Women and Migration

Responses in Art and History

EDITED BY

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29. Diaspora, Indigeneity, Queer Critique: Tracey Moffatt's Aesthetics of Dwelling in Displacement

Gayatri Gopinath

This essay draws from my recent book, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (2018).¹ I use this phrase, 'the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora,' to name aesthetic practices that engage the visual register and that allow us to theorize gender and sexuality in relation to race and migration in multiple geographic and/or national locations. Most crucially, these aesthetic practices also allow us to apprehend the ways in which viable modes of dwelling and rootedness are created in the wake of colonial dispossession and displacement. Such processes of displacement, dispossession, and dwelling may very well be obscured within conventional historical archives, and may not be accessible through conventional disciplinary approaches. It is in the realm of the aesthetic that we can most clearly see and indeed feel the imprint of these histories that often elude disciplinary or canonical knowledge, that cannot be measured, quantified or categorized through conventional methodologies, but that nevertheless powerfully shape

1 An expanded and modified version of this essay appears in Gayatri Gopinath, *Unruly Visions: The Aesthetic Practices of Queer Diaspora* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018).

the contours of our material lives in the present. The aesthetic practices of queer diaspora thus constitute an alternative archive of that which remains submerged within dominant epistemologies, and they also enact and demand a reading practice of dominant archives that renders visible their gaps, fissures, and inconsistencies.

By engaging with the recent work of celebrated Australian photographer, filmmaker, and multimedia artist Tracey Moffatt, this essay is, more specifically, a preliminary attempt to contribute to an emergent conversation between diaspora studies and indigenous studies through a queer-studies lens. The concepts of diaspora and indigeneity are, more often than not, situated in a binary or oppositional relation to one another: indeed diaspora by its very definition seems to privilege mobility, hybridity, and uprootedness, while indigeneity similarly seems to privilege belonging, authenticity, and rootedness. The two concepts may also appear to be temporally mismatched: diaspora is often seen as the product and effect of postcolonial migration, whereas indigeneity is often framed in the context of ongoing colonial dispossession.

But while the concepts of diaspora and indigeneity may initially appear inherently oppositional, many scholars have rendered in rich historical and ethnographic detail the lived experience of indigeneity that evinces the fluid exchanges between the indigenous and the diasporic.² However if indigenous studies scholars have crucially identified how these exchanges reframe the contours of 'indigeneity' itself, diaspora studies scholars have been less adept at deeply engaging with these insights to explore how they might in turn transform an understanding of diaspora. This essay intends to do just that: if we take diaspora to name the movement of indigenous populations not only across nation-state borders but also across and between different sovereign indigenous nations or tribal land bases, between island and mainland, and between rural and urban spaces, new mappings of diaspora emerge

2 See for instance Graham Harvey and Charles D. Thompson, 'Introduction,' *Indigenous Diasporas and Dislocation* (London: Routledge, 2016); Mark Watson, 'Diasporic Indigeneity: Place and the Articulation of Ainu Identity in Tokyo, Japan,' *Environment and Planning*, 42 (2010), 268–84; Reyna Ramirez, *Native Hubs: Culture, Community, and Belonging in Silicon Valley and Beyond* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007); Gregory Smithers, *The Cherokee Diaspora: An Indigenous History of Migration, Resettlement and Identity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015); J. Kehaulani Kauanui, 'Diasporic Deracination and 'Off-Island Hawaiians', *The Contemporary Pacific*, 19:1 (2007), 137–60.

that utterly displace the primacy of dominant nation-state formations as the inevitable locus of diasporic movement.

It is precisely the intertwining of histories of diaspora and indigeneity, displacement and dwelling, that are suggested by the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora. I understand Tracey Moffatt's work as exemplary of such practices, and as both queer and diasporic, not because of the specific identity markers and life history of the artist herself, nor simply because of the transnational/translocal circuits within which her work travels. Indeed, none of Moffatt's work is explicitly homoerotic or references same-sex desire, practices or subjectivities in any obvious sense. Rather Moffatt's work, as an instance of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, teaches us how to read: it schools us as viewers in a queer mode and method of reading that is as attuned to ongoing processes of racialization and colonial dispossession. I understand queerness in Moffatt's work as a critical lens and optic that refuses to situate these formations in a hierarchical, equivalent, or binary relation to each other. Queerness is an optic through which to read the co-implication of the diasporic and the indigenous; it also an optic that allows us to see and to sense occluded histories — specifically of settler colonial violence — and how they continue to imprint the present. But queerness also names the ways in which 'the normalizing logic of settler colonialism'³ produces sexually and gender non-normative bodies that are then subject to discipline, containment, and regulation. Moffatt's work makes apparent how indigenous bodies are 'queered' by settler colonialism, in the sense of being positioned as aberrant, perverse, and deviant. In other words, queerness in Moffatt's work is both a critical hermeneutic and names a positioning outside of white-settler normativity.⁴ And finally, Moffatt's queer-sighted vision enables a glimpse of what José Muñoz terms a 'forward-dawning futurity,' a vision of an alternative landscape that counters the deadening strictures of the here and now.⁵

3 Andrea Smith, 'Queer Theory and Native Studies: The Heteronormativity of Settler Colonialism', *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies*, 16:1–2 (2010), 42–68 (p. 53).

4 I am indebted here to Stuart Hall's famous formulation of identity not as essence but as a positioning. See Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora', in Jonathan Rutherford (ed.), *Identity: Community, Culture, Difference* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1990), pp. 222–37.

5 José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The There and Then of Queer Futurity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), p. 7.

Moffatt, the daughter of an Australian Aboriginal mother and a white Irish father, was raised along with her three siblings by a white foster mother in a working-class suburb of Brisbane, Australia. I focus here on her 2013 exhibition *Spirit Landscapes*, one of her most autobiographical works, where she returns to the site of her childhood after twelve years of living in New York City. Moffatt has eschewed directly biographical readings of her work, and has also been reluctant to be labeled as an 'Aboriginal' or even 'Australian' artist.⁶ Such a stance has led some critics to argue that she represents an urban indigeneity that embraces diasporic cosmopolitanism at the expense of, and at odds with, her indigenous roots. Indeed these critical engagements with her work reproduce precisely the commonplace understanding of the relation between diaspora and indigeneity as inherently oppositional. For instance, art historian Ian McLean notes: '[...] Gordon Bennett and Tracey Moffatt, the best known of [...] urban art practitioners, discount their Aboriginality and make art that follows, in an almost classic sense, the post-colonial paradigms of migration — of exiles, diasporas and strangers [...] However, these paradigms privilege a particular set of experiences that do not match those Aborigines who still walk with their ancestors [...]'.⁷ In fact, if we read Moffatt's work as queer in the different senses I suggest above, it evinces a complex interrelation between the diasporic and the indigenous that, far from 'discounting' her Aboriginality, clearly draws on personal and collective histories and symbolic repertoires. The vexed psychic and material legacies of Australia's Aboriginal-child-removal policies — where Aboriginal children were systematically taken from their birth families and placed in missionary or government boarding schools, or with white families — as well as the ongoing history of Aboriginal dispossession more generally, provide the emotional undercurrent for much of Moffatt's work.

This is particularly clear in *Spirit Landscapes*, made up of five distinct photographic series of digital prints, which unabashedly engages with the artist's own fraught familial history and ancestral past. When shown at the Tyler Rollins Fine Art gallery in New York in 2013, *Spirit Landscapes* opened with the series 'Suburban Landscapes': six

6 See 'Tracey Moffatt', *Deadly Vibe*, 84 (February 2004), <http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/2007/11/tracey-moffatt>

7 Ian McLean, 'Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia,' in *Exiles, Diasporas, and Strangers*, ed. Kobena Mercer (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008), pp. 72–95 (p. 76).

black-and-white photographs of unremarkable suburban streets are overlaid with brightly colored water crayon text that, as the gallery statement puts it, ‘acts like a semi-transparent veil of memory over the streets of [Moffatt’s] youth.’⁸

Fig. 29.1 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Suburban Landscapes’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

The stenciled phrases — ‘bullied here’, ‘stole a Mars Bar’, ‘tea at the Reverends’, ‘tossed flower petals’, ‘crossed the creek’, ‘to guitar lessons’ — are rendered in capital letters that stretch to cover the entire surface of the print. The images memorialize the quotidian acts and ordinary affects, the minor moments of trauma, pleasure, excitement, and boredom, that saturate the experience of childhood and adolescence. The interplay between text and image in ‘Suburban Landscapes’ both indexes and collapses the temporal and geographic distance between the adult Moffatt recently returned from New York, and her childhood self in Brisbane of the 1960s and 1970s; indeed the images hold in tension and play these multiple temporal and geographic frames

8 Kathryn Weir, *Spirit Landscapes* (New York: Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 2013), [n.p.].

simultaneously. In interviews Moffatt has spoken of the Brisbane of her youth as ‘a holiday paradise — the heat, the joy, but also the terrible mood of fear and racism.’⁹ Moffatt’s ambivalent relation to this space of ‘home’ — ‘the heat and the racism and the redneck attitudes’ as she puts it¹⁰ — is evident in the disjuncture between the meaning of the text itself and the images of apparently innocuous suburban streets overlaid with cheery crayon colors: the stark phrase ‘bullied here’, for instance, is an assertion of and testament to the quotidian violences that are just as much of the fabric of everyday life as is the heat and boredom of ‘those endless Brisbane summers.’¹¹

Moffatt’s ambivalent relation to home as a site of both belonging and unbelonging is even more apparent when we view ‘Suburban Landscapes’ alongside ‘Picturesque Cherbourg,’ a series of six digital print collages that at Tyler Rollins was exhibited adjacent to it.

Fig. 29.2 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

9 ‘Tracey Moffatt’, *Deadly Vibe*, 84 (February 2004), <http://www.deadlyvibe.com.au/2007/11/tracey-moffatt>

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

Initially the 'Cherbourg' images appear to be picture-postcard pretty, color-saturated landscapes of white picket fences and neat clapboard houses set against lush foliage and a bright blue sky filled with cottony clouds. A closer look, however, reveals the photographs to be in fact comprised of fragments torn apart and then imperfectly sutured together to make apparent the breaks, shards and ruptures in this vision of the picturesque.

Fig. 29.3 Tracey Moffatt, from 'Picturesque Cherbourg', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

Cherbourg itself is an Aboriginal 'settlement' founded in the late nineteenth century through the forced segregation, containment, and removal of disparate Aboriginal communities from all over Queensland, northern Australia. Moffatt's own family members were relocated to Cherbourg in the 1920s, and their descendants continue to reside there.

In order to appreciate the full import of Moffatt's images, it is helpful to consider the specific meaning of the 'picturesque' in relation to Australia. As an aesthetic ideal, the picturesque emerged in late-eighteenth-century Britain as a way of mediating between the sublime and the beautiful; landscape painters turned their attention to creating

'picturesque' images of Scotland, Wales and the Lake District, for instance, as a way of rendering these unfamiliar landscapes into those that were at once 'unthreatening, safe, and accessible.'¹² As social geographer Allaine Cerwonka notes, 'landscape painting [in Britain] in particular de-politicized the effects of the displacement of the peasants from the countryside by creating beautiful melancholy landscapes [...] absent of beggars and gypsies who increasingly populated such landscapes in the nineteenth century. Picturesque landscape painting converted poverty and industrialization into art and thus kept it at a manageable distance from the bourgeois and the upper class.'¹³ Cerwonka details how this British ideal of the picturesque was deployed in the white settler colony of Australia not only through visual technologies such as painting and photography but also through the actual reshaping of the land itself, for instance through the imposition of English-style gardens onto the Australian landscape: 'The aesthetic production of the landscape was a useful method for mystifying the colonial appropriation of land underway in Australia. Turning the Australian continent into an English countryside and farmland helped erase the physical evidence of Aboriginal presence and influence on the land.'¹⁴ The production of the picturesque, then, was a key aesthetic strategy through which white settlers rendered an unfamiliar and threatening landscape both knowable and familiar. It enabled them to imagine an organic tie to the land, naturalizing Aboriginal dispossession and laying claim to Aboriginal lands under the legal doctrine of *terra nullius*: empty land belonging to no one that was uninhabited, uncultivated, and therefore available for white settlement.

It is precisely this mystification of colonial domination and the erasure of colonial violence in the framing of the picturesque that Moffatt's 'Picturesque Cherbourg' both references and dismantles. Moffatt's disquieting collages of ruptured landscapes and visions of 'home' directly reference the spatial practices of settler colonial domination in Australia. The apparent 'picturesqueness' of Cherbourg belies its history as a key site of containment, segregation, and disciplining of

12 Allaine Cerwonka, *Native to the Nation: Disciplining Landscapes and Bodies in Australia* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), p. 62.

13 Ibid..

14 Ibid., p. 66.

Aboriginal peoples; indeed 'inmates' (as its Aboriginal inhabitants were called) needed permission from settlement authorities to enter or leave Cherbourg until well into the 1970s. Various historians and first-person accounts have detailed the intense forms of 'bodily and sensory regimes'¹⁵ that governed every aspect of inmates' lives. These forms of discipline, surveillance and regulation were spatialized in the built environment of Cherbourg itself, which was split into two distinct areas: the 'camp domain', where the majority of Aboriginal inmates lived, and the 'administrative domain', reserved for the white supervisors along with a number of favored Aboriginal inmates.¹⁶ These inmates lived in small timber cottages that they built themselves and that were meant to foster a European heteropatriarchal domestic ideal, even as this ideal was impossible to achieve given the system of child removal and labor exploitation in place: family units were routinely disaggregated with adults forced into gendered forms of labor (domestic labor for the women, manual labor for the men), while children were housed in sex-segregated dormitories away from their biologically related kin. Historian Thom Blake describes the housing spaces of inmates as follows: 'These cottages were identical in form and located on small blocks and enclosed by timber fences. The cottages were provided for 'better' inmates who demonstrated they could adopt white norms of behavior and family life.'¹⁷ In light of this history, Moffatt's photographs of seemingly innocuous, even banal images of flowers and sky, tidy houses and white picket fences, take on an entirely different, far more chilling valence: this is the built environment of settler colonial power, where the houses and fences, lawns and gardens, are not simply the markers of suburban domesticity. Rather, as Moffatt's fractured images indicate, this architecture indexes the transformation of bodies and landscapes that are deemed threatening and antithetical to white-settler norms of racial, gendered and sexual order. 'Picturesque Cherbourg,' then, reveals the ways in which indigenous bodies — seen as co-extensive

15 Margaret D. Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Nation: Settler Colonialism, Maternalism, and the Removal of Indigenous Children in the American West and Australia, 1880–1940* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), p. 248.

16 See Thom Blake, *A Dumping Ground: A History of the Cherbourg Settlement* (St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 2001), for a detailed study of the formation of Cherbourg.

17 Blake, *A Dumping Ground*, p. 130.

with indigenous land — are ‘made queer’ by settler colonial logic, in the sense of being positioned as aberrant and developmentally out of step with European civilizational modernity, and therefore in need of management and transformation.

Settlements like Cherbourg were meant to inculcate in their inmates a personal and collective historical amnesia through the criminalization and attempted eradication of indigenous languages, spiritual belief systems, kinship, and entire ways of life. What does it mean then for Moffatt to claim this space, one that attests to the ongoing violence of the settler colonial project, as home? At Tyler Rollins, directly facing ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’ on an opposing wall was displayed the most visually striking photograph series in the exhibition, entitled ‘As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land.’ In six large-scale (49x72 inches) images, each of which is shot through a differently colored monochromatic filter, Moffatt lies on the earth and points her camera upward, capturing trees and sky; the outlines of nude female figures are faintly discernable among the clouds and tree branches.

Fig. 29.4 Tracey Moffatt, from ‘As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land’, 2013.
Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

As art critic Kathryn Weir comments on the images: ‘The view from the ground of sky and trees is radical; photographic conventions favor the heroic tree portrait or the sweep of forest captured from

above or yonder.’¹⁸ Moffatt’s claiming of ‘her’ ‘ancestral land’ is not a re-possession in the sense of ownership, control, and mastery that characterize a settler-colonial relation to land. Rather what emerge are landscape photographs that reject the generic conventions of landscape photography; given that the vantage point is from the ground looking up, away from the earth, in Moffatt’s photographs the earth itself is felt and sensed rather than seen, manipulated or controlled.

Yet ‘As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land’ could also be read as a reinscription of essentialist notions of an inherent connection between the female body and nature, and between the indigenous subject and land/geography; certainly Moffatt’s title makes the work available to such an interpretation. If read solely through what I would call a narrowly diasporic lens, Moffatt’s apparent conflation of female bodies, indigeneity, and landscape appears indicative of what Stuart Hall terms ‘a backward looking conception of diaspora,’ one that is marked by ‘the endless desire to return to “lost origins”, to be one again with the mother, to go back to the beginning.’¹⁹ Indeed moving through the gallery space from ‘Suburban Landscapes’ to ‘Picturing Cherbourg’ to ‘As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land,’ one could read *Spirit Landscapes* as tracking a movement backwards, from the place of displacement to the place of origin: from Brisbane, to Cherbourg, to the female body and the land itself. But such a reading and critique of Moffatt’s work would in fact misread the far more complex relation she maps out between her own embodied subjectivity and the space of ‘home’ in all its valences. Indeed as both ‘Suburban Landscapes’ and ‘Picturesque Cherbourg’ make clear, Moffatt’s claiming of ‘ancestral land’ is a hard-won, complicated negotiation of various home spaces, all of which are simultaneously spaces of comfort and intense discomfort, and are multiply displaced, rent, and dislocated. Her images speak to what I would term a ‘diasporic rootedness’: her sense of being indigenous to the land is in fact rooted and routed in and through diaspora and the myriad dislocations and historical violences that both Cherbourg and the working-class suburban streets of Brisbane represent. Thus Moffatt’s framing of ‘ancestral land’ holds important lessons for queer diaspora studies, a field that has long sought to disrupt narratives of

18 Weir, *Spirit Landscapes*.

19 Hall, ‘Cultural Identity and Diaspora,’ p. 235.

origin and return. In Moffatt's work, 'ancestral land' is simultaneously a space of displacement; to 'lay back' on it is to lay claim to it, and to therefore inescapably reckon with traumatic histories of dispossession and the ambivalent modes of affective connection to and alienation from 'home' they engender. Her understanding of 'ancestral land,' then, precludes any simple claiming of such space as home, origin, or site of return.

In Moffatt's work, there is no generalizable category of 'the land' or 'the female body.'²⁰ Rather Moffatt's transposition of nude female figures onto the sky and trees must be read within the specific history of white-settler appropriation of indigenous lands and the gendered and sexual regulation of indigenous bodies. In light of this history, 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land' may in fact envision an alternative cosmology, a utopian landscape of possibility that José Muñoz would name queerness: a 'forward-dawning futurity' that 'is visible only in the horizon.'²¹ Countering the multiple histories of violent dispossession and forced containment that continue to exact a brutal price on indigenous bodies and lands, Moffatt's imaginary landscape, or dreamscape rather, dares to imagine other ways of being in the world that are not beholden to settler colonialism's normalizing logic. It does so by envisioning a way of dwelling in displacement, one that wrests and lays claim to home spaces that have long been the site of the violent imposition of settler colonial norms and regulations.

This white-settler logic is directly referenced in 'Pioneer Dreaming', a series of six smaller, rather unassuming hand-painted photographic diptychs which at Tyler Rollins were exhibited as a kind of bridge between 'Suburban Landscapes' and 'Picturesque Cherbourg.' The right frame of each diptych depicts a white female heroine from classical Hollywood or Australian western cinema gazing out across the Australian outback, while the left frame of each diptych evokes the

20 I draw this observation from Julia Bryan-Wilson's astute reading of Ana Mendieta's *Siluetas* series. Moffatt's work is akin to Mendieta's in that, as Bryan-Wilson observes about the latter: 'Just as there is no such thing as "the earth" or "the goddess", there is no such thing as "the body" in Mendieta's work; she goes against "the body," to reassert the existence of, and interdependence between, many bodies.' Julia Bryan-Wilson, 'Against the Body: Interpreting Ana Mendieta,' in Stephanie Rosenthal (ed.), *Ana Mendieta: Traces* (London: Hayward Publishing, 2013), pp. 26–38 (p. 36).

21 Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, pp. 7 and 11.

expansive landscape in subtle gradations of black, yellow, and red (the colors of the Australian Aboriginal flag).

Fig. 29.5 Tracey Moffatt, from 'Pioneer Dreaming', 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

Historian Margaret Jacobs has detailed the crucial role that white women played in US and Australian settler colonial projects in their effort to regulate indigenous bodies and minds.²² In Moffatt's foregrounding of the white heroine of popular US and Australian cinema, we can understand 'Pioneer Dreaming' to reference this gendering of settler colonial power and the centrality of maternalist discourses to indigenous dispossession in both national contexts. Moffatt has shied away from claiming that her work draws on 'traditional' mythologies and belief systems, preferring to speak of her work as articulating a highly 'personal mythology.'²³ Nevertheless both the landscapes of 'Pioneer Dreaming' and 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land' can be read as specifically evoking the continued salience of Aboriginal notions of Dreaming — a complex cosmology and spiritual system that maps 'the rich histories of ancestral sites and tracks that locate individual identity in particular places.'²⁴ Indeed Kathryn Weir notes that the subdued ochre tones of the landscapes in 'Pioneer Dreaming' recall the magisterial watercolors of Albert

²² See Jacobs, *White Mother to a Dark Race*.

²³ Kate Robertson, 'The Spectre at the Window: Tracey Moffatt's *beDevil* (1993),' *Senses of Cinema*, 81 (December 2016), [n.p.].

²⁴ McLean, 'Aboriginal Modernism in Central Australia,' p. 75.

Namatjira, the mid-twentieth century Aboriginal painter who mastered the 'western' art of watercolor painting. Ian McLean argues that Natmatjira's landscapes 'depict a transcendent stillness through which Namatjira claims the modernity of Arrernte spiritualism and thus the continuing presence of Dreaming.'²⁵ Similarly Moffatt's evocation of the 'transcendent stillness' of Namatjira's landscapes in 'Pioneer Dreaming,' together with the dreamscapes of 'As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land,' suggest the ongoing resonance and power of alternative personal and collective cosmologies. These cosmologies provide a direct rejoinder to the 'Pioneer Dreaming' of the white-settler imagination, one that is replete with images of indigenous bodies and lands in need of civilizational uplift and cultivation.

Moffatt's final series in *Spirit Landscapes* is 'Night Spirits,' eight triptychs set apart from the main gallery space in a small, almost completely darkened room. The images of the Queensland outback — of desert landscape, a lone house, a telephone pole along the road, a river — are repeated and displayed in different permutations and through different monochrome filters of red, blue, green, or yellow.

25 Ibid., p. 92. 'Arrernte' refers to the Aboriginal people in central Australia who are the original custodians of this land.

Fig. 29.6 Tracey Moffatt, from *Spirit Landscapes*, 2013. Courtesy of the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, CC BY 4.0.

What emerge are eerie nightscapes seemingly devoid of living beings, populated solely by ghostly, indeterminate, misty white shapes, splotches and shadows. The series seems to consciously mimic the 'spirit photographs' that gained tremendous popularity in Europe in

the nineteenth century. These photographs, according to Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu, were meant to capture the so-called 'ectoplasm' that was believed to be the 'materialized phenomena for the world beyond the senses. Photographs were the medium for translating or making visible, indeed material, that which would otherwise be invisible.'²⁶ Kathryn Weir writes of the process by which Moffatt created these images: '[...] Moffatt drove alone at night along isolated roads in outback Queensland. She would stop the car and slowly and deliberately set up the camera, while the small hairs rose on the back of her neck and a tingle of fear sharpened her senses. The resulting intense, luminous images show strange traces populating the night, suggesting some lingering plasma residue of untold lives.'²⁷ Moffatt here turns to the sensorial — the feeling of fear and the bodily and mental transformations it causes — as a way to capture and render visible the specters of past violences. These violences continue to haunt the present and cannot be apprehended simply through conventional technologies of representation that seek to capture 'evidence' that is visible, quantifiable, and measurable. These apparently empty, deserted landscapes are in fact teeming with the bodies of the dispossessed that can only be sensed and felt in and through the body: Moffatt's body and by extension the body of the viewer, who is in turn affected and pulled into the state of trepidation and foreboding that initially gave rise to these images. Spectrality is in fact a recurrent theme in Tracey Moffatt's work; as Gerry Turcotte notes, through Australian government policies such as *terra nullius* and child removal laws, 'Aboriginal people were made ghostly [...] turned into insubstantial spectres haunting their own land, a process that was reinforced in wider government policy, in historical record-keeping, in map-making, and [...] in literary figurations.'²⁸ Moffatt's work responds to this 'imperial legacy of spectralizing Indigeneity'²⁹ not only by conjuring forth the ghosts that colonial violence produces but by insisting on their materiality, as they act on, and interact with, bodies and landscapes in the present.

26 Elspeth Brown and Thy Phu, 'Introduction,' in Brown and Phu (eds.), *Feeling Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), p. 15.

27 Weir, 'Spirit Landscapes,' [n.p.].

28 Gerry Turcotte, 'Spectrality in Indigenous Women's Cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole,' *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 43:1 (2008), 7–21 (p. 8).

29 Ibid.

Thus Tracey Moffatt's *Spirit Landscapes* makes evident how the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora are precisely that: a practice and a doing, a reading strategy and viewing tactic, that allow us to see and to sense differently. *Spirit Landscapes* quite literally enacts a queer-sighted vision that allows us to see the ghosts that live among us, that continue to shape our daily and nightly existence whether we are conscious of their presence or not. The work speaks to the ways in which dispossessed populations create home out of seemingly uninhabitable locations in the aftermath of past and continuing processes of removal and containment. Moffatt's images thus act as an alternative archive that records everyday forms of dwelling in displacement; they demand that we as viewers dwell in landscapes that are far from comfortable or comforting but that instead afford us a vision that demands that we see the intimacies of apparently discrete historical processes. In claiming Moffatt's work as an important instance of the aesthetic practices of queer diaspora, I do not wish to engage in a colonizing gesture that simply absorbs articulations of indigeneity under the sign of diaspora. Rather, I hope to have illuminated the complex interaction and interrelation between the diasporic and the indigenous that her work maps out: the ways in which indigeneity is routed through diaspora, just as diaspora is rooted in indigeneity. Moffatt's work enacts a queer method that foregrounds the intertwined nature of these apparently discrete and oppositional concepts. But queerness in Moffatt's work is also, crucially, a way of imagining alternative futures and possibilities, modes of dwelling and making home, despite brutal histories of displacement and dispossession. Now more than ever this seems like an indispensable and vital contribution.

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