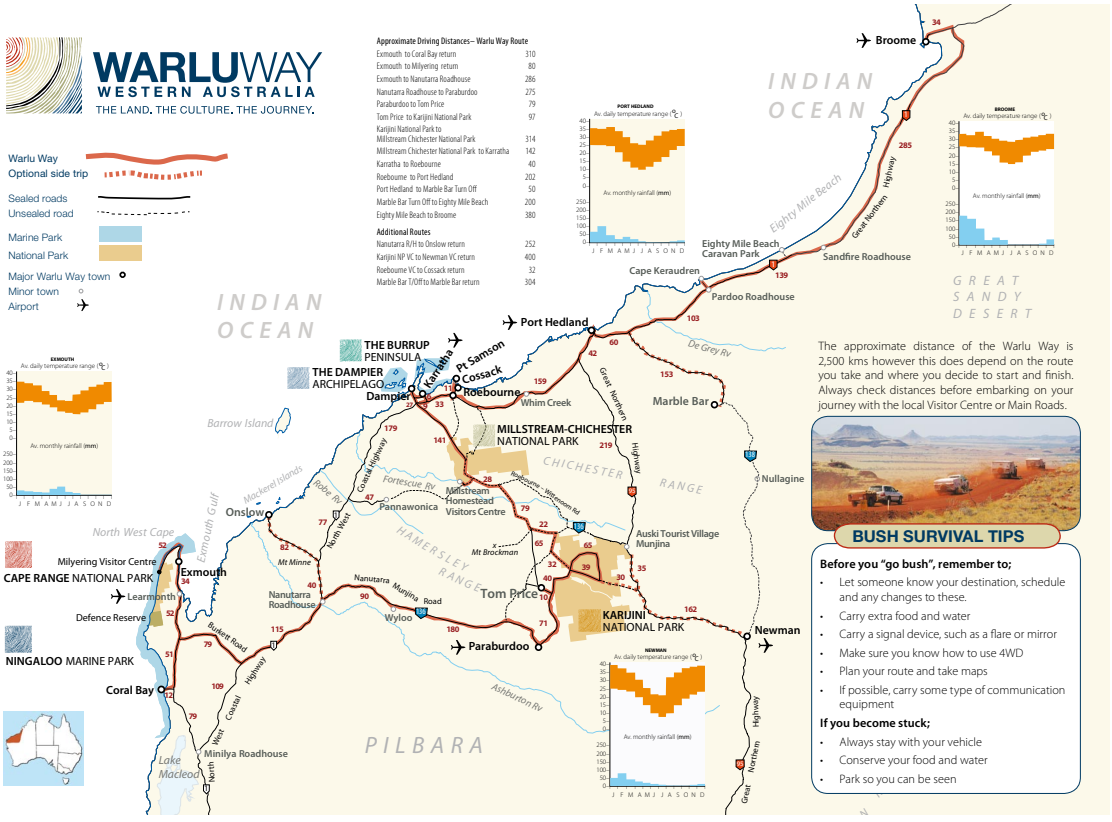
[29] Qtd. in McCredden, Lyn. 'Haunted Identities and the Possible Futures of "Aust. Lit."' *JASAL* 'Spectres, Screens, Shadows, Mirrors.' Special edition, 2007: 19.
[30] Dir. Lilias Fraser. Fraser Film and Video. 1990.
[31] Bain, Di. 'Mining Magnate Defies Critics,' 21 May 2008.
<http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2007/s2251864.htm>. Accessed 29 May 2008.
[32] North Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 1991, 267.
[33] Pers. Comm., Karratha, 23 August 2006.

Tapping further into the 'new place' rhetoric of 'colonial enterprises', the Western Australia tourism website advertises the Pilbara as an 'explorer's paradise' suggesting the Pilbara is one of the last frontiers. Such tourist advertising produces Pilbara space in a way that suggests an indebtedness to colonial history. It resorts to notions of 'authentic' Australian landscape experiences (such as rugged landscape, gorges, water-holes) that are tied in with a nationalist ideology of 'outback' Australia (in spite of being one of the most highly urbanised countries in the world). In tourism, a colonialist legacy is perpetuated, supporting notions of an empty space and of the unknown, as if it is a space that still needs to be 'discovered'. European explorers perceived the outback (including the Pilbara) as a wilderness: life threatening, disorientating, uninhabited. Today the outback has been turned into a setting for a wilderness adventure to enable tourists to re-enact early explorers' experiences—however a possible route of 'discovery' has already been mapped out. In fact, an exploration trail/cultural drive linking an Indigenous creation story and non-Indigenous sites of significance called 'W(h)arlu Way' has been developed (Figure 12).

Figure 12: Map of the Warlu Way in the North West of Western Australia (www.australiasnorthwest.com/Destinations/The_Pilbara/The_Warlu_Way/Warlu_Way_map).



It can be argued that so-called 'agents of blindness', a term coined by Roland Barthes, are operating when the desert is described as empty space. 'Agents of blindness' are constituted in tourist guides, travel advertising, ethnographies etc. and induce a sightlessness to non-Western realities. Barthes was mainly concerned with orientalist discourse and the way in which 'tropes of emptiness' allow for a discovery of new worlds

ignoring already existent forms of inhabitation. He argues that the search for a traditional exotic is a Western construction based on the desire for a space that is uncontaminated by modern culture.[34] Correspondingly, the rhetoric of the Pilbara as an empty space seems to operate as an agent of blindness not to the modern but to a prevailing Indigenous history and a diversity of flora, fauna (and food).

Joyce Inji, an *Yinhawangka* woman who lives in the Bellary Springs community near Tom Price, mentioned in an interview: 'We see things in our land that other people can't see, not just spiritual things, but the things that are inherent in our traditional way of life.'[35] Almost certainly many places – that would show evidence of Indigenous spatial practices and that serve as a visual record of the cultural heritage of the region's Indigenous population – are present, however they might not be immediately visible and perhaps difficult to access.

The rhetoric of the desert as an 'empty space' is challenged by the anthropologist Bob Tonkinson, who points out the richness of the desert environment in *Cleared Out* – an account of how 20 Aboriginal women and children in the Western Desert had been pursued by the Woomera Rocket Range patrol officers, *clearing* an area into which rockets were to be fired.

> Their homelands, as Martu describe them, conjure up visions of a Garden of Eden, having food in abundance, rather than an arid desert. …When they talk about country, you always get a very positive view of the resources that were there and how much of everything there was.[36]

With respect to a Post-*Mabo* consciousness an allegedly empty space becomes known as a land with a history[37] (of which rock paintings and petroglyphs are visual evidence). I would like to suggest that a previously ignored Indigenous presence – perceived as an absence – is now inextricably linked to Aboriginal identity and might thus be seen as a 'confession' of past racial and cultural blindness. Reading the country as desert (from *desertum* = abandoned, desolate) is indicative of the divide between non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australia. Chris Healy in discussing 'vernacular history', as a concept of marginalised, silenced 'invisible' history and the ways in which 'vernacular history' can 'speak' to describe the embeddedness of the past in the present suggests: 'To think of Aboriginality as a space of memory and the vernacular is to imagine the forgetting of dispossession as the spectre haunting Australian heritage'.[38]

In order for a broader cross-cultural understanding to occur, a largely silenced 'invisible' (spatial) history needs to be acknowledged. Chris Healy's account of the embeddedness of the past in the present is crucial not only to our understanding of the interconnectedness of past and present in the Indigenous belief system, but also as a way of acknowledging pre-contact history. One way of acknowledging Indigenous

[34] Barthes quoted in Barnes, Trevor J. and James S. Duncan, eds. *Writing Worlds: Discourse, Text and Metaphor in the Representation of Landscape*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992, 36.
[35] Pers. Comm., South Hedland, 10 August 2006.
[36] Davenport, Sue, Peter Johnson and Yuwali. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies P, 2005, 10.
[37] Collins, Felicity and Therese Davis. *Australian Cinema After Mabo*. Cambridge UP, 2004, 76.
[38] *Forgetting Aborigines*. Sydney: UNSW P, 2008, 131.

history and values of 'old space' would be through the introduction of Indigenous place names.

VIII. Naming

A consistent use of Indigenous place names, would cast a different linguistic net, and thus create a different history, a different sense of identity and a different 'new place' or (even) restore 'old space'; for example within Aboriginal culture, Port Hedland is called *Marrapikurrinya*, Roebourne is called *Yirramugadu*, Marble Bar is called *Pipanya*, Mt Nameless is called *Jarndunmunha*, Mt Whaleback is called *Bambajinha*, Mt Bruce is *Bunurrunna*, Mount Meharry is called *Minjiyanha* (*Wirlbiwirlbi*), the Fortescue River is called *Martuthuni*, the Robe River is called *Jajiwurra*, the Harding River is called *Ngurin*, Hamersley Gorge is called *Minhthukundi*, Joffre Gorge is called *Jijinbunha*, Fortescue Falls are called *Jubula* (names based on *Punjima* language). These names not only convey meaning and values of such places, which demand respect – and recognition, but also undermine claims for 'discovery' and ownership by colonial Australia.

In Indigenous terms, space is considered in different divisions. One section of the Ashburton River, for example, is called *Bilyabilyanku*, another part is called *Kabawarra*. Different names are assigned, not only because they refer to different places, but because they embody a different 'story'. Names used by non-Indigenous people for the North West such as Nichol Bay, The North District, De Witt's Land, suggest a demarcation of an entity rather than individual places. Such choices of names reveal a tendency towards generic concepts of space, which is in line with the practice of the generalised landform classification of the desert. The tendency to generalize space—rather than specify places—further reveals ignorance not only of Indigenous presence but also of the diversity, complexity and accuracy of place names which was relevant (and arguably still is) for survival and orientation on the land.

IX. Conclusion

A process of ongoing reflection on 'old spaces' and 'new places' enhances our understanding of differing cultural values. 'Old space' in the Pilbara is the product of ancient geology and culture. 'New place' is defined by economic opportunities and notions of achievement and struggle. The focus of the early settler seemed to be on creating a 'new life' by erroneously assuming the country existed as *terra nullius* (land that belongs to no one or that is not owned or governed by anyone): 'Australia was seen as a spacious land with the potential to avoid problems of the "old world". It was the space of projection of a so-called "New World"'.[39] John O'Carroll rightly noted that a 'New World' claim is utopian: '"New World" is a name for the total avoidance of history, responsibility, and knowledge.'[40]

[39] Hoskins, Ian. 'Constructing Time and Space in the Garden Suburb.' *Beasts of Suburbia: Reinterpreting Cultures in Australian Suburbs*. Eds. H. Ferber, C. Healy, and C. McAuliffe. Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne UP, 1994, 4.
[40] ibid., 4.

However, 'new place' can be constructed as a visionary concept without 'total avoidance of history, responsibility, and knowledge': In an article entitled 'The Pilbara Identity', Paul McGillick writes that the Pilbara could be imagined as a 'new place' due to its large migrant population and a diversity of cultural attitudes. McGillick further suggests *seeing* the region as environmentally and culturally unique, which will form the basis for a distinct regional identity, rather than 'endure it, exploit it and then get out'.[41] As McGillick argues the construction of the Pilbara as a 'new place' contains the potential to 're-write' the region's identity by acknowledging the cultural and environmental uniqueness of the Pilbara – derived from 'old space' qualities – that have been neglected or deliberately 'silenced' in recent history. With the Pilbara – as an example – Australia could break new ground in establishing a unique reconciliatory and conservation ethic and lead the way in global ecological debates. In order to achieve this objective an affective and cognitive effort is needed in terms of 'a *shared spatial consciousness* that provides the primary foundation for solidarity and political praxis'.[42] Ken Mulvaney in the article 'Culture Clash' raises the following question:

> Somehow, as a nation, we seem to value heritage, but not Pilbara heritage. Why? Is it because the Pilbara has always been seen by us just as an industrial hub and we only come here for exploitation: gas, metals, mining? People simply don't find this a beautiful environment, filled with valuable, history-rich sites. We don't know enough about its wonders; we don't get emotional about this little parcel of land stuck on the far edge of the continent'.[43] In the same article, the author Nicolas Rothwell further asks a question that taps into the 'old space - new place tension': 'What is the Burrup's rightful place in today's Australia? Is it a quarry or a sacred site and are the two things that different in our thoughts?[44]

Indigenous culture constitutes a unique aspect of space in the Pilbara. Previously silenced Indigenous voices 'become empowered' as the notion of spatiality is given greater emphasis in a process of 'rebalance[ing] the ontological foundations of knowledge formation'.[45] Soja's theorizing of notions of being first and foremost spatially (and secondly historically and socially) provide a valuable starting point for Indigenous culture to 'speak' of spatial values, which form the nucleus of their culture.

With an emphasis on theorizing the culture and identity of a region *spatially*, the Pilbara example suggests that all countries with a colonial history need to work through re-writing processes of space (and history) as part of a maturing process of cultural identity. Even if the Pilbara desert is seen as a void, Ihab Hassan, for instance, suggests that there is generative power in the void – a promise of renewal. He quotes from David

[41] McGillick, Paul. 'The Pilbara Identity.' *Form Magazine*. February (2006): 28.
[42] Soja, Edward. 'Thirdspace: Expanding the Scope of the Geographical Imagination.' *Human Geography Today*. Eds. Doreen Massey, John Allen, and Philip Sarre. Cambridge, UK: Polity P, 1999, 277.
[43] Qtd. in Rothwell, Nicolas, 'Culture Clash', op.cit.
[44] ibid.
[45] Soja, Edward, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places*, op.cit., 81.

Malouf's *Imaginary Life*: 'Here the immensity, the emptiness, feeds the spirit, and leaves it with no hunger for anything but more space, more light …'[46]

Coda

In a very recent development – on 17 January 2013 – the State Government of Western Australia announced that part of the Burrup Peninsula will be declared a National Park. The Murujuga National Park on the Burrup will be jointly managed by the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation and the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC). Joint Management has become possible due to a change in the Conservation and Land Management Act last year. The Murujuga National Park will be the first National Park that will be owned and managed by the Traditional Owners of the region. The Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation will lease the park back to the State Government and on-the-ground-management activities will be acted out by DEC under the leadership of the Traditional Owners. The Murujuga National Park (although it only covers about 44% of the Burrup Peninsula – the rest of the area is still potentially subject to further industrial development) can be read as the common ground between 'old space' and 'new place': a coming together of traditional oppositions and optimistically, a pointer to future shared developments.

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