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New Media Ecology

Lynne Star

Hand's book is most absorbing when giving readers new ways of understanding aspects of everyday behaviour that do not divorce them from the known and the past, and also resist hard predictions as to futures or what is being 'caused'. For him, the camera is and always has been a 'relational device'. That is, 'a relay within broader networks or sociotechnical systems which mutually constitute its attributes, its meaning and the relative agency of the constitutive elements of photographic practice'.

Since the 1960s and 1970s, when lots of critiques of quasi-scientific phenomena emerged, we have used portmanteau words like 'technoculture', 'posthuman' or cyborg/body to

find ways to speak about technology—society—human interfaces. Now, 'technology' is not so much restricted to wires or microwaves as to ways humans invent, devise and perform those 'things' they believe in, the projects they have 'in mind'; and how they use those things to innovate. Hand goes beyond platitudes and uneasiness about 'rapid change' to show how these things have been simultaneously within our active interventions and also never fully in our control. 

book Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures

review by Preslava Nenova

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Vital Landscapes,
Indigenous Futures

Preslava Nenova

Preslava Nenova is an international development consultant specialising in political ecology of development at University College London and international relations at London School of Economics.

Jon Altman and Seán Kerins (eds), *People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures* (Sydney, The Federation Press, 2012)

People on Country: Vital Landscapes, Indigenous Futures reflects on the experiences of multiple actors over years of action, research and community-based natural and cultural resource management projects. Over 20 per cent of the Australian continent is held under forms of Indigenous title, where land owners can exercise leverage over environmental planning and management. The authors provide accessible and rich detail on the history, the current situation and the future of the Indigenous estate and its management, as well as the implications of this management for Indigenous development, biodiversity conservation and the resilience of the entire Australian people.

The evidence points to the need for a shift in fundamental policy assumptions away from theories of economic growth, individualism, private property management, market-driven development and top-down governance to what Altman describes as a hybrid economy model which would incorporate Indigenous economic valuations and heterodox measures of productivity and wellbeing. Contributors to the book converge on the need for stronger outstations, Aboriginal institutions and community-driven development and are in opposition to the political goals underlying the Closing the Gap framework and the Stronger Futures policy package, such as normalisation and re-colonisation. The book is a vital platform for the view-points of people on the ground, or *People on Country*, a *country* which they all are worried is becoming orphaned of its human family, due to current and foreseeable Indigenous policy.

Australian ecosystems have been managed for millennia by Indigenous people in a collective way. There has been a wide global acknowledgement of

the unique role of Indigenous and collective approaches in managing the most valuable and vulnerable ecosystems and habitats, and also the unique role of such habitats in sustaining the livelihoods and cultures of Indigenous populations. A sustainable national policy, integrating Indigenous development with environmental governance, would actively involve local and Indigenous institutions at every point of programming. Instead, the Caring for Our Country program goals and desired outcomes, as well as the indicators they are to be measured against, are all set by civil servants and policy makers in a top-down manner and feature repeated use of Closing the Gap and Stronger Futures idioms which are grounded in and perpetuate narratives of Indigenous institutional and cultural failure in advancing standard development goals.

A further obstacle to Indigenous participation in determining futures on country and collectively working towards resilience is the weakened capacity of some local and regional Indigenous institutions which have lost government support after recent policy change (The Intervention), and have been under continued pressure through the years due to poverty and regional marginalisation. The book discusses some cases of difficulties with collective governance on the Indigenous estate due to weakened community consensus and diverging visions for the future. Strengthening these institutions is vital for the sustenance of local Indigenous community governance.

The Australian territories held under forms of Indigenous title are mostly remote, amount to approximately 1.5 million km², providing vital ecosystem services to the entire continent and habitats to unique species. Pressures on these ecosystems are greater than ever with threats such as climate change, invasive species and uncontrolled wild fires. Such an expanse of

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territory cannot realistically be managed, as envisaged in current government policy, by approximately 700 rangers alone. The perspective from *People on Country* is that the hiring of individual rangers under the Working on Country program amounts to a partial, unsustainable, individualistic and labour-market based solution, which overlooks and marginalises traditional solutions of having people on country, whose livelihoods are co-dependent with the health of the ecosystems and who have technical knowledge and adaptable community institutions used in caring for these particular territories over millennia.

The book powerfully delivers the argument that knowledgeable and capable Indigenous rangers are not a stand-alone human resource to be co-opted into a state machine of Natural Resource Management, but rather these rangers are organically rooted in the homelands communities. Rangers have gained their embodied knowledge through personal experiences on country; their tacit knowledge has a history of inter-personal connections and relationships with their kin and is technical, operational and applied through their unique agency. Practical knowledge and skill in caring and being cared for by country constitute the Indigenous people's continuity with their past, with their people, with places in the landscape, and constitutes their sense of self. It seems one-sided and even exploitative to reify this skill, memory and kinship practice of caring for country into the category of a 'real job', that of a ranger, and pay individual Indigenous community members to carry it out as a very small minority, while others in the outstations have to choose between continuing to live outside the economy or are incentivised to abandon *country*, settle in larger towns and be mainstreamed into land-alienated jobs.

The communities and places which produce rangers need as much sustainable support as current rangers do through remuneration, or in the words of the Djelk rangers: 'How will we grow our young people up, knowing their country and being able to use our knowledge if we don't have a place for kids to live and grow on country?' It is no wonder that the government foresees ranger jobs will provide something to aspire to among Indigenous Australians—it suggests that only monetising the latter's own identity, memories and knowledge and selling it back to them in the form of a job is able to motivate them to compete against each other in a Western-style and individualistic competitive labour-market. Nonetheless, remote communities are entitled to monetary incomes, whether channelled through such employment schemes or other ways, and in that sense the ranger jobs are a positive though limited development, as contributors to the book agree. The authors point to the need to continue the debate on implications and the action on complementary alternative solutions.

Despite the unique role Indigenous Australians are having in building the resilience of the entire Australian people and arguably the world via ecosystem-based adaptation to climate change, currently much of this work is carried out informally and is not remunerated or resourced. Working collaboratively with a range of institutions, co-opting Western technical and scientific methods, ranger groups gather data on and monitor ecological indicators, control the spread of weeds and feral animals, collect polluting material such as ghost nets from the sea, report foreign fishing vessels, patrol habitat borders and sites of cultural significance. All these activities are inter-dependent, with the importance of customary harvest being particularly great for resilient communities and ecosystems, Indigenous health, nutrition, sustainable livelihoods, custom and culture. The authors draw attention to the politics of absence of support for this important practice.

Caring for Country started as a social movement with grassroots mobilisation of Indigenous people through community-based ranger groups, regional organisations and Indigenous land councils. It had the support of the Community Development Employment Projects and eventually also of non-governmental and conservation organisations. Local Indigenous organisations see financial independence as more achievable when different sources of funding are combined and are particularly encouraged by the possibilities of emissions trading markets. Funding through such markets has been accessed by regional Indigenous land management organisations such as the Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation, who prevented the emission of tonnes of carbon into the atmosphere by reducing the wildfire fuel load over vast territories using Indigenous technical knowledge and tracking their work spatially using modern GIS tracking. Although such market schemes were initially facilitated by government, the prospects are there for area and community-based Indigenous organisations to access carbon finance as financially self-determined registered charities.

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People on Country voices the concern that the state by its nature will try to dominate, take over and obliterate the idiosyncratic and local ways of 'caring for country'. Evoking James Scott, Altman points to the tendency of government to formulate objectives and aims through homogenising and standardising, settling and centralising in large population centres, imposing conditions and criteria for development in a top-down manner. This is done by the means of maps, censuses, statistical indexes, laws and conditionalities to bind Indigenous people, placing demands on them for 'normality' and acceptance of 'real jobs', coercing people to fit into reified and simplified categories of cultural identity, eg. by placing the condition of evidence of Indigeneity for the purpose of gaining tenure on land and usurping Indigenous knowledge as and when it suits. All these actions are carried out by the state machine in order to create a legible society as a pre-condition for then manipulating this. On the other hand, Altman does not explore the alternative: in the absence of a state, processes of obliteration and forces of co-opting, acting via global economic and social phenomena such as that of the global market and corporations may be even more overpowering.

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• The government talks about the environment as an asset
 • to be managed, as property to be used. It talks about
 • Indigenous people as in need of normalisation. While
 • this is very disconcerting, it is clear that at the same
 • time the government is spending significantly more
 • money on Indigenous Protected Areas and Indigenous
 • rangering than ever before, projects which are of use to
 • both Indigenous people and the ecosystems the entire
 • people of Australia depend on. But is the government
 • deflecting attention from the real and deeper issues
 • concerning Indigenous people's future by focusing on
 • seemingly obvious practical solutions to environmental,
 • employability, health and nutrition problems among

Indigenous Australians? While we all might agree on the need for practical positive outcomes, what they look like, the ways in which we get to those and the wider implications on people's holistic wellbeing and self-determination are not obvious and the policy details need to be thrashed out in an open consultative manner rather than glossed over by rhetoric. It is vital that rigorous analysis and participatory learning and action for practical and fair outcomes continue in such ways as are exemplified in the *People on Country* collaborative project. 

book Hidden Ireland

review by Lorna Hannan

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Hidden Ireland

Lorna Hannan

Lorna Hannan grew up in various Irish enclaves in country Victoria. She is now a grandmother and local historian and lives in North Melbourne.

Val Noone, *Hidden Ireland in Victoria* (Ballarat Heritage Services, 2012)

• Val Noone's *Hidden Ireland in Victoria* uses a mouth-watering collection of graphics, photos of important objects and reproductions of masterpieces to accompany a text whose account in a more conventional form would be markedly less vivid, compelling and enjoyable. His work has the charm and interest of a family scrapbook while at the same time presenting a wide-ranging account of one of Victoria's most numerous and influential ethnicities. Importantly it shows us what books in the information age can be.

• So used are we to an Irish presence in the history of Victoria that we often overlook this group's ethnic distinctiveness in both language and culture. As Noone reminds us, many Irish arrived here with a language other than English in their mouths. Although they were to lose it, inescapably their background created a distinct form of life. They made and maintained, even militantly so, a culture distinct from that of the English that governed so much of their public life.

• Noone is already widely recognised for his knowledge of matters to do with the Irish in Ireland and in Australia, and his account of lost language Irishness in Victoria is thorough and compelling. Noone describes himself as a sort of beachcomber 'wandering along the sea shore seeking and often finding pieces of flotsam and jetsam from the wrecked ship of Irish-language culture'. This is a telling description of his style of work, which presents not fundamentally as an argument but as a very big, diverse and invaluable collection of what he has variously stumbled upon, absorbed and researched.

• The many photographs, maps and reproductions, ranging from the masthead of an 1857 Scots Gaelic newspaper in Hobart to images of the needlecraft of an early settler continually infuse meaning and emotion, which take over from the printed word. For example, the evocative image on the cover of the Famine Rock monument at Williamstown beach. The message is

haunting. Against the skyline of today's city, the monument speaks of the famine years and the Great Hunger that took many to the grave at home and brought many to Australia's shores. Or the inside front cover image: a large group of the Young Ireland Society picnickers in Ferntree Gully, February 1917. If someone from your family came from Ireland, you will notice faces in this group that resemble those of your own mob. (The image is an illustration of how the multiplication of Irish-based organisations was a symptom of disunity as well as growth.)

Noone recognises that wreckage is the most important truth regarding Irish language. Everything you can say or find out about it has to be said in that context. After all, for decades before my lifetime Irish language culture was pretty much wrecked in Ireland itself. But despite the fragmentation that is the inheritance of centuries of domination, Noone adopts an optimistic stance. In this he uses the title *Hidden Ireland* to link his work to that of Daniel Corkery, aka Donall O Corcora, the Cork man who in 1924 published a study of eighteenth-century Irish language poets under the title *The Hidden Ireland*. Corkery was not a native Irish speaker—he had set out to learn Irish as an adult and subsequently became a leading figure in the revival of the Irish language in Dublin, where to be truthful it scarcely existed at the time. His *The Hidden Ireland* was a mighty monument to the language and the poetry of a people who had been almost pushed into oblivion, and of a determination that it not happen.

From the moment you pick up Noone's book, it is obvious that Ireland isn't

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People on Country Vital Landscapes Indigenous Futures Editors John Altman and Sean Kerins The Federation Press, 2012. Racism. Race and Racism in Australia Second Edition David Hollingsworth Social Science Press 1998. Knowledge of history. Why Weren't We Told? A personal search for the truth about our history Henry Reynolds Penguin Books, 2000. Freedom Ride. Freedom Ride A Freedom Rider Remembers Ann Curthoys Allen and Unwin 2002. 2012, People on country: Vital landscapes, Indigenous futures. Sydney: The Federation Press. Ando, K., Yorifuji, K., Ohnuma, S., Matthies, E. and Kanbara, A. 2015. Environmental education and K-12 student outcomes: A review and analysis of research. Journal of Environmental Education 49(1):1-17. Attwell, G. 2007. Personal Learning Environments - the future of eLearning? eLearning Papers 2(1):1-8. Battiste, M. 2002. Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in First Nations education: A literature review with recommendations. Ottawa: National Working Group on Education. Beatley, T. and Newman, P. 2013. People on Country book. Read reviews from world's largest community for readers. Seeks to reposition Indigenous people and their caring for country activities from the margins to core of the growing national conversation on issues such as climate change, biodiversity loss and resource depletion. This book challenges the Australian public, policy community and politicians. Get A Copy. Our team of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers explored wellbeing for Indigenous people in remote Australia through focus groups and interviews. Grounded analysis showed how research participants would like more Indigenous education for their children. Their vision for education includes transmission of Indigenous knowledge and skills in art, culture, history, land and sea management, and literacy in both English and Indigenous languages.