

Incidents (of Travel)

Episode No. 7 Hobart, Tasmania April 2, 2018

Itinerary by Lucy Bleach

I moved to Tasmania from Sydney in 1999 with a young family and anything we could fit into our Toyota Corolla station wagon. We unfurled and grew here, and my developing artistic practice became deeply affected by the proximity of intimate daily life to an elemental, tectonic and at times opaque land.

For me Hobart affords a sense of potentiality, it remains unencumbered by an anxiety to be defined or aligned (as expressed by big cities), and embraces being on the periphery, whilst seeking to connect, often with other peripheral places, in authentic ways.

Incidents (of Travel) presented an opportunity to calibrate, in unassuming ways, a series of sites that are typically not noticed, not visited or not known within Hobart's suburbs and outskirts. Yet they are all significant for the way they connect us to geologic time, the Earth's vibration and deep space. Interlaced into the itinerary are selected locations where I have produced artworks that have been directly or indirectly triggered by these unassuming sites of significance.

Traveling with Camila is like foraging for truffles – foraging through each site's material, foraging through thoughts, facts and poetics, foraging through contexts and associations. I first met Camila when she visited Hobart in 2015. That brief time was filled with fungi-like conversations: nutrient rich, and symbiotic with locations, people and ways of thinking. We continue our friendship, discussions and creative experiences, and it feels like such a natural extension of our ongoing dialogue that we embarked on *Incidents (of Travel)* together in this special place.

1. Tephra outcrop. Margate.

Having finally found a coffee for the road (as our day out will be Easter Monday everywhere will be packed), we will drive south out of Hobart, on the Channel Hwy. The Channel Hwy snakes along the estuarine waters of the Derwent River and D'Entrecasteaux Channel, named after the French explorer Bruni D'Entrecasteaux, who sailed up the channel in 1792. We will head for a town called Margate, 15km south of Hobart. As we approach the township, we'll turn off into a small dirt road, obscured by a lumpy landmass. The landmass is a tephra outcrop, an exposed volcanic feature on the side of the highway. This outcrop was designated a geological feature and officially opened by the Minister for Tourism in February 1973. It is marked by a now faded sign indicating its geological significance, but with no accompanying interpretation.

I love this site because it is so nondescript, it's a messy conflation of outcrop, road, cars, houses – its specialness is quiet, hidden, but there for those who take time to notice it. It represents a time when the Earth was fluid, shape-shifting, volatile. It indexes a time long before us, and will exceed the contemporary surfaces and structures that obscure it.

2. Seismic Vault – Earth Sciences, University of Tasmania. Mt Nelson.

We will head back closer to town, to a suburb of Hobart called Mt Nelson, which, in 1811, became a key signal station using colonial semaphore technology until the establishment of Hobart's first telephone line in 1880.

Lines of sight. Lines of communication. Lines of vibration. Our travels won't take us to the top of the mountain, rather halfway up. We'll park the car and follow a dirt track that is bordered by bush and University of Tasmania Plant Science agricultural plots. We'll reach an odd piece of architecture, which is half buried in the hill – part concrete, bricks, mortar and steel. It's simultaneously familiar and arcane. This bunker was constructed in 1973 to house a range of University-owned seismic equipment that capture and record live seismic activity across Tasmania. The equipment's recorded data feeds into the Global Seismic Network.

This site excites me for its clandestine activity – literally underground movement is captured and housed in an anonymous, ambiguous structure and connected to the capillary-like systems of the world's vibrations.

3. Mt Pleasant Radio Observatory, Cambridge.

20km east of Hobart is the agricultural area Cambridge, where many vineyards, orchards and annual grain farms flourish. Nestled amongst vineyards, and up a long dirt road is the Mount Pleasant Radio Observatory, a radio astronomy based observatory owned and operated by University of Tasmania. It is home to three radio astronomy antennas, the 26-meter tall Mount Pleasant antenna, the 14-meter Vela Antenna and the 12-meter AuScope VLBI antenna.

These extraordinary structures stand in stark contrast to their rural backdrop, a kind of science fiction architecture that resemble massive steel ears attuning their hearing to space. Ongoing research into the Vela Pulsar, a pulsing neutron star 958.9 light years from Earth, is undertaken here. I am interested in other sounds, hypervelocities and cosmic journeys that might be heard, in particular those of passing meteor and comets that reflect sound waves as they come into proximity with the earth's atmosphere.

4. Kelly's Garden. Salamanca Art Centre.

Kelly's Garden is an outdoor public exhibition space managed by Salamanca Art Centre. The site evidences the remains of an old warehouse basement, built with diverse colonial materials including convict-hewn sandstone, convict-made bricks and more contemporary architectural layers. A strata of architectonic materials.

A long time ago when the site was derelict, I approached the art centre to use it as an open air studio, which I did for six months, carrying out a range of sculptural experiments. More recently I produced the work *Superslow* at this site, which involved building a version of a 19th-century domestic brick ice house with a white plastered interior and a rooftop sod crop. The structure housed a 1.2 meter cube ice block that melted slowly as it was retarded by the insulating qualities of the double-lined bricks and earth roof. As the ice slowly melted the crop slowly grew, presenting a form in dynamic flux where the only constant was the brick structure.

5. Domain House. The Queen's Domain, Hobart.

Domain House is a neo-Gothic sandstone landmark built in 1848-49 on the Queen's Domain, near Government House. It was originally the High School of Hobart Town, and then became a site for advanced education that housed the state's first art school. I have made a few works here that respond to the precarious state of the building, exploring

the poetics of collapse. *Homeopathy* (2013), tended to the house's disrepair, materials, architectural and cultural homeopathy, by introducing a concentrated dose of ruin as a way of reviving the site – as a location, as a cultural entity and as a home.

More recently, *Something More Solid* (2016) involved casting a full-size cello in a slab of toffee, thus rendering it mute, with only the crest of the strings breaching the toffee's surface. The A string's resonant frequency was activated by an electromagnet to create an enduring quiver, that was amplified. Over the course of the exhibition, the toffee shifted from a solid to liquid and the slow viscous flow gradually silenced the vibration.

6. Contemporary Art Tasmania (CAT).

Contemporary Art Tasmania is Tasmania's professional-level, public presentation platform dedicated to contemporary and experimental art. They provide incredible opportunities for Tasmanian artists by supporting diverse, energetic practice and connecting the community to contemporary international (and peripheral) discourses.

In 2015, I produced the work *Underground* as part of a CAT solo commission. The work presented a rammed wall containing two earthmover inner tubes, that were connected via hoses to an air compressor. The work sourced global seismic data from live web-based monitoring streams, as well as local 'vibrations' pertaining to human activity collected within the gallery administration and public spaces. The two streams of vibrational data were translated to electronic impulses, triggering the air compressor to release air and inflate the corresponding inner tube. Contingent on the intensity and duration of the local or global live seismic events, the inner tubes destabilized the form, triggering a process of destruction over the course of the exhibition.

7. Tarooma.

Tarooma is a suburb 7.5km south of Hobart located on the river estuary. I live here and swim throughout the year. This will be the last stop of our trip. Here Camila and I will go for a walk along the beach and cook dinner together at my house.