ASPECTS OF PLACE IN NEW FOLK MUSIC

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DECLARATION

This is to certify that:

(i) The thesis comprises only my original work towards the Master by Research;
(ii) Due acknowledgement has been made in the text to all other material used;
and
(iii) The thesis is less than 20,000 words in length, exclusive of tables, maps, bibliographies and appendices.

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ABSTRACT

This practice-led research examines the notion of “place” within the context of new folk music and how the setting of a song can effectively drive, and respond to, social and environmental issues. Place is integral to my own practice as a singer-songwriter and investigating the underlying motivation behind my work has led to a broader analysis of place amongst practitioners and theorists across a diverse range of disciplines. I have chosen the genre of “new folk” to explore these theories, as it best captures the combination of techniques that are reflected in both my own songwriting and in the music of the songwriters that I analyse throughout the thesis.

In the dissertation I explore three facets of place in songwriting – narrative place, virtual place, and natural place – to illuminate social themes around listener empathy, social connection and disconnection, replication and ecology. These concepts are discussed through the works of new folk songwriters, including Joanna Newsom, Scott Walker, Bill Callahan, Will Oldham, Laura Marling, and Midlake, who all engage closely with text, narrative and imagery to depict a compelling sense of place in their work. I construct linkages between place and songwriting through the lens of theorists and philosophers, including Thomas Gieryn, Tia DeNora, Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes, and Timothy Morton to understand how an aesthetic engagement with our surroundings impacts on our sense of social identity.

To accompany the written component I present a creative folio, comprising nine original songs, that encapsulates these three notions of place, accompanied by an explication of process behind the creative output. This linked collection of songs illustrates some of the core concepts explored in the dissertation and contributes to a body of music that is concerned with place, connection and identity.
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INTRODUCTION:

“THE SEA IS NOT MINE”

“Coming up with a new world view means dealing with how humans experience their place in the world. Aesthetics thus performs a crucial role, establishing ways of feeling and perceiving this place.”

“A placeless world is as unthinkable as a bodiless self.”

The year is 1983 and a group of four families walk back from the beach, up the craggily ochre rocks and through untamed bush land. Back at camp, surrounded by gum trees and a makeshift home, they prepare for dinner – lighting a fire in the pit and putting the billy on for tea. As they sit around the fire and the dusk settles in, the families share stories and sing rounds of “Michael, Row the Boat Ashore.” The children are bewitched by the flames and the magic of the stories, and the songs float around their ears until they are drowsy and content. This memory of summer holidays camping in dense bush land, a short walk to the ocean, is imprinted on my mind more strongly than perhaps any other childhood recollection. The smell of smoke, the salty trace of the ocean, the dust, the people and the strong sense of stillness are all things that are indelibly linked to my past. This is a story about a location; the physical whereabouts of the campsite. It’s also about unique surroundings; the collection of bush, people, the fire pit and the billy. And it’s a story about identity and meaning, a sense of belonging and community. It’s a story about place.

The project

This Master of Fine Arts practice-led research project is concerned with aspects of place – location, surroundings and identity – specifically within the genre of “new folk” music. New folk is defined by University of Western Sydney’s John Encarnacao as belonging to “independent artists who utilise acoustic instrumentation and/or elements of ‘folk’ material or techniques” along with lo-fi practices and “experiments with form and vocal approach.” New folk is more fully defined on pages 10-11, however as an overview I use Encarnacao’s characterisation to establish a framework for linking the musicians discussed.

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throughout the thesis to my own songwriting practice and an overarching theory of place. New folk musicians have a particular engagement to place – from the pastoral ideals of Midlake, to the old-world aesthetic of Joanna Newsom, to the analogue approach of Phil Elverum – bringing aspects of our environment and identity to the fore in their music and their lyrics. It could be argued that most songs contain some version of place, so what then is remarkable about the notion of place in songwriting? I will argue that place has value that goes beyond a geographic location and that when we start to consider other characteristics of place, as well as its inverse – placelessness or non-place – new interpretations of contemporary music become possible.

As a singer-songwriter, my creative practice is strongly influenced by place. My work to date has often featured themes of nature, with an emphasis on storytelling, imagery and lyricism, along with a focus on vocal techniques to convey a sense of place. In this practice-led project, I initially identified three types of place within my own songs – narrative place, virtual place and natural place – employing sociologist Thomas Gieryn’s definition of place as grounding for the research. Discussed in more detail on pages 8-9, Gieryn describes three components of place: (1) “Geographic Location,” (2) “Material Form” and (3) “Investment with Meaning and Value.” Understanding place in this broad sense enables a deeper analysis of place in my own music, as well as the songs of other new folk artists. In my compositions I depict narratives that are intrinsically based around our surroundings. In this sense, narrative place refers to the way song lyrics, imagery and even the mode of listening can be used to locate songs, as well as to create complex stories about people and their surroundings. My songs also engage with digital concepts, both through vocal production (layering of voices and use of reverb) and thematically, to express a tension between humans and technology. Virtual place has a dual meaning, with online environments becoming another kind of space in which we can interact, as well as the notion that music is able to transport us into an abstract sense of place. In new folk music, these nonconcrete environments enable new discourse around social connection and disconnection. Natural place refers to our non-urban surroundings, the wilderness that surrounds our man-made constructs. Many of the music examples discussed in this paper describe scenes of nature that, I argue, exist as a metaphor for something more complex than purely a setting. Perceived through Gieryn’s definition of place, my examination of these three types of place illuminate broad social themes around listener empathy, social connection and disconnection, replication, memory and ecology.

As a practice-led research project, the theory has been driven by my creative practice and vice-versa. As such, this thesis will be presented in two interconnected ways:

1. A dissertation that will construct linkages between place and songwriting through the lens of theory in order to explore how an aesthetic engagement with our surroundings impacts on our sense of social identity. I will provide a critical grounding and draw from key theorists as well as practitioners who interplay with the notion of place in their work. In this introduction, I outline the scope of the research project, discuss theoretical and practical methodologies, and define the terms “place” and “placelessness,” drawing from the work of theorists Thomas Gieryn, John Agnew, Edward Relph and Marc Augé. As the genre “new folk” is not a widely known one, I spend some time explaining its relevance to my research and my music practice with reference to John Encarnacao’s text *Punk Aesthetics and New Folk: Way Down the Old Plank Road*. In Chapter One, narrative and emotional engagement with place-based music will be explored to gauge the potential for empathy; here the work of musicologists Susan McClary and Vincent Meelberg is illuminating. I explore the relationship between location in songs and narratives, arguing that empathy is made possible through imagery that captures a sense of place. Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie provide insights into narrative empathy, as does Graham McFee. In Chapter Two, I examine virtual place to determine whether new technologies can provide alternate perspectives on place itself, and thus increase the capacity for human connection, or whether they merely construct a synthetic and ultimately meaningless experience. I explore ideological concerns around virtual communities and discuss how songwriting depicts and responds to these anxieties. Paul Graves-Brown’s and Holly Watkin’s work on music and virtual place have helped to shape my argument in this section. Jean Baudrillard’s theory on simulacra is applied to a sense of placelessness, with the idea that where there is something there is also nothing. Finally, I explore Tia DeNora’s work on virtual

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places and music, and Roland Barthes’ sense of self and image-memory in the context of a replicated object such as a photograph. In Chapter Three, natural place draws us back to the environment with implicit concerns around climate change, the pastoral, and how new folk songs engage with natural themes. Timothy Morton’s conceptions of nature and ecology are crucial in redefining how songs about our environment play an important role in understanding current human concerns, as well as helping to redefine our relationship to nature itself. Pastoral themes in folk music are explored as representative of a purist expression of music and nature. Claire Coleman’s and Lawrence Buell’s writings on ecology and nature in music are enlightening. I also examine Robert Forster’s critique of nature writing to reveal a more complex reading of environmental song motifs. Throughout the dissertation, these concepts will be explored through analysis of the works of new folk songwriters Joanna Newsom, Scott Walker, Will Oldham, Bill Callahan, Laura Marling, Sun Kil Moon, Phil Elverum, and Midlake, who all engage closely with text, narrative and imagery to depict a compelling sense of place in their work.

2. A creative folio of nine original songs that are inspired by aspects of place and placelessness, accompanied by song notes and lead sheets to help contextualise the music with the theory. Through a range of perspectives, the collection explores how the setting of a song can reflect complex notions of the self, as well as themes of connection and disconnection. In each song I experiment with different compositional and conceptual treatments of the core theme – place – using a synthesis of new folk techniques, including vocal layering and effects, engagement with technology, and an emphasis on narrative and lyrical imagery to further elucidate notions of place, nature, narrative, meaning and empathy in practice.

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Methodology

In considering a research approach for this project, I consulted a number of resources that outline the undertaking of an artistic practice within an academic context. This has been particularly helpful in developing an understanding of art as research and applying this to my songwriting. Practice-led research – in which creative practices and outputs are considered forms of research, alongside critical theory – first emerged as an academic model in the last two decades.\(^\text{11}\) Complexities around how to present art as research are prevalent when using this method, as well as how to maintain a distinct arts practice whilst adhering to the formal academic requirements of a research degree.\(^\text{12}\) In *Practice-Led Research, Research-Led Practice*, editors Roger Dean and Hazel Smith explain: “To be process-driven is to have no particular starting point in mind and no pre-conceived end. Such an approach can be directed towards emergence, that is the generation of ideas which were unforeseen at the beginning of the project.”\(^\text{13}\) The emergence of place, nature and narrative motifs in my music guided the research outcomes in a way that was unencumbered by an original expectation of arrival. Through reflective studio practice I settled on aspects of place as the foundation for the research. During my candidature, the process developed into a more reciprocal arrangement where the research also began to inform the direction of the music. Dean and Smith observe a codependency between research and creativity, “not only in terms of practice-led research but also in terms of research-led practice … to explore the multidimensional, reciprocal and iterative relationship between research and practice.”\(^\text{14}\) As my research ideas solidified, I brought these to the practice of writing, conceptually, by considering what aspects of narrative, virtual and natural place mean to my own music, as well as practically, by applying digital methods and techniques (such as vocal layering and processing of sounds) and instilling some of these place themes into my lyrics.

Clark Moustakas, in his excellent text *Phenomenological Research Methods*, underlines the variations between certain established research approaches that help to place the tone of work against a larger social research context.\(^\text{15}\) This practice-led project developed with

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\(^{13}\) Dean and Smith, “Introduction,” 23.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., 10.

combined methodologies of hermeneutics and heuristics in mind. Moustakas defines hermeneutics as a “science of interpretation. In knowing oneself, one comes to know about the external world and other people.” Analysing the role of place in my music has helped to clarify the significance of place in the music of other new folk songwriters. M.H. Abrams also provides a comprehensive and holistic explanation of the methodology of hermeneutics and its relationship to philosophy, psychology, art theory and poetry. Its original intent, writes Abrams, was to understand “ways of dealing with the temporal, concrete, ‘lived experience’ of human beings.” Heuristics depends more upon experimentation and self-examination that can then be applied to a larger context. As Moustakas notes, a “heuristic process is autobiographic, yet with every question that matters there is also a social – perhaps universal – significance.” The collection of nine original place-based songs presented in this thesis developed out of my distinct songwriting process, which in turn informed a larger conceptual analysis of notions of place and connection through the works of other songwriters, practitioners and theorists. There is a unique experience of working in practice and transferring the methodology to an existing body of knowledge that informs and sparks further theoretical concerns. It is through this engagement that an artist can experience, as Barbara Bolt and Estelle Barrett observe, “a very specific sort of knowing, a knowing that arises through handling materials in practice.”

In considering how to structure the thesis, I have chosen to present a theory of place in music that is somewhat distinct to the creative component. Andrew McNamara warns against practice-led researchers who tend to “conflate research and practice,” rather than maintaining some division between a theoretical research question and the practical work. As such, the first section of the thesis is presented as an argument for place in new folk music, supported by a theoretical framework. In the second section, the creative folio, I present the collection of nine original songs, accompanied by explanatory song notes.

16 Ibid., 8.
18 Moustakas, Phenomenological Research Methods, 16.
Creative practice

My studio practice is comprised of both songwriting and singing within a folk aesthetic, with emphasis on imagery and lyrics to depict narratives, as well as experimentation with vocal techniques and production to explore natural and digital states. My practice is based on experimentation and recording of rough ideas that may or may not progress to further development. Over time the ideas are refined and instrumentation is added to further bolster and add colour to the music. This method can be slow, a process of trial and error, of addition and subtraction, to find the right balance of dynamism and spaciousness within each piece. Once the musical ideas have taken shape, I begin to work with musicians and engineers in the rehearsal and recording process to reach the final production of musical ideas.

Early on in the creative phase of this research project, clear themes emerged that would drive the rest of the music and theories throughout my candidature. Narratives are critical to my songwriting practice and I attempt to create rich scenes around community and intimacy through lyrical imagery. Other narrative ideas explored in the thesis, such as empathy, are present in the melodic devices of my music. For example, a tendency towards minor keys and expressive vocals to connect in with a listener, and storylines to transport them to an alternate environment. Engagement with technology is also prevalent within my practice, to explore a natural evocation of sounds against produced techniques, such as layering of voices, edited field recordings and other digital processes to represent the social contradictions we face in a technologically driven world. The recording techniques, editing, mixing and mastering process all contribute to the conceptual notion of nature versus technology, man-made versus organic, and in this space I explore the challenges of connecting to others amidst the perceived distancing of technology. Natural evocations of place reference landscapes, natural spaces and our relationship to animals to depict a sense of community and, at times, nostalgia.

A thorough exploration of the creative ideas behind the nine original songs written for this research project is presented in the Creative Folio section beginning on page 43, along with links to each song, recording notes (Appendix A) and lead sheets (Appendix B) to enhance the listening experience.
Key terms

Place

Place, writes Dolores Hayden, is “one of the trickiest words in the English language, a suitcase so overfilled one can never shut the lid.”

Place is a concept that speaks of the everyday – after all we are always somewhere. To help ground the following chapters on narrative, virtual and natural place it is helpful to study the work of theorists across the disciplines of philosophy, geography, architecture, and ecological criticism. Edward Relph notes that “places are so completely taken for granted that they need no definition.”

However, he and other theorists (such as geographers John Agnew and Tim Cresswell, and philosopher Edward Casey) agree that place is not only about location.

Casey refers to place as being “something in process, something unconfinable to a thing. Or to a simple location.”

Place resides in the cracks and crevices around material objects and within the quality of emotions that we experience. In this sense, place is more difficult to define. While there are a number of ways to understand place – from a physical location, to a sense of belonging, a point in time, a role, or a purpose – I will limit my analysis to sociologist Thomas Gieryn’s definition to provide a consistent framework for analysis:

(1) “Geographic Location,” (2) “Material Form” and (3) “Investment with Meaning and Value.”

For Gieryn, geographic location refers to place as belonging to a particular mapped point, “a unique spot in the universe.” Material form denotes place as containing something measurable. “Place has physicality,” says Gieryn, made up of “things or objects” at a unique location. Thirdly, a geographic location filled with objects is a place “only when it ensconces history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory.”

John Agnew defines place through three similar qualities: “Location,” “Locale” and “A Sense of Place.”

Lawrence Buell notes that due to the duality of “pointing outward toward the tangible world” and equally as an internal concept “to the perceptions one brings to it,”

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23 Relph, Place and Placelessness, 43; Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society, 27-28; Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History, 337; Tim Cresswell, Place: A Short Introduction (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 11.
24 Casey, The Fate of Place: A Philosophical History, 337.
27 Ibid.
28 Agnew, Place and Politics: The Geographical Mediation of State and Society, 5.
place is inherently ineffable. Applying this to music analysis, the duality creates complexity in the way we interpret songs, through the external function that music has in reaching an audience and the internal experience a listener has with a song. In a way, it is how one imagines or constructs place that imbues it with definition. As anthropologist Marc Augé asserts, “place is completed through the word.” The symbols and personal meaning that we assign to locations enable us to feel place connected. Place applies to every aspect of our lives, who we are as a society, our territory and our art. Edward Relph was one of the first people to write about place and identity with his 1976 book *Place and Placelessness:*

The basic meaning of place, its essence, does not therefore come from locations, nor from the trivial functions that places serve, nor from the community that occupies it, nor from superficial or mundane experiences ... The essence of place lies in the largely unselfconscious intentionality that defines places as profound centres of human existence.

It is with this idea of social relevance and “centres of human existence” in mind that I consider place as a sense of being, a way of capturing social positioning and, in the context of songwriting, a way of understanding the self through art. As established, I have selected three types of place to base my argument: narrative place, virtual place and natural place. In the following chapters, I relate Gieryn’s concept of place to these three classifications, to assist in the examination of new folk songs cited in this thesis.

*Placelessness*

In the analysis of different aspects of place it is equally necessary to apply the inverse of place when considering how spaces connect and disconnect us. Relph describes placelessness as “the weakening of distinct and diverse experiences and identities of places.” Place and placelessness, in a theoretical context, are concepts that have arisen from, or most comprehensively been explored through, the fields of geography and architecture. Non-place is another way of negating place, as developed by Marc Augé, an anthropologist who juxtaposes the notion of place against the idea of spaces that are devoid of cultural relevance, such as airports, highways and waiting rooms. He observes: “If a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a

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29 Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond,* 59.
31 Relph, *Place and Placelessness,* 43.
32 Ibid., 6.
non-place.”34 Place and non-place are thus linked by their interdependency and the ready possibility of one becoming the other.

New folk
In this thesis, I use the term “new folk” to discuss independent musicians who employ non-traditional song structures and vocal styles in their practice, along with unconventional instrumentation and engagement with digital themes. Genre is a difficult concept when discussing artists, as many artists fit into multiple categories and many would resist the categories under which they have been placed. For the purposes of this relatively short research paper, it is expedient to set up a genre framework so as to give shape and meaning to my arguments. As Fabian Holt remarks, “naming a music is a way of recognizing its existence and distinguishing it from other musics.”35 As established, I use Encarnacao’s definition of new folk as experimentation with vocal and stylistic form within a folk aesthetic. Encarnacao situates the origins of new folk in the early 1990s to encompass categories such as “avant folk,” “psychedelic folk,” and “progressive folk.”36 The concept of new folk is extremely useful to my research, in helping to collate the various musicians and their songwriting styles into a coherent form within a collective genre. New folk techniques can be found in the work of artists such as Laura Marling, Bill Callahan, Phil Elverum and Joanna Newsom. I argue that these artists can be discussed in terms of new folk because they are united by their strong lyricism, linkages to folk music, their introduction of new technologies and use of non-traditional song structures, as well as being songwriters who engage with themes of place, narrative, technology and nature in their music. Traditional “folk” is not an adequate descriptor for the music discussed in this thesis. While a single definition of folk music is difficult to locate, Oxford Music defines it as “acoustic music performed by a solo act or a small ensemble, often written by the performer(s), rendered in very simple arrangements, and dealing with social or personal issues to which most lay persons can easily relate.”37 New folk music certainly shares some of these characteristics (solo acts or small ensembles, singer-songwriters and personal thematic material), however there is enough distinction (complexity of arrangements, divergence from traditional song structures, as well as interplay with technology) to qualify as its own subgenre. Other genres, such as indie-folk and freak-folk, again while containing

34 Augé, Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity, 77-78.
36 Encarnacao, Punk Aesthetics and New Folk: Way Down the Old Plank Road, 10-11.
some common techniques with new folk (experimentation with form and instrumentation in particular\footnote{Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary & Thesaurus, s.v. “Freak-Folk,” Cambridge University Press, accessed 23 June 2016, http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/freak-folk; Kerry L. Smith, Encyclopedia of Indie Rock (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2008), 173.}), are more specific in their intent and not as inclusive as new folk in capturing musicians that are working in unique ways with technology, lyricism, instrumentation and thematic material around intimacy and place. Reducing the stylistic parameters to Encarnacão’s definition of new folk has enabled me to focus on a subset of musicians to investigate the implications of new folk music in the context of place. In the following chapters, I discuss the correlation between new folk artists and their lyrical and thematic connection to place, whether through narrative, virtual or natural constructions. The connection between new folk music and place is one that I have observed in my own music as well as the artists mentioned throughout the thesis. Through my own practice and examination of new folk musicians, I identify a shared way of considering place that extends beyond our physical surroundings.
Chapter One investigates narrative constructions of place within new folk songwriting. Here my argument centres on the use of place within songs as a tool to create imagery, connection and empathy in the listener. Musicologist Holly Watkins refers to “narratives of locality” used by contemporary composers and songwriters. There are many ways that location and place might be applied in songwriting but, as Watkins argues, fictional musical narratives can stand in for current social perceptions about how we feel, interact and experience the world. I first present an explanation of the relationship between music and narrative to form a basis for how lyrics, storytelling devices and songs are interconnected. Next, I look more specifically at ideas of place and placelessness in new folk songwriting, using examples of artists who display a strong focus on place within their work. Finally, I explore the relationship an audience might have to songs about place to understand how empathy and an individual listening experience can reveal new aspects of place. Song examples from Scott Walker, Joanna Newsom and Will Oldham provide concrete examples to demonstrate narrative place.

Music and narrative
A song can be a vehicle for telling stories. Imagery and sentiment in music are frequently developed through a formalised structure, involving a dramatic approach similar to that of literature, often with an introduction, climax and resolution. Narratives within society also play a crucial role in how we interact with each other and how we understand our individual selves. Musicologist Vincent Meelberg claims that “human beings have a basic inclination to interpret the world around them in a narrative manner.” Meelberg proposes that music narratives are more successful in achieving this than other kinds of narratives, arguing that “narratives move towards certain goals. Narratives suggest some sense of motion, a sense of going in some direction. And music elicits this sense perhaps even

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40 Relph, Place and Placelessness, 1.
42 Ibid.
stronger than verbal narrative does.” On the other hand, musicologist Susan McClary queries this ability, posing the question: “Can music itself tell stories?” McClary argues that most music of the twentieth century fails in its narrative efficacy through a reliance on a conventional approach to composition involving static configurations (e.g., verse, chorus, verse). She notes: “We have settled into a way of experiencing time that involves the repetition of tiny units. Whatever the sources of this increasingly pervasive process, [music] assiduously resists narrative structuring, even when its lyrics tell stories.” If mainstream music adheres to a standardised format, rendering it narratively weak, what can be said about works that diverge from this systematic inertia? I argue that new folk’s utilisation of strong imagery, personal exploration and lyrical and stylistic experimentation all work in favour of imbuing a narrative depth within songs. There are many examples of new folk songwriters, notably Scott Walker and Joanna Newsom, as well as avant-garde artists and even sound artists who demonstrate an unorthodox and at times disconcerting approach to composition and narrative. They resist industry standards of form through experimentation with new methodologies, such as musique concrète [natural or man-made sounds recorded from the environment (e.g., birds, trains, door creaks)], and perceiving the listener as collaborator.

If we accept this cohabitation of music and narrative in new folk songs, what is more ambiguous is the question of how stories are communicated, in terms of form and the mode of delivery (for example, oral traditions versus new technologies). What also needs to be explored further is the creation, or collapse, of social connection within these listening spaces. As Jacques Attali argues, through its expressive palette and broad accessibility, music is able to mirror the complexities of our social environments. Through practice, new folk artists are finding new ways to extend approaches to storytelling, while simultaneously disturbing ideas of connection and meaning.

Scott Walker
While Scott Walker doesn’t only fit under the genre of new folk, he is an artist who demonstrates many of the characteristics I have observed in this style – strong lyricism and

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44 Ibid., 250.
46 Ibid., 22.
imagery that builds narrative, experimentation with form and structure, and unconventional vocal delivery. In *The Drift*, Walker creates a collection of songs that are linked thematically and yet have their own unique tensions around place and disconnection.⁴⁹ Although Walker’s lyrics tend toward the absurd – for example: “Where will you sleep my stomach/ My second stomach through the trees” – his references to place are significant.⁵⁰ Walker’s music can be viewed as a soliloquy on humanity, in which, as Timothy Deines writes, “distinctions, such as the difference between ‘nature’ and ‘human,’ collapse.”⁵¹ The erosion of these distinctions works to relocate the listener away from the present and into a world of Walker’s creation.

In the 12-minute song “Clara,” Walker demonstrates a crafted approach to narrative tension that transports the listener into a dream (or nightmare) state. The song is based on the mistress of dictator Benito Mussolini, Clara Petucci, who chose to remain with Mussolini rather than escape when she had the chance. Mussolini and Petucci were shot after trying to flee and then publicly hanged at the Piazzale Loreto in Milan.⁵² Walker’s lyrics evoke the macabre aspects of the imagined scene:

This is not a cornhusk doll,  
Dipped in blood in the moonlight,  
Like what happened in America.  

This is us, our eyesides snagged,  
Dipped in mob in the daylight,  
Like what happened in America.⁵³

Walker has shifted our attention to an historical imagining, re-envisioning the death of these two figures. The interchange between voice (mournful and operatic) and narrative (through dramaturgy) progresses the scene along with a distinct application of a rich sound palette. He does this in a metaphorical way – “dipped in mob in the daylight” – to engender an experience of tactile association around the historical event. Understanding the mechanics behind Walker’s songs also enriches the musical experience. For example, the rhythmic slapping heard two minutes into “Clara” we know to be a percussionist punching a slab of meat.⁵⁴ The knowledge shifts our experience to a participatory one, locating sounds outside the expected range. This information helps to constitute the song’s

⁴⁹ Scott Walker, *The Drift*.
⁵² *Scott Walker: 30 Century Man*, directed by Stephen Kijak (Melbourne: Madmen Films, 2006), DVD.
⁵⁴ *Scott Walker: 30 Century Man*. 
meaning and, through the collective act, magnifies the anxiety implicit in the song. Using a known event with strong image-based lyrics means that the listener experiences the narrative within a designated location; we are placed in that dramatised scene and this aids our connection to the song.

**Place in new folk music**

The utilisation of strong imagery, personal revelation, and lyrical and stylistic experimentation in new folk music enhance narrative value. While many songs make reference to place, some necessarily do so. They develop nuance and emotional richness from an engagement with their surroundings. Within the location of a song I explore the devices at play in composing a “unique spot.” Within the narrative structures, I observe the textual indicators, the musical references and motifs, and the narrative drivers that communicate to us where a piece is positioned, and what impact this has on interpretations of meaning. Through the old-world fables of Joanna Newsom, or the pagan woodland scenes of Midlake, to the urban veracity of Sun Kill Moon, a relationship to physical place is of fundamental concern to these songwriters. Applying this perspective to my research, there is an interesting trend in the way that a sense of place is used in these songs to reflect our relationship with, and anxieties about, our changing environment, invoking concerns around climate change, digital expansion and social connection. In a sense, it is the interaction that songwriters have with place that allows us to step back and view how we as a society experience the world, attributing meaning to the complex events we face globally. As Timothy Morton writes, “art sometimes gives voice to what is unspeakable elsewhere.” Viewed in this way, music that contains a strong conception of place retains greater meaning and intentionality for interpretation of everyday human experiences.

Applying a conceptual understanding of place within art, and specifically music and songwriting, enables us to make sense of song meaning and narratives in a unique way. Music has the potential to inspire an emotional connection in a listener that is specifically individual. Paul Graves-Brown argues that music is expressive in that “it does not try, as a painting does, to re-present some thing, but rather to evoke an experience, emotion or event.” Music simultaneously has an illustrative function, engendering place through its locational and image devices. Holly Watkins notes that “music of all sorts takes place in

place, so to speak, and it also takes part in place. But music is also a place of sorts.”\(^{58}\) Within the framework of songs, place becomes a multifaceted construct, operating not solely as a locational marking point, but also as a means of helping to ground the complexity of the human experience. In this context place has a refined purpose, one that can help us to find meaning in our every day lives, through the replication of fantasy and imagery held in music and other artforms.

**Will Oldham**

Will Oldham may be one of the first proponents of the new folk genre, according to John Encarnacao.\(^{59}\) Under the early banner of the Palace Brothers, Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy and now under his own name, Oldham’s musical palette explores DIY and lo-fi recording techniques, and a mode of vocal delivery that is both highly skilled and yet conveys a sense of fragility and naivety. “The effect is of rawness and fragility,” notes Encarnacao, where a consciously unpolished approach is underlined by “a powerful intimacy.”\(^{60}\) While Oldham’s music moves between country, rock and punk aesthetics, there is an underlying sense of lyricism and connection to place that grounds his music. On the album *I See a Darkness*, Oldham explores fear and loneliness in a rough-hewn manner that aligns with the concepts of place and placelessness, when considering Gieryn’s sense of place as comprising “meaning and value.”\(^{61}\) In the song “A Minor Place” Oldham (as Bonnie ‘Prince’ Billy) sings:

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I have been to a minor place,
And I can say I like its face.
If I am gone and with no trace,
I will be in a minor place.\(^{62}\)
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A sense of place is a main driver in this song and in many of Oldham’s works. Robert Forster writes that Oldham “can imbue each album with a sense of place and intent.”\(^{63}\) In this brief stanza, place reflects both somewhere one can go – a physical location – as well as the more abstract sense of a place for the disappeared, shown by the lyrics: “If I am gone and with no trace.” The idea of a minor place is particularly compelling here suggesting that place has large and small elements. Music narratives work to create these

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60 Ibid., 183.
63 Forster, “In Search of a Songwriter,” 70.
minor and major places, via a direct and literal evocation of surroundings through imagery, and via the social and emotional processes of interpretation to help emplace us more figurally.

### Joanna Newsom

In her music, harpist Joanna Newsom harnesses strong image-based language as a storytelling device to describe an archaic and, at the same time, contemporary relationship to place. Newsom fits into the new folk category through experimentation with sound and form to create structural novelty in her songs. She also experiments with narrative through long-form ballads, intricate polyrhythmic harp lines and unconventional vocals. As John Encarnacão writes, “Newsom shares with many new folk artists a celebration of nature that extends into anthropomorphism.”

Her music places nature at its centre, creating a mystical fiction of pastoral-meets-whimsy. On the album *Ys*, she connects with the listener on an emotional level and the virtuosic techniques, and rich arrangements, are integral to an intimate sense of sharing a story. Newsom’s avant-garde techniques are muted by the innocence of her delivery, which engages the listener and convinces us that we are listening to a narrative. The song “Emily,” written for her sister, exemplifies this combination of technique and emotional connection with the listener via intimate lyrics:

> And, Emily, I saw you last night by the river.  
> I dreamed you were skipping little stones across the surface of the water.  
> Frowning at the angle where they were lost, and slipped under forever.  
> In a mud-cloud, mica-spangled, like the sky’d been breathing on a mirror.

> Anyhow, I sat by your side, by the water.  
> You taught me the names of the stars overhead,  
> That I wrote down in my ledger.  
> Though all that I knew of the rote universe,  
> Were those Pleiades loosed in December.  
> I promised you I’d set them to verse so I’d always remember.

“Emily” is 12 minutes in length and the lyrical content runs to almost 900 words. This unhindered approach to a song format enables Newsom to create a visual landscape that is rich and strange, taking her listeners on a journey into a fantastical space. This free-form approach, argues Claire Coleman, “allow[s] the songs and lyrics to develop organically, free of the constraints or traditions of either the art or pop music spectra.”

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64 Encarnacão, *Punk Aesthetics and New Folk: Way Down the Old Plank Road*, 194.

65 Newsom, “Emily,” *Ys*, track 1.

66 Coleman, “‘The Wild Blue Yonder Looms’: Joanna Newsom’s Wildness,” 64.
era. Words like “ledger” and the cluster of stars “Pleiades” (with links to Greek mythology\(^{67}\)) takes a scene by a river throwing pebbles and propels it to a past time. Place in Newsom’s work becomes an insignia for longing. Through her fictionalised setting she is able to talk about love and hope for her sister in a nonconcrete way, at once removing the literal experience whilst maintaining intimacy.

**Empathy in a listening context**

“If a sparrow comes before my window I take part in its existence and pick about the gravel.”\(^{68}\)

So far I have explored narrative intent within songs and place as a conceptual and expressive tool. Now I consider how connection and empathy are established through place-based narratives in new folk songs. I am interested in how empathy and an individual listening experience can reveal new interpretations of music. Through an understanding of emotional engagement to narrative music, I will explore what social meaning an audience might gain from their listening experience. It is through this abstracted engagement with place that an audience can find his or her own meaning and application within a broader social context. It is important to emphasise that this is not an empirical study into how a listener might specifically “feel” when listening to a piece of music. As Amy Coplan and Peter Goldie write, this is a “problem of intersubjectivity” and whether “we know others’ mental states.”\(^{69}\)

Further to this, I am not trying to ascertain individual responses to place-based songs. Instead, I am concerned with locating an empathic framework within music narratives to demonstrate how an audience might emplace themselves within a fictional composition through the process of empathy.

Empathy in art is an ambiguous subject for many theorists, psychologists and artists. Graham McFee discusses the problematic task of trying to define empathy claiming a “lack of consensus among scholars.”\(^{70}\) Edward Titchener explains empathy as “feeling into” or “einfühlung” – a way of knowing another person’s, or character’s, emotional perspective.\(^{71}\) Empathy allows us to adopt another’s experiences, filtered through our own

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\(^{69}\) Coplan and Goldie, “Introduction,” xiii.


experiences, and in the process to learn more about ourselves. This is a dual event according Coplan and Goldie: “We experience the other’s feelings as our own because we project our own feelings onto the other.”\(^7\) This act creates an exchange between emotion and identity. Coplan further describes empathy as a deep cognitive and emotional process, noting that “when I empathize with another, I take up his or her psychological perspective and imaginatively experience, to some degree or other, what he or she experiences.”\(^7\) In this sense, a reader’s empathy with a character or narrative co-exists with retention of the self as an individual. Graham McFee outlines a slightly different set of criteria for empathy as “a degree of matching [emotions] as its success condition” between a character, or narrator, and the reader.\(^7\) These are important points for my research, as they inform the different kinds of conditions under which empathy can be viewed and establish a mode for interpreting empathy within a listening context.

It is my contention that empathy enables a listener to uniquely connect to music that has strong place imagery and often very personal or intimate themes. I argue that it is possible to listen to a piece and be transported into the story, to have an empathic response with the character, to feel like you are there in the narrative. Vincent Meelber observes that “a narrative listening stance, a stance in which music is narrativized, explicitly calls for the active contribution of the listener in order to structure the music in time.”\(^7\) Narrativity in music, where music itself becomes the storyteller, generates co-authorship with an active, participatory audience. Jad Abumrad, creator of Radiolab (a science radio show and podcast), utilises digital approaches to composition, such as splicing and layering of sound, to tell stories in a semi-musical way. He describes the ability to create imaginative inclusion in the listener with the possibility of empathy. Abumrad believes that his audience is a collaborator in the creative process: “I’m painting something but I’m not holding the paintbrush. You are. So it’s this deep act of co-authorship and in that is some potential for empathy.”\(^7\) This is not to say that there is a loss of the individual self in the process. According to Coplan, empathy requires a “self-other differentiation,” which works to keep distinct the imagined self from the real self (challenging Baudillard’s notion of hyperreality.

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\(^7\) Coplan and Goldie, “Introduction,” xii.
\(^7\) McFee, “Empathy: Interpersonal Vs Artistic,” 192.
\(^7\) Meelberg, New Sounds, New Stories: Narrativity in Contemporary Music, 224.
as will be discussed in Chapter Two). This distinction of identities has another possible outcome – the ability to use one’s own experiences in the creation of meaning behind a song. The intimacy and connectedness that we experience with narratives in music, particularly place-based narratives, lead us toward broader notions of social identity, connection and meaning.

**Sun Kil Moon**

The music of Sun Kil Moon offers an interesting example of narrative empathy through songwriting that comes from a distinctly personal approach. On the album *Benji*, Sun Kil Moon’s Mark Kozelek is processing personal loss and a crisis around identity, and the lo-fi techniques and his grainy vocals, contrasted against fine classical guitar lines, presents the mix between folk technique and a newer approach that is distinctive of new folk. In his lyrics, Kozelek engages with an idea of place that is steeped in imagery and personal revelation. He draws from his own experiences in a way that is, at times, uncomfortable to listen to. The writing is self-consciously personal and literal, steeped in nostalgia. On the song “Carissa,” written about his cousin, Kozelek sings:

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Carissa burned to death last night in a freak accident fire
In her yard in Brewster.
Her daughter came home from a party and found her,
Same way as my uncle, who was her grandfather.
An aerosol can blew up in the trash.
Goddamn, what were the odds?
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From a first reading, the lyrics are not immediately musical and could read as a transcript or a fragment of a letter. As lyrics they defy the poetic construction we often expect of musical text. The text is also utterly specific to the experience of this artist. However, through the strong place-based narrative imagery (for example, “In her yard in Brewster” and “An aerosol can blew up in the trash”) Kozelek paints a detailed picture for the listener. His dry, raw vocal delivery and the consistent motion of the guitar line draws us in and we can connect to the meaning behind this story, and perhaps even “feel” the narrative, even though this is not a lived experience for us. Susan McClary rhetorically questions whether we put our own history and narrative into music, reflecting our own experiences rather than the “music itself narrating.” This is an important point because it again leads to the possibility of collaboration on the part of the listener in terms of constructing song

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narratives. Empathy might allow us to connect with Kozelek’s narrative but as a listener we contribute our own story, our unique genome of experiences to the narrative thus shifting intentionality and response.

Summary
I have argued that a narrative conception of place in new folk music helps us to understand everyday human experiences, through the processes of imagery construction, empathy and projecting our own experiences onto the musical landscape. Songs that feature strong place imagery, whether it be to describe a location, surroundings or a connection between people, can help us to process strong emotional events. New folk songs, in particular, succeed at this through a relationship to exploring place and a focus on personal lyrics that expresses universal human concerns.
CHAPTER TWO:

“A KIND OF OBTUSE DREAM”:
PLACE, TECHNOLOGY AND MUSIC

While music emplaces us through its sheer physical impact on our bodies, it also transports us into alternative realities, into virtual environments of its and our own synergistic making.81

In this chapter, I turn to an analysis of how virtual music spaces, technology and replication might impact, erode or possibly even enhance social connection. Online environments offer a new setting in which the mode of listening to music challenges the terms of how we connect to one another. This can be linked to Thomas Gieryn’s idea that place is imbued with “history or utopia, danger or security, identity or memory.”82 Rather than a geographic location, online spaces convey a sense of place and are a way of exchanging information with one another through virtual situations. I explore the idea of virtual listening spaces, both in terms of music as a kind of nonconcrete place, and how new technologies expand the mode of listening, the tools we use (online, on our phones, etc.) and the kinds of music we listen to. As Holly Watkins writes, “Rethinking musical space as a virtualization of social and natural spaces – the two are always connected – helps to further understanding of music’s richly textured social and ideological fabric.”83 I employ Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra and loss of meaning through replication to reflect upon the notion of placelessness within the context of technology and music. I reference Roland Barthes’ writings on the contemplation of the photograph and Tia DeNora’s theories to reflect upon the relationship between place and memory. Finally, I argue that music technologies may in fact enhance a sense of community engagement rather than strip away intimacy. Melanie Wilson’s work “That Other Bathroom” demonstrates the role of memory in a podcast, while Phil Elverum’s music displays a fine balance between digital and analogue processes.

Online places

It is my contention that online environments constitute places, just as a house, park or school might. Gieryn excludes virtual environments in his definition of place, remarking that “websites on the Internet are not places in the same way that the room, building,

80 Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, 3.
82 Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 465.
campus, and city that house and locate a certain server is a place.” Yet virtual places, including online spaces, do meet the criteria that Gieryn has set for place, particularly in respect to place being filled with material things, and embodying a sense of meaning and identity. Paul Graves-Brown discredits the notion that online platforms are devoid of place, claiming that instead virtual media “lead us to conceptualize the world topologically, as opposed to topographically.” This topological way of perceiving place is somewhat conceptual, but no less relevant. A virtual place, notes Edward Relph, “can be considered a variant of and an addition to the current distributed sense of real place that simultaneously acknowledged geographical diversity and seeks ways to make places with compelling identities.” To extend this idea further, online environments may engender place in ways that we as humans have not yet accessed. As philosopher Luciano Floridi writes, we are visitors to this new version of place comprising computers, data, software and websites, where “they are the natives, they are the locals. … they’re building a new environment and we’re guests.”

**Virtual listening environments**

In this explosive time of new technologies, global exchange and the 24-hour news cycle, music may play a role in helping us to make sense of our expanding surroundings, through its abstract ability to recode everyday life into a signifier of human experience, depicting love, loss, hope and melancholy. As Tia DeNora writes, “music may influence how people compose their bodies, how they conduct themselves, how they experience the passage of time, how they feel – in terms of energy and emotion – about themselves, about others, and about situations.” Music has the ability, precisely through its easily transferable format and narrative intent, to carry us into fantasy in ways that help envelop our sense of identity and perhaps even participate in the construction of a new reality. Music also allows the listener to enter an abstracted state and in doing so enables a sense of place that is likened to concrete places. Holly Watkins refers to music’s “many modes of being in place,” encompassing “a virtual environment related in subtle and overt ways to actual environments.” As I argued in Chapter One, there is the potential for audiences to contribute their own interpretation to a listening experience. In this sense, music can be

84 Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 465.
seen to participate in the place-making construction of self and society. G.W.F. Hegel also proposed the idea of a listener absorbing music and through this exchange giving meaning to one’s thoughts and feelings.\textsuperscript{90} Interpreting Hegel, Charles Ford writes that music “grips” the self and this hold “frees us from the fragile limits of the individual ego, delivering us over to the collective anonymity of musical style.”\textsuperscript{91} Virtual spaces enable this anonymity through a distancing from face-to-face contact. The concept of virtual place thus has the potential to become an important social tool in the construction of identity.

Further to this, when we listen to music privately, via headphones or online, the listening state is intensified for the individual. Removed from the social mode of listening to songs with other people or in a live music context, our relationship to music is altered. Portable listening devices, writes Paul Graves-Brown, produce “an experiential ‘bubble’ that isolates us from our surroundings, and indeed listening to music can be used to eliminate our surroundings … to drown out the world around us.”\textsuperscript{92} Simon Frith points to a recent rise in live performance as a reaction to a “decline of intimacy,” indicating that technology is partially responsible for the loss of a sense of belonging and place.\textsuperscript{93} However, I would argue that when we are engaged with an online mode of listening, intensification occurs through the conviction that we are a part of the music rather than being drawn back from the imaginative brink, through the reality of a venue (for example at a bar, with sounds of other people, the clattering of glasses and other distractions). Within this confined parameter, place takes on a new role. As Graves-Brown observes, “physical media themselves represent a kind of portable place, a location around which identity in music can be constructed.”\textsuperscript{94} In this other dialectic, where we instil musical meaning, new modes of delivery can be seen to enhance a fundamental sense of place.

Access to virtual music spaces affords another function via the lens of commerce. An online marketplace of seemingly unlimited and instant access to content is changing consumer listening habits and expectations of narrative. Chris Anderson devised the \textit{Long Tail} phenomenon referring to the departure from a hit-driven market to an increasingly selective and curious one. Anderson observes: “As [people] wander further from the beaten path, they discover their taste is not as mainstream as they thought (or as they had

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been led to believe by marketing, a lack of alternatives, and a hit-driven culture.”

New tastes are revealed through exposure to diverse content, with the potential for lesser-known artists to reach a larger audience and modification of the structural assumptions that mainstream music has relied upon.

**Phil Elverum**

Phil Elverum’s music captures this tension between abstract and concrete, digital and analogue forces. He is a rare artist who records his albums using only tape, with interviewer Mike Burr calling Elverum “analog in a digital world.” Elverum fits the new folk aesthetic with lo-fi techniques, confessional lyrics and use of unconventional instruments in his music. Brian Stosuy observes that Elverum’s music is “marked by a distinctive naturalistic, self-recorded lo-fi analog sound that mixes his whispered, gentle voice – which can also yell and bellow – with ambitiously varied instrumentation.” Elverum writes strong narratives about difficult subject matter – for example, the 2001 release *The Glow Pt. 2* (under band name The Microphones) with songs about overcoming depression. In “I Want the Wind to Blow” he sings:

> The sound of cars,  
> The smell of bars,  
> The awful feeling of electric heat  
> And the fluorescent lights.  
> There's sacrifice.  
> There's hard feelings.  
> There's pointless waste.  
> I want the wind to blow  
> My clothes off me,  
> Sweep me off my feet,  
> Take me up and bring me back.  
> Oh, where I can see  
> Days pass by me.  
> I have no head to hold in grief.”

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Elverum’s engagement with place and emotion helps to create intimacy within his work. As Stosuy explains: “Lyrically, he focuses on memory, first-person storytelling, myth, naturalism, the everyday as sacred, and sense of place…” While he engages in the digital spectrum in order to release his musical output, Elverum has also found a way of connecting with his audience that balances the technology with a hands-on approach. He is an example of a new folk artist engaging with virtual listening spaces through non-virtual means to build community.

**Simulacra and placelessness**

Jean Baudrillard’s theory of simulacra explores how replication and mass media have resulted in a loss of meaning within our society and our art. Baudrillard argues that an explosion of information in the media has led to dissolution of meaning, with a superficial simulation of the real, simulacrum, resulting in a hyperreal experience – “More real than real, that is how the real is abolished.” This text was written before the ubiquity of the Internet, yet Baudrillard’s ideas have even more relevance today, where replication and reproduction are pervasive. Baudrillard further argues that art has parallels to pornography, in that it becomes meaningless and banal through an exaggerated illusion of reality. Art, like sex, has resulted in the relentless transparency of things, making apparent the mechanics, destroying any illusion and embracing the banal masquerading as authenticity.

Garen Torikian provides a solution to this tendency in art by advocating to “disentangle” hyperreality from art,” to avoid watering down the impact of art “leading to a ‘nulled’ experience.” Torikian also challenges the notion that art is compromised by this lack of division between the real and the simulated: “Art has its own distinct status in the world and offers alternatives to resist and combat hyperreality.” It does this by not assuming the function of the real. Art succeeds, essentially, by not attempting to be real.

The implosion of meaning through simulacra is like the notion of placelessness. If one of Thomas Gieryn’s criteria for place encompasses meaning and value, then the inverse of this – placelessness – would be a space where there is little to no meaning or value. Placelessness is an important concept to consider in my research because it speaks to

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99 Stosuy, “Phil Elverum.”
100 Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, 81.
103 Ibid., 101.
potential isolation from our communities in the context of virtual environments. Edward Relph suggests that with the encroachment of mass media and globalisation it is more and more difficult to feel place-connected.\footnote{Relph, \textit{Place and Placelessness}, 90.} Tim Cresswell extends this argument observing: “We are surrounded by a general condition of creeping placelessness, marked by an inability to have authentic relationships to place because the new placelessness does not allow people to become existential insiders.”\footnote{Cresswell, \textit{Place: A Short Introduction}, 44.} Cresswell describes the globalisation of technology and instant access to information as “accelerating homogenization” of our society (resulting in more non-places).\footnote{Ibid., 43.} As we become encapsulated by places that look like everything else, the distinctions between our individual selves lessen. Music is reliant on duplication to communicate to a mass audience and thus is itself at risk of becoming placeless. Through reproduction, Paul Graves-Brown argues, “music is frequently used to deconstruct and negate place.”\footnote{Graves-Brown, “Nowhere Man: Urban Life and the Virtualization of Popular Music,” 232.} Its very portability results in a transient existence.

\textbf{Place replication and memory}

“Music moves through time, it is a temporal medium. This is the first reason why it is a powerful aide-memoire. Like an article of clothing or an aroma, music is part of the material and aesthetic environment in which it was once playing, in which the past, now an artefact of memory and its constitution was once a present.”\footnote{DeNora, \textit{Music in Everyday Life}, 66-7.} One way to combat the threat of a “creeping placelessness” is to find connection within these new environments. I examine reproduction and memory within the context of place-based music to establish other ways of locating place and identity. Tia DeNora suggests that music assists us in the memory edifice, formulating the building blocks for how we compile our identities through the selective listening process, using past, present and future versions of ourselves to continually refresh our identities. “Music can be used as a device for the reflexive process of remembering/constructing who one is … a device for the generation of future identity and action structures, a mediator of future existence.”\footnote{DeNora, \textit{Music in Everyday Life}, 66-7.} We construct memory through the articulation of places that ground us in a particular time, situation or location. Memory can be used as an anchoring point, to filter and situate our experiences. As Cresswell observes, “Place and memory are, it seems, inevitably intertwined.”\footnote{Ibid., 63.}

\footnote{Cresswell, \textit{Place: A Short Introduction}, 85.}
My own recollections of camping as a child contain a synergy between memory, sound, song and place. Within this tapestry of scenes that I construct there exists a replication of experience. These images are my own recollections, tinted by the passage of time. When I consider place in this way there is an interesting duplication of an experience, where I am at once the protagonist of the event and also an observer, watching the event from a distance. Roland Barthes offers a wonderful perspective on this link to memory. In his autobiography, Barthes presents a philosophical and cerebral view of himself through analysis of his childhood photographs. He reveals to the reader the somewhat distant task of connecting image to past and memory:

When consideration … treats the image as a detached being, makes it the object of an immediate pleasure, it no longer has anything to do with the reflection, however oneiric, of an identity. … It provokes in me a kind of obtuse dream, whose units are teeth, hair, a nose, skinniness, long legs in knee-length socks which don't belong to me, though to no one else. … The childhood photograph is both highly indiscreet (it is my body from underneath which is presented) and quite discreet (the photograph is not of ‘me’).  

Barthes does not attempt to extract the memory itself, but the image of the memory. This intersects with my research in exploring different perspectives of the imagined and the real, within Baudrillard’s conception of simulacra. The memory I have of sitting around the campfire, listening to stories and songs, is altered through this experiential lens. It is already a reproduction, a distorted and idealised event where the subject is not I but a “discreet” self. However, this altered memory does not necessarily implode the meaning behind the recollection. And in the context of music, songs about place and memory can in turn reflect our own experiences, and contribute further meaning and value to the listening experience.

Melanie Wilson

Melanie Wilson is a sound artist who creates interactive installations to engage with her audience through expanded listening experiences around memory and place. In her work, she shares similar stylistic devices with new folk songwriters, including the application of lo-fi techniques to engage her audience, along with deliberate textual frameworks, strong imagery and anchorage to place. In “That Other Bathroom” podcast, Wilson notes that it was “created to be listened to at a distinct time and location: in front of the mirror, in your

111 Barthes, Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes, 3.
bathroom, with the door shut, in the evening time.” Through an intimate narrative, coupled with a dynamic and referential soundtrack (water running in the bath, taps being turned off), Wilson creates an experience for the listener of being both inside and outside the piece. The narrative depicts a man standing in his bathroom and looking into the mirror:

He recalls a moment when he is standing in another bathroom, much as he is doing now. It was a moment maybe a year or so ago, in a bathroom in another city. Very vividly he remembers looking into the mirror and thinking about his bathroom at home, here. The sound of the door as it closes, the smell, the towels, and here he turns and regards the room as if from a distance. … Then, turning back to the mirror, the sensation of the memory settling on him, persisting. The use of the mirror is important in this piece. T.M. Knox, in the preface to Hegel's *Aesthetics*, describes how our own mind is mirrored: “Consciousness becomes aware of itself by being aware of objects and then by being reflected back into itself from them. … The eye does not see itself except through its reflection in the mirror.” A memory, as I have argued, is highly constructed and the selected imagery represents the narrative in a very specific way. In Wilson's piece, we as listeners apply our own memory and place-sense to this scene, in which the character is reimagining another scene. The replication is cyclical. Within each version we construct meaning and intimacy through an emotional identification with the protagonist and the ability as listeners to form an identity. The podcast format aids connection to the story, allowing the composer to set the listening parameters (“at home, in front of the mirror”), creating an inclusive performance in a transferable space. The technology that allows us access to this piece at home adds another dimension of intimacy. The accessibility of the podcast, according to Richard Berry, sees “audiences, cut off from traditional media, rediscover their voices.” Rather than passive audience engagement, listeners become collaborators and are thus more involved in the construction of place.

Virtual communities

While new mediums may steer us beyond traditional forms of narrative, the mode of delivery does not necessarily hinder our ability to engage emotionally. My argument is based on Tia DeNora’s statement that “technologies are social as well as technical,” with new technologies participating in the formation of identity.\(^\text{116}\) It is important to consider how new modes of listening might isolate us from traditional social environments, in turn helping or hindering a connective process. Paul Graves-Brown argues that technology has played a role in the decline of social connection and “the collapse in the sense of belonging to a place.”\(^\text{117}\) However, I contend that it is precisely the erosion of face-to-face connection in virtual spaces that solidifies our intent to find social value online. As Kazys Varnelis and Anne Friedberg observe, new technologies have the capacity to extend the way we connect with each other, giving us choice over how and when we find that point of connection.\(^\text{118}\) Any disengagement experienced via technology may be offset by a different kind of place connection. The mass media we are surrounded by – Facebook, Twitter, online news, YouTube, Instagram – may provide a new type of social network unmediated by physical location, but still engendering a sense of place. Places, Doreen Massey argues, “are not so much bounded areas as open and porous networks of social relations.”\(^\text{119}\) The engagement with technology can further be seen as a diversion from the constant need to be in place. As Mark Pedelty notes: “The modern consciousness seeks escape from place, and modern technologies, from thermostats to earbuds, provide it. … our minds are quite literally elsewhere.”\(^\text{120}\)

If place is essential to our being, and conceptions of place have an impact on aspects of our social and individual identities, then how do place and placelessness in art work to divide or connect us? Jad Abumrad describes a podcast as having the ability to transcend the everyday tools used to convey it, thereby achieving something greater than its parts. He observes: “The kind of storytelling that I do is somehow independent of the technology that delivers it. … Your job as a storyteller is to create a circle of connection

that might as well be thousands of years ago around the campfire.” New folk songwriters, by necessity, engage within this simulated environment, but their music in some ways belies the media and creates connection amidst these individualised environments. They resist this digital space, thematically and at times technically, creating community in the midst of virtual insulation. According to Mark Pedelty, there is a symbiosis with technology, identity and place, in which “people, places, and technologies generate songs. In return, music helps define who we are and mediates our imagination of place.” New folk songwriters, like Joanna Newsom and Midlake, apply this approach to their music by narrating faraway places, to help to designate feelings and experiences that are closer to home.

**Summary**

I have argued that there are many ways to consider virtual place, from observing music as a constructed environment, to examining whether online tools and platforms exist in similar ways to more concrete spaces. Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra and Barthes’ exploration of a replicated image both extend the complexity of simulated spaces. Ultimately, I argue that within these various online environments we encounter similar concerns around social connection and disconnection as with other places. Online spaces can be equally as inclusive, or exclusive, of community as concrete spaces. New folk musicians navigate this tension between abstract and physical ideas of place through the particular techniques and thematic content of their songs.

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CHAPTER THREE

“IT’S LONESOME OUT THERE ON THE PRAIRIE”¹²³:
NATURE, ECOLOGY AND PLACE

“In order to have an environment, you need to have a space for it; in order to have an idea of an environment, you need ideas of space (and place).”¹²⁴

In this chapter, I turn to ecological concerns of place-based music to interpret how music that features our surroundings, particularly the natural environment, might also reflect wider social concerns. Nature in art is not only concerned with ecology, but permeates all particles of the artist’s experience. As Timothy Morton states: “All texts – all artworks, indeed – have an irreducibly ecological form. … We will soon be accustomed to wondering what any text says about the environment, even if no animals or trees or mountains appear in it.”¹²⁵ I identify ecological concerns about place, noting that the musicians who utilise new folk techniques often rely on nature-based imagery to tell their stories. While their music could not be described as environmental (in the sense of a “politics of the natural,” as Noel Sturgeon describes it¹²⁶), there is often a predilection for the other, the retrograde of urbanity, within their writing. I examine the notion of “nature” to understand some of the motivations behind songs that have strong natural themes. Finally, I examine the broader social implications of the role nature has to play in our society, as a way of escaping our everyday lives through a transformative listening space. Throughout, I focus on ideas of nature as set against the songs of artists Midlake, Bill Callahan and Laura Marling.

Nature in new folk songs

It is my contention that the tendency toward natural themes in many new folk songs represents a greater search for meaning by engaging with intangible aspects of an idealised landscape. As Holly Watkins explains, “music has been caught in a continuous cycle of displacement and re-placement for as long as its history can be reconstructed. Music may even work to transform concrete places into more abstract spaces.”¹²⁷ It is this abstraction that I am interested in, the capacity that music has to modify our experience of our

¹²³ Forster, “In Search of a Songwriter,” 68.
¹²⁵ Morton, The Ecological Thought, 11.
environment. Of particular impact is the work of Timothy Morton, who sets out to erode the unimpeachable status that we give to nature, frequently described as “a reified thing in the distance, under the sidewalk, on the other side where the grass is always greener, preferably in the mountains, in the wild.”128 This is particularly relevant in the context of contemporary songwriting where nature is often elevated to the supernatural, and artists represent an exotic imagining (in particular I am thinking of the portrayal of the “mystical musings” of Björk129). Morton questions the displacement of nature to a stature outside our everyday environment, investing in this fantasy an unattainable utopia. This is not to denigrate all art that evokes the nature identity as a trope. As I argue, aesthetics with strong themes of nature contribute to the experience of being in place.

**Midlake**

The American band Midlake engages with nature in a particular way within their music. On the album *The Trials of Van Occupanther*, writer Tim Smith elucidates aspects of nature that convey a longing for an ideal, escaping from the mundane reality of everyday concerns. He explains: “When I listen to Prokofiev or Rachmaninoff, it’s not the hardened streets of New York. It’s out in the woods or something. That’s my happy place. There’s a real longing to be in that place, but people hardly ever get there. You get up and go to work instead.”130 The social strategy and function in music as a form of escape is not a new thought but, as Timothy Morton observes, natural themes in music might play more than just an escapist role:

> “Perhaps the experience of being cajoled into a landscape that is so non-human, serves partly to give us space from the interminable structure and rigidity of everyday life. Perhaps it gives our minds a breather, just as a trip to the ocean might restore a sense of peace, so too might the imagery that a song conjures.”131

In the song “Chasing After Deer,” Smith creates a dual experience between the reality of the locational awareness (being set in a forest) and a broader social tone (chasing an unattainable goal):

> For myself I must remind,  
> That the woods are usually kind,  
> And the sea is not mine.

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And when you’re all alone,
And chasing after deer,
Don’t be upset if it’s scared,
And you can’t reach it.

I know that you are fast,
But it’s much faster,
And after a while you can’t keep up,
So you start to lag behind.

But it doesn’t know,
That you’ve resigned.
So off a cliff,
It falls to the sea,
And you are sad,
But the sea is not mine.132

The abstraction of the forest setting and the characters within the song removes the listener enough from a sense of everyday to be able to contemplate larger themes in a non-grandiose way. It succeeds in doing this by using metaphor to explore feelings of belonging and the inevitability of death through the character of the deer, who simultaneously represents the “other” (not human), and the protagonist “I,” through an empathic connection to the experience of pursuing something. Reviewer David Simpson writes of the album: “[It] places itself in the head of an imaginary 19th-century hermit. This allows vocalist/multi-instrumentalist Tim Smith to ponder everything from unrequited love to the environment.”133 This piece also draws from pastoral themes. The pastoral is defined as a dichotomy between forces and “the projection of a philosophical opposition, generally one between art and nature or between country and city.”134 The pastoral in art symbolises a way of life that our urbanised communities would appear to lack. For example, in “Chasing After Deer,” there is a disjuncture between the desire to become part of the landscape and the admission that we cannot possess nature.

The nature ideal
Reflecting on the previous chapter, where I explored notions of an original “pure” artefact versus duplication through simulacra, nature-based music has closely aligned itself to a purity of approach. David Ingram observes that “advocates of folk music claim that

authenticity in music derives from the performer or style of music being close to nature.\(^1^{135}\)

In this sense, the pastoral and nature itself are perceived to represent virtuous places whilst urban environments and technology come to represent artificial landscapes. I am interested in challenging the idea of nature as a mysterious muse. If we are to think about ecology in a less whimsical sense, to understand what is happening to our environment, as well as how this might be expressed through our art forms, it is essential to deconstruct how nature and its various forms are played out in our music. As Morton explains, “art forms have something to tell us about the environment, because they can make us question reality.”\(^1^{136}\)

The more that we relegate our natural environment to a reified object, the more distant we become from the realities of our impact on the environment. “The environment is not an ‘other to us,’” write Lakoff and Johnson, but “part of our being.”\(^1^{137}\)

Critics of nature writing in music dismiss the shoe-gazer trend of writing about the environment and the self. Robert Forster argues that over the last decade we have returned to some of the stylistic music ideals of the 1970s, with a “mother-nature muse.”\(^1^{138}\) He writes: “The current crop has forsaken the cowboys and their ladies and the good times past for a more neurotic and charged reading of the landscape itself.”\(^1^{139}\) Forster is dismissive of the self-reflective style of writing and calls for a new type of songwriter that is “willing to stake out new territory and leave nature well enough alone.”\(^1^{140}\) However, it is simplistic to dismiss nature themes in music as being too introspective and disconnected from reality. While I agree that new waves of writing are useful for refreshing our reflective social analysis, and perhaps there is a dependency on themes of nature as a metaphor for an idealised existence, songs about our environment often take on a new function in attempting to make sense of the relationship between our man-made environment and the natural one. In the context of architectural theory, Dolores Hayden refers to the essence of how we look to aspects of place within our everyday lives, noting: “The aesthetic qualities of the built environment, positive or negative, need to be understood as inseparable from those of the natural environment.”\(^1^{141}\) By removing the distinction between man-made and natural spaces, an underlying sense of unity comes to define place.

\(^{138}\) Forster, “In Search of a Songwriter,” 68.
\(^{139}\) Ibid.
\(^{140}\) Ibid., 71.
Laura Marling

Given the struggle against conceptions of a “pure” wilderness set against “artificial” man-made landscapes, and even virtual spaces, it doesn’t seem surprising that songs of place and social isolation dominate music, particularly in the new folk genre. Laura Marling’s unusual approach to songs, vocalised hints towards Joni Mitchell, and a political leaning in her lyricism, makes her a fitting subject for my research. In “When Were You Happy? (And How Long Has That Been?)” she voices this predicament:

Hey there new friend across the sea,
If you figure things out, would you figure in me?
Wouldn’t it be a thing,
To live somewhere quietly where there’s a breeze,
And there’s a reason for us to be?

I look at people here in this city and wonder if they’re lonely,
or like me they’re not content to live as things are meant to be.
When were you happy?
And how long has that been?\textsuperscript{142}

In this piece, there is a sense of tracking the urban to find connection amidst the concrete surroundings. The discord between an urban life and an esoteric natural “other” sits beneath the longing for contentment and connection. As Marling remarks, “access to nature is almost a privilege now. And though I believe that technology may one day catch up and help us go back to a pre-Industrial Revolution style of living, we miss out on a great deal by being so cut off from the natural world.”\textsuperscript{143} In her music, this balance is brought to the fore, reflecting the duality that many people face in grappling with an urban surrounding.

Environmental aesthetics

In order to understand the role of nature and the environment in music, we also need to examine how nature and art function together and the ways in which our society expresses concerns about climate change, technology and globalisation through aesthetic means. The tendency to write about nature, particularly in new folk music, may in part be motivated by a desire to express anxiety about our environment. As Lawrence Buell writes, “an

\textsuperscript{142} Marling, “When Were You Happy? (And How Long Has That Been?),” Once I Was an Eagle, track 13.
awakened sense of physical location and of belonging to some sort of place-based community have a great deal to do with activating environmental concern.”^{144} It’s an unsettling time in the world for conversations around nature. From the threat of global warming, to the realities of an increasing population and dwindling of resources, the world is a worrying place and our role in it still very untenable. The notion of art is crucial for a deeper discussion of nature. Morton observes, “for it is in art that the fantasies we have about nature take shape – and dissolve.”^{145} He also draws attention to the fascinating prospect of nature becoming less mysterious once it is labelled.^{146} In highlighting the specifics of our surroundings, the supernatural element is removed and the concept of nature is normalised. This has particular implications for music where we play with, and explore, aspects of our environment – the ugly and harsh aspects as well as the beautiful ones. Songwriters Scott Walker, Bill Callahan and Joanna Newsom all play with notions of the grotesque in their songs, making their music more complex and intriguing. Further to this, by unseating the idyll of nature, we begin to shift our conception of nature from a pure otherness, instead regarding it as another type of place that is able reflect ordinary social concerns.

**Bill Callahan**

On *Red Apple Falls*, Bill Callahan explores the frailty of human existence through environmental narratives, revealing the interplay between beauty and violence that is a theme of much of his music. Callahan is one of the earliest proponents of the new folk genre.^{147} Originally recording under the band name “Smog,” he brings a deep oratorical voice and serious, image-rich lyrics to his music. His folk guitar rhythms help to set his music in a tradition of folk storytelling. Throughout his music he has engaged with themes of nature and, like Scott Walker, the darkness of his lyrics conveys an emotional depth through a fictionalised narrative, sustained by a rich musical palette. The song “Blood Red Bird” is an example of how Callahan uses natural themes:

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What cries home?
Where cries from?
A blood red bird lies in the woods,
Weeping into dead leaves,
With wing torn and jutting bone.
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^{144} Buell, *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. And Beyond*, 56.
^{146} Ibid.
What hand bent it to bust,
To be useless?
What hand? I could have done it,
With two fingers.
A blood red bird.
A blood red bird. 148

While it is possible to analyse the lyrics purely from a point of narrative intent, the final two stanzas in this song provide an interesting context. The song at first seems to be about a dying bird, maimed from some unfortunate instance. Further in, the piece becomes more clearly about the writer. We know that, with the strength of his two fingers, the narrator too could have killed this creature. In this sense, the song becomes about the dominance of man over animal. The piece is also an exploration of his state of mind, showing a capacity for destruction of the self and the other. Amidst the harsh reality of death, there is a beauty to the music that belies the darker tone. This is also evident in the music of Scott Walker, who argues against a perception of nihilism in his music. Walker has responded to the claim that his music is morose, saying “I’m so puzzled when people say it’s all dark, dark, dark, whereas I think there’s a lot of beauty in it. Obvious beauty.” 149 It is this dichotomy between the lovely and the grotesque that makes nature and art so compelling. As Morton explains: “Environmental art, from low to high, from pastoral kitsch to urban chic, from Thoreau to Sonic Youth, plays with, reinforces, or deconstructs the idea of nature.” 150

Viewing nature from this perspective contextualises some of the greater concerns that we are facing, specifically in our relationship to nature through ecology and the global climate crisis. In this sense, there is a connective quality between the stories encapsulated by new folk songwriters and the preservation of a concept of nature that seems to be slipping away.

Summary
In this chapter, I have examined how varied and complex conceptions of nature can be used in new folk music. From activism and the pastoral, to a sense of escapism, nature themes in music cannot be seen simply as an esoteric statement, but reflect the intricacies of human experience. Whether new folk songs use the pastoral to express longing and nostalgia, as with Midlake and Laura Marling, or play with more stark forms of our natural surroundings, as with Bill Callahan and Scott Walker, place and nature present a complex relationship.

CONCLUSION:

“BEYOND THE TREES”

By examining different aspects of place within new folk music, I have argued that themes of social connection, narrative empathy, virtual environments and our relationship to nature impact the interpretation of new folk songs, their lyrics, instrumentation and form. Thomas Gieryn’s thoughts on places are a keystone to the research, where he writes, “place matters for politics and identity, history and futures, inequality and community.”

I first lay the foundations for this practice-led research project, establishing a framework for my argument, presenting a summary of my methodological approach and creative practice and outlining some key terms that will be used throughout. I have used John Encarnacao’s definition of new folk to encapsulate a small body of musicians who engage with folk traditions, new instrumentation and experimentation with form and technology in their songwriting. There are certainly other ways to interrogate folk making, including broader folk forms, such as free improvisation, computer music, hacked electronics, and so on, however these are beyond the scope of this thesis and could be explored in more detail in future research.

I have explored narratives of place in this thesis, how different settings can embody complex stories about our lives, connecting us through imagery and empathy. Vincent Meelberg and Susan McClary provide a context for narrative efficacy across both literature and music. Amy Coplan, Peter Goldie and Graham McFee offer insights into empathy and art, in support of my argument about how the listening experience can transport us into a new reality. The music of Scott Walker, Will Oldham, Joanna Newsom and Sun Kil Moon is examined to show how rich lyrical imagery can create powerful narratives around place and identity within a new folk aesthetic.

Concepts of technology and place have been analysed, both in terms of websites and virtual spaces as well as how music can embody abstract places. Holly Watkins makes an excellent case for virtual space making in relation to real, physical locations. Tia DeNora, Simon Frith and Paul Graves-Brown write about how technology places or displaces us. These ideas are further articulated through my place-based songwriting, where I employ digital techniques, such as doubling of voices, reverb and other post-production effects to create a sense of distance and altered reality. Jean Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra adds

151 Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 482.
complexity to the notion of virtual place with the warning that mass media implodes meaning, resulting in a hyperreal state. Roland Barthes represents himself as an imaged memory, an example of how replication can be both real and unreal. Finally, I argue that online communities are being formed just as old ones might be disappearing, creating new forms of connection and intimacy. Phil Elverum and Melanie Wilson work closely with technology in their music, drawing on digital techniques as a distancing mechanism as well as using it to enact intimacy.

Timothy Morton’s definitions of nature and place play a substantial role in this thesis, representing natural spaces not only as places of beauty – the “natural” is often used to represent idyllic notions of humanity in music – but also as places of ugliness and isolation. Environmental considerations are unavoidable when discussing nature and art, with climate change and ecological issues redefining our ongoing relationship to nature. Lawrence Buell’s contributions in this area help to contextualise the critical implications of place for motivating environmental engagement. Midlake, Laura Marling and Bill Callahan, in particular, incorporate themes of nature within their music to depict multifaceted human experiences, such as loneliness, fear and self-destruction.

Through my creative practice I examine the vast, daunting and sometimes synthetic versions of our lives within the spaces in which we live. In the following creative folio, place is represented through the three aspects articulated above: narrative place, virtual place and natural place. Narrative place is explored through lyrical imagery to embody a sense of being in a location. Virtual place is represented through lyrics that question whether our increased engagement with technology creates further isolation, or whether there is capacity for a new kind of connection. Production techniques are important to the representation of virtual space, with the use of digital effects including reverb, doubling of voices, field recordings and other digital processes to create a contrast between a perceived intimacy of being in place and a potential distancing through different vocal placements. My songs also are heavily influenced by a personal experience of nature, stemming from early years camping in Australian bushland. The following collection of songs emphasises these intricate inter-connections and understandings of place.

We live in an era in which individual autonomy and the notion of the self influences the ways we listen to music, with more engagement with new technologies. These ideas are particularly relevant to the notion of virtual places. With the insurgence of Internet culture, the way we interact with art signifies much about the way we connect with
one another and where we access artforms transforms the mode of experiencing a song, whether it be live, online, or within our own homes. Charles Ford recalls a time where “the individual effected his identification with art not by assimilating the work of art to himself, but by assimilating himself to the work.” In this age of individualism the interchange between music and narrative is one that speaks to the listener about their own experiences but, as I have argued, also depicts some of the prevalent themes in our society. How conscious we are of this reciprocal relationship is yet to be seen. While I hope that music does not only become an expression of a listener’s experience, losing its objective power, I trust that when we experience, process and refurbish music narratives, in the end we are left with something that is greater than ourselves. Places connect and disconnect us continually, and it is in these spaces that we come to know ourselves, our relationship to others and to our environment, and the value of art.

Watercolour 2, Point Addis, Victoria by Hisu Lee.
CREATIVE FOLIO:

“THE EUCALYPT SPLENDOUR”:
EVALUATING PLACE-BASED SONGWRITING
THROUGH PRACTICE

“To preserve our places and be at home in them, it is necessary to fill them with imagination.”

In this section I turn to my creative practice, outlining the process behind nine original songs within the larger context of practice-led research. These songs explore place and (at times) placelessness through the concepts of narrative place, virtual place and natural place. Within these themes there is a fundamental dialectic around social connection, exploring and understanding how we process the world, and how as a songwriter I find meaning in my own experience of music and place. As a practice-led project, my songwriting practice has been the impetus behind the theories presented throughout the dissertation. Without a clear intent for the creative process, I would not have selected these three dynamic notions of place as a way of understanding my own music as well as the music of other new folk songwriters. As established in the introduction, I have chosen to present my findings in two separate sections – a dissertation and creative folio – to create a distinction between the practice and the resulting theories. This is in part to avoid, as Andrew McNamara writes, the “conflation between the creative practice and the conceptual, historical or intellectual influences deployed in the exegetical component.” This structural choice by no means dilutes the creative component of my work. The dissertation is presented first as the establishment of ideas and concepts to reflect upon. The creative section follows, providing song analysis and links to each original song, to present the music as a distinct collection of works as well as being integral to the ideas explored earlier.

In the following extractions, I explain the process involved in the creation of the songs whilst avoiding an overly literal interpretation. According to Roger Dean and Hazel Smith, some practitioners claim that by reflecting too intently on the meaning behind one’s own music, there is a danger of quelling the impact of the work and the creative process. They observe that “such arguments reinforce the mystification of the creative artist and romantic ideas about the spontaneity of the creative process.” On the other hand, I am not compelled to over-clarify my own work, particularly as my research focuses on how a

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155 Dean and Smith, “Introduction,” 25.
listener relates to a song and contributes their own meaning, and their own sense of place. Dean and Smith note: “There may be certain aspects of the work that practitioners do not want to talk about, such as possible interpretations of it, and the role of the practitioner in these respects remains distinct from that of the critic.”

To this end, I have attempted to reflect on the creative decisions made in light of the research concepts, with some analysis of original intent but preferring to focus on the thematic material rather than more subjective readings. I have structured the nine songs into three categories in line with the dissertation: narrative place, virtual place and natural place. While many of the songs fit into more than one of these place categories, to simplify I have arranged them by their core relationship to each category.

**Creative works**

The collection of nine original songs to accompany this thesis is attached as a compact disc on the back hard cover page. The track listing is as follows:

1. This Town
2. A Haunted Love Song
3. Forgotten Minds
4. The Fisherman’s Daughter
5. We Are The Machines
6. As He Lay Sleeping
7. At The Bayou
8. Beyond The Trees
9. Little White Bird

A digital version of the music can be accessed at the following link: [http://bit.ly/MFA_Music](http://bit.ly/MFA_Music). Individual song and lead sheet links are also provided below.

**Song notes**

**Narrative place**

“This Town,” “A Haunted Love Song,” “Forgotten Minds,” and “The Fisherman’s Daughter” all explore narrative forms of place, looking to story and the creation of an imagined scene to import meaning and value. As Lawrence Buell argues “the power of images seems key to making individuals and groups feel place connected.” This is in line with Thomas Gieryn’s definition of place as a collection of things, people and

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156 Ibid.

1. THIS TOWN
Street lights down and the town is quiet.
Come away from there, go to sleep safe for now.
In the darkness hour, when it’s cold and dour,
We can hear the town turn away again.

For when the tires burned, left the dust to settle down,
Leaving behind faces, staring back with blank hearts and tired eyes.
So he left that shimmering scene,
Scattered like the winds, free to roam this land.

See I hardly know what to say,
There’s nobody here this way, and then he is gone.
Can’t somebody hear those cries,
When this town comes alive, keeping to themselves,
This little white lie.

I saw the falling windowpanes,
Eaten up by flames. Nothing is the same.
In the terrible night, everyone is keeping an eye out.
No one is their old self now. Nothing is the same.

Recording: http://bit.ly/MFA_Track1

In “This Town,” I create a setting of rural domesticity broken by the event of a fire that leaves the town wondering who is responsible. Urban spaces are often linked, as Gieryn notes, to “disconnections, isolation, [and] fear.” The rural setting, then, represents community, inclusion and connection. Peter Rowe refers to this as “the ideal of rural life against the moral depravity and vice of the city.” In this piece I explore the inverse idea of a country town as an unsafe place, with a divided community. The song starts at the chorus to create a sense of unease, a foretelling of the events to come, before the verse enacts the narrative. The doubled vocal line hints at representation of the community, voices in unison acting as narrator. At 1:45 (bar 27) there is a breakdown, where the drums, piano and voice clash against one another, before returning to a synthesis with the introduction of the electric guitar. The intensity increases with the second iteration of the

159 Ibid., 476.
chorus, from 2:49 (bar 43), creating a sense of dystopia. The upper voice in the third above the melody is matched by the “screeching” guitar line, which drives the tempo. The song ends abruptly, with the intention of leaving the listener somewhat disconnected.

2. A HAUNTED LOVE SONG
Oh haunted love song, oh anchor keep these lives drawn.
Salty lips kiss me long, before the night is gone,
And the howling wind sets home.

And who are you above the loam and sea?
I’m the one who loves. I’m the one who breathes.
In the dark, so dark there’s nowhere to toss and turn but in.
On this eternal night, where we go to die.

It’s the half-light of vanishing sightlines,
Where we call out, fumble our love away.
Fear is following this time, and steals upon the first light.
And all the starkness blurs into the bright.
Here the shoally lands. Here the falling hands.
Here I find, I found you.
In this tome, where you lie tonight.
Holding the dust, all in the past.

And for this young demise, a haunted love song lies.
Over the moon, over the sun.
Over the blind, oh blind love.


In “A Haunted Love Song,” the idea of place turns inward and becomes a consideration of a sense of place, as explained by John Agnew.\(^\text{161}\) The narrative is explored through love and dislocation, and the idea of physical space, whilst still a concern, is secondary to a sense of disconnection from others and from the idea of existence at all. The “tome” in this song also offers a glimpse into displacement, with the idea of death correlating to the idea of a non-place. “We go to such places to visit those who are no longer,” writes Gieryn about cemeteries.\(^\text{162}\) Here the song explores the in-between state between place and non-place, trying to make sense of a duality of place experience. The strings and languid vocals create a sense of distance and isolation, whilst using a roaming melody to build the tension. The song starts gradually, with a single voice, moving through different melodic phrases as the piano comes in. The viola parts merge and divide, with one part adopting sul ponticello at

\(^\text{161}\) Agnew, Place and Politics : The Geographical Mediation of State and Society, 5.
\(^\text{162}\) Gieryn, “A Space for Place in Sociology,” 482.
to add a ghostly quality to the top end and to emulate a sense of entanglement between the lovers. As Marc Augé writes, “in the concrete reality of today’s world, places and spaces, places and non-places intertwine and tangle together. The possibility of non-place is never absent from any place.”\textsuperscript{163} The viola quavers, beginning at 2:06 (bar 30), help to move the narrative forward in support of the ascending vocals. The melody then returns to the opening refrain, slightly modified, this time communicating a sense of finality.

3. FORGOTTEN MINDS
I hope the stars come out tonight.
Oh, they’re kind of shy.
They have learnt to hide in style.
And we are the monsters, we are the makers, we are the masters.

Stars are piled up in my back garden,
Lying like wrecks of these forgotten minds,
Still thoughts rewind.
And we are the monsters, we are the makers, we are the masters.

And it’s a blur, this place of return.
The sirens are taunting, their song is haunting.
The ants are frantic and hide in the attic.
I am just a daughter, and she will be one soon.
The clanging pantry, oh eggs will you marry me?
The voices are shrieking. It’s noise and I’m thinking.
My face is warm and red and brawn, the stars are crumbling.
And we eat apple pie, with wide smiles and not knowing why.

I hope the stars come out tonight.
Oh, they’re kind of shy.
They have learnt to hide.
And we are the monsters, we are the makers, we are the masters.

And it’s all a blur, this place of return.
The sirens are taunting, their song is haunting.
The ants are frantic and hide in the attic.
I am just a daughter.

And it’s all a blur, this place of return.
The sirens are taunting, their song is haunting.
I am frantic, and hide in the attic.
I was just a daughter, and she will be one soon.

Recording: \url{http://bit.ly/MFA_Track3}
Lead sheet: \url{http://bit.ly/Track3LS}

\textsuperscript{163} Augé, \textit{Non-Places: Introduction to an Anthropology of Supermodernity}, 107.
“Forgotten Minds” is inspired by the more recent music of Scott Walker and the sense of dystopia that he creates through his lyrics, and his instrumentation. The lyrics here reflect a foray into a slow madness and the depiction of events once again speaks to placelessness. Gieryn remarks that a loss of place has “devastating implications for individual and collective identity, memory, and history – and for psychological well-being.” The intention was not to overtly create a scene of insanity, but to offer a hint of chaos. The lyrics came from one writing session where I was surrounded by a lot of people, with clattering noise and shrieks of laughter. In that normalised café setting there was a sense of absurdity that I wanted to bring to this song. The harp acts as the melodic and rhythm section, with the French horn adding an aspect of fanfare that accentuates the scene.

4. THE FISHERMAN’S DAUGHTER
He mistook her for the flora,
But she was just the fisherman’s daughter.
He alit by sea and carried flowers to her feet,
And honey blossom tea to warm her.

She is proud, she is fierce. She is forever.

Early morn, the fisherman’s boat returned to shore,
And to this scene, he cried: “Leave my daughter alone.”
And drove him on.

Many years have gone and she is older now.
But beauty never left her ways.
Far into the night they run with possums by their side.
Those were long ago days.

He is gone, the sea is forlorn. He is the never.


In “The Fisherman’s Daughter,” the oceanic island setting centres the song in a particular place against which a tale of love and grief ensues. Through the isolation of the island and the roughness of the sea, the narrative expresses a sense of tension and conditionality. To create a scene of fantasy is a way of creating place that is both personal and detached from reality. As sociologist Anthony Smith observes, “a land of dreams is far more significant than any actual terrain.” In order to keep the narration in focus, the arrangements on this
song are minimal with only my voice and piano to depict the imagery. I explore the
dynamics between love and loss when circumstances lead us to unexpected outcomes. This
piece was loosely inspired by Björk’s 2015 album, *Vulnicura*, where she explores her own
grief and heartbreak through imagination and imagery on the song “Black Lake”: “My
heart is an enormous lake/ Black with potion/ I am blind/ Drowning in this ocean/ My
soul torn apart/ My spirit is broken.” There is spaciousness to both Björk’s piece and
“The Fisherman’s Daughter” that mirrors the passing of time in each story. Memory and
place are highlighted, with reference to my research on how replication and memory link to
place, through a reconstructed historical narrative of the self.

Virtual place

“We Are The Machines” and “As He Lay Sleeping” both explore the notion of virtual
space, examining the dichotomy between human and machine, and between aspects of
connection and disconnection.

5. WE ARE THE MACHINES
Sleepy by the flame, the rumble and blur of faces and voices.
The stories told tumble about and we are down.
Sleepy by the flame, the ember it glows,
The sparkled lines, the unbroken time stretching for miles.

And we are carried to bed on a perfectly still …
Immense stars above me, a hard-lined earth below.

We are the machines. We are the golden ones.


In “We Are the Machines,” I was intrigued by the juxtaposition of an idealised natural
environment against the potential disconnection of machinery and technology. The themes
in this song were informed by my research on virtual spaces and new modes of listening to
depict a sense of otherness. The song begins with a scene of intimacy around a campfire
(drawing on my childhood experiences) with the guitar and vocals mimicking being thrown
into the “rumble and blur” of the gathering, with the crackle of fire and the low hum of
voices. Midway through the piece, the piano, bass and drums increase in tempo leading to
the repetition of the line: “We are the machines/ We are the golden ones.” This line
becomes an insignia for progress, the future and dystopia. The vocal production in this

piece also reflects my engagement with technology as an artist, applying different effects at the mixing stage to denote a certain distance from the more intimate introduction. In the transition to the second section, from 1:21 (bar 37), there is a thematic disjunct shown by an increase in tempo and vocal layering, resulting in a fracture of style and emotional intent. Mark Deuze observes: “The manifold scrambled, edited and converged ways in which we produce and consume information worldwide are gradually changing the way people interact, are interconnected, and give meaning to their lives.” 168 “We Are the Machines” works with ideas of nature and technology, or even nature transforming into technology, to set them against each other and demonstrate how they coexist within our own lives.

6. AS HE LAY SLEEPING
As he lay sleeping.

It was too late.
And in the heat he ran into the trees.

As he ran, he was chased by lines in the sand.
They made an impression on this quiet man.
And for awhile he thought he’d won, and turned to look behind.
But he was already drawn. He was already drawn. He was always gone.


“As He Lay Sleeping” explores a narrative about a being transported to a new environment. This was particularly compelling as I explored ideas of empathy within music and how the listener might also be transported by a piece of music and its narrative. This involves, as Amy Coplan suggests, “using the imagination to undergo a shift from one’s own cognitive perspective to the cognitive perspective of the target individual.” 169 The lyrics, melodic construction of this song (for example, the lullaby reference through repeated motif), and found sounds are intended to create a sense in the listener of being in a somewhat simulated space. The field recordings – the whirr of the train, the crackle of twigs in the bush and brushing of metal – enmeshed with a harmonic song structure, intertwining melody and digital textures contribute to the virtual narrative. The effect is of a slightly industrialised version of a dream. The song begins as a lullaby, with the dirge-like repetition of voices singing, “As he lay sleeping.” The tone changes at 1:55 (bar 31) with a melodic

169 Coplan, “Empathic Engagement with Narrative Fictions,” 143-44.
surge upwards, and in this second stage the song moves into a more recognisable song structure, building to a chorus of voices and sound textures that create a sense of movement and urgency in the character’s story. Linking this to my research, I examine the way that we connect and disconnect from people, places and even time. Here the dualities between narrative and meaning, loss of self and empathy, run parallel to the research being explored to illustrate the process of being inside a story.

Natural place

In “At The Bayou,” “Beyond The Trees,” and “Little White Bird,” a relationship to our natural surroundings is embedded within the narrative. As discussed in the thesis, an engagement with our surroundings not only refers to an idyllic setting, but has the capacity to speak to our sense of self, identity and community. As Timothy Morton explains, “Human beings need each other as much as they need an environment. Human beings are each others’ environment.”

7. AT THE BAYOU
I wish that we were running. I wish that we were hunting. I wish that they were chasing. I’d wait there in the morning. I’d listen to their humming, and hide out in the bayou. I’d listen to the tree frogs, and scattered birds are flying.

I’d wonder where it’s coming from, call out to the darkness throng. Wonder where the morning’d gone, listen to the tide roll in. I wish that they were running. By the time we felt the fleeting, it was dawn on the night plain.

I’d be there when it’s dawning. I’d be there at the bayou. I’d listen to the tree frogs, and scattered birds are flying. I’d listen to the calling, and wonder where it’s coming from. By the time we felt the fleeting, swift the night was gone. And we wandered home, all, alone.


In “At the Bayou,” I set the piece within the location of a bayou (wetlands), amidst birds and tree frogs. Conceptually, I was inspired by the music of Midlake, a band who, as I have mentioned, frequently reference natural landscapes (in the song “Core of Nature,” for example: “I will wear the sun/ Ancient light through these woods/ Woods that I walk

170 Morton, The Ecological Thought, 4.
The intention with this song is to reflect a human experience through a specifically non-human setting, to offset the normal anxieties of being alive against the wildness of nature. Manuel DeLanda’s analysis of geological structures is relevant in considering the complex relationship between humans and their environment. DeLanda writes: “An ecosystem links together a wide variety of heterogeneous elements (animals and plants of different species) which are articulated through interlock, that is, by their functional complementarities.” With this piece I have attempted to reflect this sense of interlock, through the cyclical motion of the guitar and voice to create a meditative quality. The ambiguous tone of the lyrics also creates a nonspecific impression of place and time. The song integrates with my research on notions of connection and disconnection, via the voice that is at once intimate and yet removed. In this way I am experimenting with different vocal placements to explore notions of narrative and nature. The lyrics alternate between the viewpoint of “I” and “We,” again to mirror themes of social connection and disconnection examined in the research. When the lyrics turn to the collective (“And we wandered home/ All/ Alone,” from 2:36 [bar 44]) there is an introduction of vocal layering and discordant harmonies that speaks to the concept of being simultaneously together and alone.

8. BEYOND THE TREES
   It was cold outside that day, and the pavement cracks did grey,
   With the shrinking, and its nearing.
   Even if you were unsure, and the shadows loomed more,
   With the warning, now it’s clearing.
   But they can’t see beyond the trees.

   What is the edge, where is the forest dear?
   What is the edge? Into the hale and clear.
   Where are the wild ones, the wild we don’t talk about?
   Where does it end, how can we hold on?

   But they can’t hear you, drowned out by big sounds.
   The forest and coral, wading in the soft ground.
   Even when heads start to turn, they will never seem to learn.
   They were wrong, just like you said.
   Even when you are unsure, and the shadows loom more,
   Through the dawning, we see the stirring.

What is the edge, where is the forest dear?
What is the edge? Into the hale and clear.
Where are the wild ones, the wild we don’t talk about?
Where does it end, how can we hold on?

What is the edge, where is the forest dear?
What is the edge? Into the hale and clear.
How can it be over, how can it be wild outside?
How can it be rocking loud? Rising sun comes down.
How can it be sharp unseen, how can it be hollow and clean?
How can it be salty knees? When it’s still and quiet please.
But they can’t see beyond the trees.


“Beyond the Trees” is more overtly environmental than my previous work, driven by themes of climate change and the seemingly gloomy future of our planet. In this piece, I was concerned with imparting a sense of ecological complexity, whilst maintaining somewhat nonspecific language that could be recast by listeners in different ways. As Timothy Morton notes, “environmental writing is a way of registering the feeling of being surrounded by others, or more abstractly, by an otherness, something that is not of the self.”

The piece begins simply with electric guitar and a single voice. The second harmony appears and disappears, creating variation between the experience of the self and the other. Distortion on the guitar, beginning at 1:18 (bar 24), reflects a more urban clamour and a sense of erosion. In the second chorus, at 1:58 (bar 44), the instrumentation continues to build momentum before being pared back, stripped of its components. The final line – “But they can’t see beyond the trees” – completes the song with the effect of removing the individual in favour of a chorus of voices.

9. LITTLE WHITE BIRD
The silver tree with its prickle leaves, welcomed me to the winter.
Down the path you and I will pass, on our way to the tinder.
Ravens small will clamber and crawl, in the end they’re carried,
Over the red rocks and out of the gnarled locks, down to the wild sea.

Here in the dark, here by the cold.
Here where the children wait, and there’s no fire in the coal.

But I can now see clearly it was you, all along.
And I will not go nearly, though my love in the night is strong.
Little white bird in the dawn. Little white bird in the morn.
Little white bird in the night. Little white bird in flight.

Well I thought I could find the lock and the gate, to unfurl this eucalypt splendour.
And far away there’s a rumbling place, gave into spectral slumber.
And it’s outside of wondering, and its thunder, and the breathing starts to shallow.
Find a place for our tired state, the night will draw us under.

Here where it’s dark. Here where it’s cold.
But I can now see clearly it was you. I have heard that you’re old.
I will not go nearly, though my love in the night is strong.
Little white bird in the dawn. Little white bird in the morn.
Little white bird all along. Little white bird.

Little white bird in the sad low. Little white bird in the sorrow.
Little white bird in the shadow. Little white bird in the hollow.
Little white bird in the sad low. Little white bird in the sorrow.
Little white bird in the shadow. Little white bird in the hollow, hollow.


“Little White Bird” utilises metaphor and drama to enrich the idea of an abstract, universal and core human experience of the wilderness, love and a sense of belonging. The song moves through different melodic blocks with the form: ABCDE/ ABCDD(F). The second pass repeats the initial structure, this time with lyrical variations. My inspiration for the song was Joanna Newsom’s “Emily,” a multi-structured song that moves through different key changes and verses to create a rich and original narrative style. The meandering nature of this form can be an effective way to tell a story, as in the bardic traditions, explains John Encarnacao. Of “Emily,” he writes, “The lack of repetition of text means that no notion of verse/chorus/bridge contrast is suggested; rather a consistency of poetic form suggests the folk ballad.” In “Little White Bird,” the voice is placed at the fore, with the other instruments providing a bed of sound underneath. I have left moments of silence at 0:55 (bar 26) and 1:00 (bar 28) to emphasise a sense of aloneness. Towards the end of the piece, I introduce a counterpoint in the voice, as a gesture towards folk song rounds. The French horn provides a reticent longing, both in the bridge at 1:46 (bar 50) and at the conclusion of the piece, enacting a farewell moment.

175 Encarnacao, Punk Aesthetics and New Folk: Way Down the Old Plank Road, 208.
Summary

Through the iterative process of practice informing research and research informing practice, the above nine songs have driven and adapted to the themes that I have uncovered throughout this project. Narrative place, virtual place and natural place are all explored in my songwriting practice, through strong imagery, lyrics, non-traditional arrangements and use of digital techniques. These characteristics are in line with the new folk genre that I defined in the introduction, namely, small ensemble or solo artists using a combination of acoustic and non-traditional instrumentation as well as new technologies to explore a range of narrative and emotive concepts with linkages to traditional folk storytelling. The new folk musicians mentioned throughout the thesis – Joanna Newsom, Will Oldham, Bill Callahan, Laura Marling, Phil Elverum, Scott Walker, Sun Kil Moon and Melanie Wilson – have all influenced my creative process, encouraging experimentation with unconventional song structures and vocal approaches, to further explore themes of place, narrative, empathy, connection and disconnection in my songwriting.

While I have focussed on the genre of new folk in order to constrain the research within a short space, there are many more areas that could, and should, be investigated in terms of place. These include a wider analysis of folk, encompassing protest music and more experimental versions of folk, such as electronic forms, with the use of more complex techniques and tools to explore virtual and digital environments. Place and placelessness will continue to drive my songwriting practice as I examine the relationship between our environment, nature and technology, and engage with digital processes, vocal experimentation and lyrical constructions of place.
DISCOGRAPHY


BIBLIOGRAPHY


APPENDIX A:

Recording notes
For this collection of songs, a number of musicians and engineers were involved to assist with the recording, mixing and mastering process. The musicians were provided with a combination of chord charts, lead sheets, set parts and demo recordings, and were also encouraged to contribute their own playing style to the music. I worked with each of the musicians over a number of weeks to experiment with different approaches for the recordings. The songs were multi-tracked to allow for the layering of parts and editing of material along the way.

Recording credits
*Vocals:* Brea Acton (all tracks)

*Piano:* David O’Brien (tracks 2,5,6,7,9); Brea Acton (track 4)

*Synth harpsichord:* David O’Brien (track 1)

*Percussion:* Ben Smart (tracks 1,5,7,8)

*Electric and acoustic guitars:* Tom Larkey (tracks 1,7,8)

*Bass guitar:* Dave Bennett (tracks 1,5,8)

*Harp:* Genevieve Fry (track 3)

*Viola:* Phoebe Green (track 2)

*French horn:* Sydney Braunfeld (tracks 3,9)

*Field recordings & synth:* Brea Acton (track 6)

Dave Manton engineered, mixed and mastered all of the tracks, except for the harp on track 3 (recorded by James Cecil), the viola on track 2, and the French horn on tracks 3 and 9 (recorded by Alistair McLean).
APPENDIX B:

Lead sheets
To accompany the recordings, I have included printed lead sheets to assist with analysis, interpretation and the overall listening experience. These can also be downloaded as links at: http://bit.ly/MFALeadSheets.

1. This Town  (http://bit.ly/Track1LS)
5. We Are The Machines  (http://bit.ly/Track5LS)
This Town

Street lights down and the town is quiet. Come away from there, go to sleep safe for now. In the darkness hour, when it's cold and dour, we can hear the town turn away again. For when the tires burned, left the dust to settle down, leaving behind faces, staring back with blank hearts and tired eyes. So he left that shimmering scene, scattered like the winds, free to roam this land.

See I hardly know what to say, there's nobody here this way, and then he is gone.

Can't somebody hear those cries when this town comes alive, keeping to themselves this little white lie. I saw the falling window panes, eaten up by
flames. Nothing is the same. In that terrible night, everyone is keeping

an eye out. No one is their old self now. Nothing is the same. Ooh

Ooh

Ooh

Street lights down and the town is quiet. Come away from there, go to

sleep safe for now. In the darkness hour, when it's cold and dour, we can hear the town turn away

again. Street lights down and the town is quiet. Come away from there, go to

sleep safe for now. In the darkness hour, when it's

cold and dour, we can hear the town turn away again.
A Haunted Love Song

Brea Acton

\[ \text{\textbf{A}} \]

\[ \text{Oh haunted love song, oh anchor keep these lives drawn. Salty lips kiss me} \]

\[ \text{long, before the night is gone, and the howling wind sets home.} \]

\[ \text{And who are you, above the loam and sea? I'm the one who} \]

\[ \text{loves. I'm the one who breathes. In the dark, so dark there's nowhere to toss and turn but} \]

\[ \text{in. On this eternal night, where we go to die. It's the} \]

\[ \text{half light of vanishing sightlines, where we call out, fumble our love away.} \]

\[ \text{Fear is following this time, and steals upon the first light. And all the starkness.} \]
blurs into the bright. Here the shoally lands. Here the falling hands. Here I find,

I found you. In this tome,

where you lie tonight. Holding the
dust, all in the past.

And for this young demise, a haunted love song lies. Over the

moon, over the sun. Over the blind, oh, blind love.
Forgotten Minds

Brea Acton

\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Am}} \]

I hope the stars come out tonight

\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]

learnt to hide in style

\[ \text{\textbf{Am}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]

makers we are the masters

\[ \text{\textbf{Am}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]

wrecks of these forgotten minds, still thoughts rewind

\[ \text{\textbf{Am}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}(b5)} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}(b5)} \]

monsters, we are the makers, we are the masters

\[ \text{\textbf{Gm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{F}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{Dm}} \]
\[ \text{\textbf{C}} \]

And...it's a blur, this place of return

The sirens are taunting, their song is
haunting. The ants are frantic and hide in the attic. I am just a daughter, she will be one soon. The clanging pantry, oh eggs will you marry me? The voices are shrieking. It's noise and I'm thinking. My face is warm and red and brawn, the stars are crumbling. And we eat apple pie, with wide smiles and not knowing why.

I hope the stars come out tonight. Oh, they're kind of shy. They have learnt to hide. And we are the monsters, we are the makers, we are the masters.
And it's all a blur, this place of return. The sirens are taunting, their song is haunting. The ants are frantic and hide in the attic. I am just a daughter.

And it's all a blur, this place of return. The sirens are taunting, their song is haunting. I am frantic, and hide in the attic. I am just a daughter, and she will be one soon.
The Fisherman's Daughter

Brea Acton

He mistook her for the flora, but she was just the fisherman's daughter. He alit on sea and carried flowers to her feet, and honey blossom tea to warm her. She is proud, she is fierce. She is forever. Ooh

Early morn, the fisherman's boat returned to shore, and to this scene, he cried: "Leave my daughter alone." And drove him on.
Many years have gone and she is older now. But beauty never left her ways. Far into the night they run with possums by their side.

Those were long ago days. He is gone, the sea is forlorn. He is the never. Ooh Ooh Ooh

Ooh Ooh Ooh

Ooh

Ooh

(OFade out)
We Are The Machines

Brea Acton

\[ j = 100 \]

Am C F G Am C F G Am

Sleepy by the flame, the rumble and blur of faces and voices. The stories told tumble about

and we are down. Sleepy by the flame, the ember it

glows, the sparkled lines, the unbroken time stretching for miles.

And we are carried to bed on a perfectly still...

Immense stars above me, a hard-lined earth below."

\[ j = 130 \]
As He Lay Sleeping

Brea Acton

Train sounds to 0:18

F# D♭m F# D♭m F#

As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____

D♭m F# D♭m F# D♭m F#

As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____ sleeping

D♭m F# D♭m F# D♭m D♭m

As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____

F# D♭m F# D♭m F#

As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____

D♭m F# D♭m F# D♭m F# D♭m F#

As he lay____ sleeping As he lay____

D♭m F# B C♯

It was too late_________ And in the heat_____ he ran into the trees. As he ran, he was chased by lines in the sand. They made an im-
pressure on this quiet man. And for awhile he

thought he'd won, and turned to look behind, but he was already

drawn. He was already drawn. He was always gone.
At the Bayou

Brea Acton

I wish that we were running. I wish that we were

hunting. I wish that they were chasing. I'd wait there in the morning. I'd listen to their

humming, and hide out in the bayou. I'd listen to the tree frogs, and scattered birds are

flying. I'd wonder where it's coming from, call out to the

darkness throng. Wonder where the morning'd gone, listen to the

tide roll in. I wish that they were running. By the time we felt the fleeting, it was

dawn on the night plain. Oh. Oh. Oh.
I'd be there when it's dawning. I'd be there at the bayou. I'd listen to the tree frogs, and scattered birds are flying. I'd listen to the calling, and wonder where it's coming from. By the time we felt the fleeting, swift the night was gone. And we wandered home, all alone.

Ooh.

Dada

Dada

Ooh.

Dada

Ooh.
Beyond the Trees

\( j = 70 \)

Brea Acton

\[ \text{It was cold outside that day, and the pavement cracks did grey with the shrinking, and it's nearing.} \]

\[ \text{Even if you were unsure, and the shadows loomed more, with the warning, now it's clearing.} \]

\[ \text{But they can't see beyond the trees.} \]

\[ \text{What is the edge, where is the forest clear? What is the edge? Into the hale and clear. Where are the wild ones, the wild we don't talk about?} \]

\[ \text{Where does it end, how can we hold on? But they can't hear you, drowned out by big sounds. The forest and} \]
coral, wading in the soft ground. Even when heads start to turn, they will never seem to learn. They were wrong, just like you said. Even when you are unsure, and the shadows loom more, through the dawning we see the stirring. What is the edge, where is the forest dear? What is the edge? Into the hale and clear. Where are the wild ones, the wild we don't talk about? Where does it end, how can we hold on? What is the edge, where is the forest dear? What is the edge? Into the
hale and clear. How can it be over, how can it be wild outside? How can it be
rockin' loud? Rising sun comes down. How can it be sharp unseen, how can it be
hollow and clean? How can it be salty knees? When it's still and quiet please.

But they can't see beyond the trees.
Little White Bird

Brea Acton

\( \text{\( \text{\#120} \)} \)

\( \text{F\#m} \quad A \quad Bm \quad F\#m \quad A \quad Bm \quad F\#m \)

The silver tree, with its prickly leaves, welcomed me to the winter.

\( \text{\text{\text{\#13}}} \)

\( \text{A} \quad Bm \quad F\#m \)

Down the path, you and I will pass, on our way to the tinder.

\( \text{\text{\text{\#17}}} \)

\( \text{A} \quad Bm \quad F\#m \)

Ravens small will clamber and crawl, in the end they're carried.

\( \text{\text{\text{\#21}}} \)

\( \text{A} \quad Bm \quad F\#m \quad E\text{maj7}} \)

over the red rocks and out of the gnarled locks, down to the wild sea. Here in

\( \text{\text{\text{\#26}}} \)

\( \text{B} \quad E\text{maj7}} \)

the dark, here by the cold. Here where the children wait, and there's no

\( \text{\text{\text{\#31}}} \)

\( \text{B} \quad C\#m \quad E \quad B \)

fire in the coal. But I can now see clearly, it was you, all along.
And I will not go nearly, though my love in the night is

strong. Little white bird in the dawn. Little white bird in the morn

Little white bird in the night. Little white bird in flight.

Well I thought I could find the

lock and the gate, to unfurl this eucalyptus splendour. And far away there's a

rumbling place, gave into spectral slumber. And it's outside of wondering,

and it's thunder, and the breathing starts to shallow. Find a place for our

tired state, the night will draw us under. Here where it's dark,
here where its cold. But I can now see clearly it was you. I have heard

that you're old. I will not go nearly though my love in the night is

strong. Little white bird in the dawn. Little white bird in the morn.

(Repeat x 3)

Little white bird all along. Little white bird. Little white

bird in the dawn. Little white bird in the morn.

Little white bird all along.

Little white bird.
Author/s: Acton, Brea

Title: Aspects of place in new folk music

Date: 2016

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File Description: Aspects of Place in New Folk Music

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