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## Educational experiences of post-critical non-place

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### ABSTRACT

This ethnographic small-scale interpretive study investigates four international Study Abroad (SA) students' mobile experiences of local coastal/beach sites, as part of a semester-long undergraduate outdoor environmental education unit 'Experiencing the Australian Landscape' (EAL) offered at Monash University in Melbourne, Australia. Their individual and collective experiences of the coast in EAL highlighted the problematic status of uncritically assuming and accepting place pedagogy in education practices. With a specific focus on the lived time experience of the four SA students, this study examined how the participants negotiated their meanings of the Australian landscape over the limited duration of the EAL unit. Three temporal themes related to non-place experience were identified: transitory; creative; and re-normalising. In discussing these findings, we recommend that any (eco)pedagogical conceptualisation, practice, and research of 'place' needs to attend empirically and theoretically to the non-placeness of the body-time-space-relation and their increasing abstraction within globalising processes.

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## Introduction

I had this thought as I was walking. I will probably never be here again, and you look out the ocean on top of the mountain and you think to yourself, 'ok, we stop for five minutes on top of this mountain and I want to take this all in right now because I'm not probably gonna be here again', you know, we were moving on in five minutes, we were going to a different place. (Chris, American male student, 21 years old)

Education now contends with globalised demands and expectations. Educational practitioners, curriculum and pedagogical theorists, and education researchers must find ways for learners to identify and engage locally with increasingly complex large-scale problems (such as anthropogenic global warming) of global socio-ecological injustices. So far, the idea of 'place' has proven to be an attractive philosophical starting point for considering ethical dimensions of how people relate to their local environments and nature. In order to navigate post-critically (Hart, 2005; P.G. Payne, 2005) the assumptions made about place, given the increasing physical and simulated mobilities of affluent individuals in postmodernity, this study incorporates the notion of 'non-place' into place theory and its various practices in pedagogy, research and policy formulation in education.

Non-place, from a sociological/anthropological perspective, is an expression of increasingly enigmatic human spatial experiences in the globalising mobile world. We assert that place and non-place intersect, collide and collude in fast moving human bodies to form hybrid postmodern ecologies. Thus, place cannot be uncritically assumed or dogmatically imposed in pedagogies, as we demonstrate in this small-scale ethnographic case study of four international Study Abroad (hereafter SA) students studying temporarily in Australia.

Chris, an American SA student in Australia, evocatively described his bushwalking (called 'backpacking' in North America) experience that attests to our concerns about place. His mobile experience of an alleged local beach place occurred in an undergraduate outdoor environmental education unit named 'Experiencing the Australian Landscape' (hereafter referred as EAL). An important pedagogical concept in EAL was 'place' and the 'experience' of it. During the two EAL field trips to the coast/beach (3–4 days each), the class of approximately thirty SA students were encouraged to establish an intimate relationship with the local environment, pedagogically inspired as a 'sense of place' (Relph, 1976) and 'belonging' (Wattchow, 2005). The intimate relationship with place was presumed to transform the learners' environmental awareness. However, Chris's globalised voice identifies a serious question about the potential mismatch between the static notion of place and his mobile experience.

We seek to engage conceptually and empirically with the above pedagogical problem of uncritically assuming and/or imposing place in outdoor environmental education by assertively acknowledging the postmodern condition of contemporary non-place experience. In doing so, we anticipate this study serves as a catalyst for further studies of non-place experience and pedagogy in various educational circumstances and contexts. To achieve the goal, this study post-critically re-examines a recent small-scale ethnographic case study (Nakagawa, 2012; see also Nakagawa & Payne, 2011, 2015) of four SA students' experience of 'the Australian landscape' in EAL, via Marc Augé's (2008) anthropologically derived notion of 'non-place'. With a particular focus on the still elusive notion and enigmatic practices of temporality in learning (Huebner, 1987; Payne, 2013), we ask: in what ways did the Australianness of 'the Australian landscape' emerge as aspects of non-place in the SA students' experience in EAL? As a result, three thematic aspects of SA students' non-place experience were revealed. They were transitory, creative and re-normalising. We argue that these overlaying aspects of non-place experience must be incorporated dialogically into the otherwise idealised conceptualisation and romantic practices of place pedagogy in outdoor environmental education.

A research project like ours that 'digs' or 'grounds' interpretations of everyday experience and human–environment relations may post-critically advance ecopedagogical praxis due to its serious acknowledgement of ontological complexity in the rapidly changing conditions of postmodernity. To not incorporate non-place in pedagogical research is to impose or facilitate anthropocentrically universalised idealisms of place. This nostalgic hold of modern tradition will problematically reconstitute the theory–practice, rhetoric–reality, mind–body and I–world (or self–environment) binaries. We, as post-critical educational researchers, seek to deconstruct and reconstruct them into more socio-ecological progressive forms (Payne, 2013).

To engage with the fluidity and mobility of our contemporary globalising lived experience, Marc Augé's notion of 'non-place' is helpful. In the current society Augé labelled 'supermodernity', there are no absolute places and non-places but spaces of sociality and symbolisation that are increasingly ephemeral and enigmatic (although Augé often critically problematised the disappearance of place). Similarly, while Augé's focus is primarily on spatiality, Virilio's (2010) 'dromosphere', the now never ending omnipresence of the digital instant in the speedy war against time, raises many questions about the current status and treatment of temporality, in relation to spatiality and their embodiments, within education discourse, environmental education practices and methodological experimentation in research (Payne, 2015). The contemporary temporality of spatially moving bodies is an accelerating, potentially pathological, overlaying of digital postmodern time, linear modern time and cyclical pre-modern time.

As the ecologically problematic supermodern spatio-temporal conditions gain traction in personal, public and political life, the recovery of organic and intimate place is undoubtedly an important philosophical concept to consider for needed postmodern ethics (Bauman, 1993; Payne, 2009). Importantly, and not coincidentally given heightened concern about the Anthropocene, there is now a groundswell of theoretical interest in ontologically oriented less anthropocentric framings, such as speculative realism (e.g. Bogost, 2012; Morton, 2013; Sparrow, 2014), new materialism (e.g. Bennett, 2010; Frost, 2010; Grosz, 2010), actor-network theory (e.g. Latour, 2005), non-representational theory (e.g. Thrift, 2008) and post-qualitative/posthumanist educational research (e.g. St. Pierre, 2013). Indeed, the various 'turns' in contemporary theory return the researcher and researched to the need for 'a political ecology of

things' in environmental education research, as Bennett's (2010) *Vibrant Matter* eloquently proposed. These theoretical informants provide major inspirations for how we in this study are to move from the uncritically accepted or endorsed anthropocentric notions of place to less anthropocentric conceptions and practices of non-place in outdoor environmental education.

To summarise, our post-critical employment of Augé's notion of non-place engages the accelerating mobility and fluidity of the globalising lifeworld experience and the recent ontological turn in philosophy. Our post-critical approach to educational inquiry considers how non-place can partially be read into the claims made rhetorically about the value and efficacy of place pedagogy in EAL as a case of outdoor environmental education, but without making an argument for either place or non-place.

### Three aspects of non-place – transitory, creative and re-normalising

We could say, conversely, that the act of passing gives a particular status to place names, that the fault line resulting from the law of the other, and causing a loss of focus, is the horizon of every journey (accumulation of places, negation of place), and that the movement that 'shift lines' and traverses places is, by definition, *creative* of itineraries ... [our emphasis] (Augé, 2008, p. 69)

In his *Non-places*, Augé identified two interrelated aspects of non-place: *transitory* and *creative*. The former, relatively well known, is characterised as the negative of 'anthropological place' that is 'concerned with identity' (2008, p. 63). Transitory non-place is formed through mobile functions such as transport, transit, commerce and leisure. Well-known everyday examples include the shopping mall, airport, toll-way, railway station, hotel and the Internet. In the current society Augé called supermodernity, the spaces formally known as places are becoming increasingly transitory non-places where subjects and objects are constantly on the move.

On the other hand, the creative aspect of non-place is primarily associated with how we perceive the space, as the opening quote in this section indicates. For example, a tourist may temporarily visit an exotic location. The location consists of various 'acts of passing', and it is through those acts that the tourist makes meaning of his/her 'journey'. In addition to the tourist's movement, the acts of passing in the tourist non-place (which is most likely a transitory non-place) may include, for example, a taxi driver travelling between an airport and numerous hotels, a vendor walking along a beach with souvenirs identical to those the tourist saw at a previous location, and so on. While those transitory movements are routinised as tourism, they also create a 'fault line' in the identity of the tourist place through accidental interactions between the moving bodies and things. That accident may be experienced as, on one hand, 'authenticity' for the tourist, and on the other, 'detraditionalisation' (and/or perhaps 'colonisation') for the locals. As a result of the enigmatic and possibly contradictory nature of the non-place experience, the transitional non-places may become 'creative' in the sense that what was known or assumed as place in that spacing of the temporal is now increasingly contestable, for both the tourist and the locals.

In 'Introduction to the Second Edition' of *Non-Places*, Augé re-emphasised the creative aspect of non-place. He indicated that non-place may be a deconstructed place but it does not remain empty or 'placeless' (Relph, 1976). Instead, it is soon to be creatively reconstructed. Such reconstruction may be 'fictional' yet 'creates' new meanings of non-place, thus possibly providing educational value (Leggo & Sameshima, 2014, p. 539). However, after reviewing Augé's other publications, Merriman (2004) concluded that the creative aspect of non-place, or 'more mobile, dynamic and relational account of space and place' (p. 145), was often downplayed in Augé's writings. Indeed, even in the second edition of *Non-places*, Augé's (over)emphasis on transitory non-place seems clear, indicating his critical concern about supermodernity. Nonetheless, it should be noted that Augé did recognise creative moments in non-place.

To those two aspects of non-place, we add the third, *re-normalising*. Critically oriented scholars in sociology and geography have highlighted how non-place attracts political and economic power to intervene hegemonically. For example, Nigel Thrift (2008, pp. 83–86) explained how the contemporary driving space, which is typically transitory for Augé, is not a space for free movement but indeed is commodified and reconstituted by affective technologies such as computer software and ergonomics

in the current climate of accelerated capitalism (Noys, 2014). The driving non-place is now increasingly governed for a 'better' driving experience the latest model car technologically offers. Possibly, soon we will not 'drive' anymore. We are told what to buy for convenience and comfort, and we are happy.

Urry (2002) suggested that the 'tourist gaze' of a traversing subject and his/her itinerary are often socio-culturally and commercially organised by the tourism industry and its professionals. They design the tourists' consumption of place in a specific way and the tourists embody them as a gaze. Even 'off the beaten track' (Lonely Planet, 2015) or 'vagabonding' for long-term world travel (Potts, 2002) is presented to us for our safe and sensitive consumption! In elaborating on the discontents of postmodernity, Bauman (1997) also observed that experiencing the sacred (or 'peak-performance'), an important element in tourism, is increasingly market-driven and 'organized around the duty of avid, perpetual, though never definitely gratifying consumption' (p. 180).

A similar criticism about the accelerating drift to globally abstracted consumer experiences of culture and nature is expressed in the educationally decolonising literatures, for example, of land-based environmental education. Despite its priority for socio-ecological justice, there is a 'danger ... [that] the nuances of place become reduced to objects of experiential or visual consumption' (McKenzie & Bieler, 2016, p. 77). In an earlier critique of postmodernism and education, Usher and Edwards (1994) concluded that 'experiential learning is fast becoming a central object in a powerful and oppressive discourse' (p. 205).

From a critical point of view, non-place is re-normalising after the ruin of place. It is 'a new kind of emerging 'polis' – one that is the place that defines "us"' (Sharma, 2009, p. 132), with the positive power to give rather than to take (Foucault, 1990). Various authors have pointed out that re-normalising non-place is eclipsing our everyday lifeworld in tacit and 'uneventful' ways: airport security checkpoints (Pütz, 2012), middle-class offices (Gregory, 2011), prisons (Poole, 2007) and so on. And it is not only in the urban environment where this re-normalising non-place applies. Nature, after its alleged 'death' (Merchant, 1980) or 'end' (McKibben, 2003), now faces the same concern. Environmental educators have been aware of that for some time, but very little has been theoretically and empirically said so far. Hence, this post-critical study of the rhetoric of place and its pedagogical implementation is crucial.

In summary, for post-critical environmental education, we conceptually view non-place as an inclusive set of the above three experiential aspects – transitory, creative and re-normalising – in attempting to deconstruct and reconstruct place and its pedagogies in educational discourse and practices. These aspects and perspectives are evolving, simultaneous and overlaying, rather than discontinuous and isolated (see James, 2006, for this type of post-critical ontology-epistemology). In what follows, we demonstrate how these three aspects of non-place are empirically interpretable in the four SA students' experience of 'the Australian landscape' in the unit 'Experiencing the Australian Landscape' (EAL).

## Context and methodology

The increased flow of international students across borders is one significant aspect of contemporary Australian higher education. This study highlights the complex nature of four international SA<sup>1</sup> students' experience of 'the Australian landscape' in an undergraduate outdoor environmental education unit 'Experiencing the Australian Landscape' (EAL), which was offered at Monash University (in Melbourne) in the first semester of 2009. EAL combined eight weekly on-campus meetings (academic learning programme) and two multi-day field trips (experiential learning programme) within the semester-long unit of outdoor environmental education. EAL was recommended by the SA programme as an ideal way for its students to experience Australian nature outside the lecture theatre. The total number of enrolled students was approximately thirty of various nationalities. While this small-scale ethnographic study sampled international SA students, the same critique may apply to local Australian students, many of whom are also affluent and mobile.<sup>2</sup>

For the SA students, EAL's two experiential learning field trips, particularly the first one at a coastal location in Point Leo, were designed as a pedagogical emplacement of slow time for the learners to feel the Australian places. In Point Leo, the SA students stayed at a campsite for two nights and three days

with more time allocated for personal reflective practices. The second field trip to Wilsons Promontory National Park, also a coastal location, was conducted faster than Point Leo, in the sense that the learners participated in a four-day bushwalk passing through various sites in the Park that necessitated changing their campsite each night.

The SA students' experience of Australian non-place in this paper is reported based on the data collected for a small-scale ethnographic case study (Nakagawa, 2012). The opportunistic, self-selecting, or volunteering four participants consisted of: one Jewish Israeli female, Abby; one Anglo-American female, Brigitte; and two Anglo-American males, Chris and Don (all pseudonyms). The four participants were aged in their early to mid-20s. All were studying at Monash University during the first semester (approximately four months, from March to June) in 2009 and were enrolled in EAL. They successfully completed the unit.

The qualitative data corpus consisted of three sources collected by the lead author: (1) participant observation as a student/researcher in weekly indoor lectures and the two outdoor field trips where the lead author not only recorded field notes but also talked and walked with the research participants, in order to emplace himself sensorially (Pink, 2009) and empathically (P.G. Payne, 2005) in the participants' lifeworlds; (2) three sixty-minute semi-structured individual interviews spread throughout the semester with each participant (this is the main data source on which this paper reports); and (3) the participants' reflective journals (a part of the unit's requirements) as protocol writings. Although the submission of their journals to the lead author was optional due to their potentially personal nature, all the participants except for Abby voluntarily photocopied theirs and provided them for the purpose of this study. These three data sources were interpretively triangulated.

For the interviews, an 'interview guide approach' (Patton, 2002, p. 349) was employed in order to focus on the richness of the research participants' lived experience within the prepared topics. In the first interviews, the main topics were set as the research participants' interests in, assumptions about, and expectations of EAL, and their prior knowledge of the Australian landscape. In the second interviews, the participants described their field trip experience in Point Leo and how they applied (or did not apply) their academic learning in EAL lectures. In the final interviews, the participants reflected on their overall semester-long experience in EAL and how that contributed to their understandings and appreciation of the Australian landscape. These three successive interviews were conducted to interpret the cumulative pedagogical effects of EAL (i.e. before, during, and after) on the four SA students' experiential understandings of Australianness in 'the Australian landscape'.

For the data interpretation method, van Manen's (1990) existential thematic analysis was employed. The notion of 'experience' is interpretively and practically problematic in the discourse of experiential education (Fox, 2008). Thus, van Manen's broad frame to categorise what might be reported as experience into four existential aspects – spatiality, temporality, corporeality and relationality – was used to generate possible themes from the collective data-set. In this paper, some thematic findings in relation to temporality provide the basis for our interpretation of the problematics of place, which leads to our ecopedagogical recommendation of acknowledging and incorporating the concept and potential practices of non-place. However, as we will indicate, those temporal themes are closely linked with other existential categories so as to construct a deeper interpretation of the meaning of EAL.

Any process of interpretation derived from ethnographically grounded, embodied and lived experiences demands some explanation. Using James's (2006) methodology of 'constitutive abstraction' in social theory, we move interpretively between four interrelated levels of analytical abstraction (i.e. empirical, conjunctural, integrational and categorical). James's (meta-)methodology allows for the flexible use of different theories and methodologies within the different constitutive levels of abstract analysis. In this paper, the abstract analysis can be circumstantially and contextually read into the descriptive accounts of the factual research undertaken in the empirical explanation of the small-scale ethnographic study of the four SA students in EAL.

In this texted paper, the four SA students' voices are represented in an impressionistic manner, which we find appropriate to express the potentially elusive and contingent ontology of non-place and its epistemologies. In so doing, while we tried to represent as best as possible within the limits

of language (P.G. Payne, 2005), we also acknowledge the non-correlation of being, experience and thought. Our less anthropocentric access to knowledge (Sparrow, 2014) is limited and affected by the non-representational (Thrift, 2008). Therefore, like a 'hyperobject' (Morton, 2013), the participants' collective voices are collapsed spatially and temporally, as well as bodily (except for the second theme of creativity). Thus, it may appear that our representation lacks accuracy. With our acute awareness of this methodological issue, we argue, however, that there is no such thing as accuracy in representing non-place or, for that matter, even of place (Massey, 2005). The representational collapse is our textually limited demonstration of our conceptual and theoretical understandings of the embodied practices and relations in non-place.

Other methodological limitations concerning this interpretive study include: a small sample size for any purpose of possible transference (while we do not aim for generalisation, we flag the possibility of a similar conceptual critique for related studies); and our strong subjectivist orientation and related emphasis on the participants' reflexive voices spoken in the interviews rather than on their sensorial movements in the fields.

Lastly, the lead author participated as a participant student/researcher (i.e. not as a unit coordinator or a lecturer) in EAL without any influence over the four participants' outcome in the unit. This was clearly explained to the participants at the time of their recruitment in order to implement an ethical research practice in education. Their information was treated confidentially. The research process was approved by the ethics committee of the university that both authors affiliate with.

## SA students' experience of Australianness

In using empirical–theoretical means to critique the rhetoric of place pedagogy, our purpose here is to describe and identify the three possible aspects of non-place (i.e. transitory, creative and re-normalising). They were interpreted within the four SA students' experience of Australianness of 'the Australian landscape' in the unit 'Experiencing the Australian Landscape' (EAL). The below interpretation indicates that the three experiential aspects of non-place overlay each other in an uneven and dynamic manner, which is partially informed by James' constitutive abstraction.

### *Transitory non-place, or 'once in a lifetime'*

I don't think I will have another chance to be in Australia because it's so far away from my home (Abby). I guess Wilsons Promontory was even more special because it's probably a place I will never go back to. I feel like it's more 'once in a lifetime' sort of thing. I mean this whole Study Abroad trip feels like to me a 'once in a lifetime' thing. (Brigitte). I want to experience as much as possible while I'm here. Why is it important ... it's just like the life thing, you know ... I want to experience as much in life while I'm alive (Chris). Every week I plan for next week (Abby). I do want to learn a lot while I am here, and obviously I go to school but I actually set my classes so all I have them is on Mondays and Tuesdays, so I have really long weekends to do things. (Brigitte). I'm always trying to go out and meet new people and never trying to stay with the same group. That's just the attitude I have especially when I'm down here, because you don't have that much time and you don't want to get too settled (Don).

The above combined representation of the four SA students' voices indicates their assumptions, interests, expectations and understandings of what sort of 'time' they would like to experience in Australia, thus what it was like to 'be' SA students there. Because of the relatively remote location of Australia in the 'world' geography, the four SA students thought that their time in Australia up to four months would be a 'once in a lifetime' occurrence. This temporal limitation in both occurrence and duration intensified their expectations for something *extraordinary* in their time in Australia and encouraged them to experience the Australian landscape 'as much as possible'.

A temporal understanding generates certain related existential actions. One spatial enactment of their intensified temporality was frequent short trips (mostly up to one week) during/after the semester. The participants explained that travelling was a means to make the most of their time in Australia. Table 1 shows that the four SA students, in their limited time, travelled to various locations locally, domestically and internationally (to countries near Australia).

**Table 1.** SA Students' trips during/after the semester.

Name	Travel destinations outside Melbourne clearly mentioned in the interviews (except for the EAL field trips)
Abby	Great Ocean Road, Byron Bay, Tasmania, Sydney, Queensland (Brisbane to Cairns)
Brigitte	Ballarat, Albury, Bendigo, Tasmania, Yarra Valley, Sydney, New Zealand, Cairns/Great Barrier Reef
Chris	Sydney, Great Ocean Road, Bells Beach, New Zealand, Cairns/Great Barrier Reef
Don	Sydney, Great Ocean Road, Byron Bay/Brisbane, New Zealand, Thailand

The SA students' individually mobilised spatiality generated a fast rhythm within their bodies.<sup>3</sup> It was through this rhythm that their expectations for and understandings of Australia as transitory non-place ('you don't want to get too settled') was reinforced. This does not mean, however, that the transitory non-place was an empty meaningless space in which their bodies were passively 'transported'. On the contrary, their time in Australia, as a 'once in a lifetime' occurrence, needed to be extraordinary for them. To achieve the extraordinary, the four SA students actively made sense of Australian transitory non-place by a series of 'translations' (Latour, 2005),<sup>4</sup> referring to the other existential categories of spatiality, corporeality and relationality (van Manen, 1990). One line of translation indicated in the combined representation of the SA students is: remoteness of Australia (spatiality) → limited time in Australia (temporality) → many weekend trips (spatiality) → fast rhythm (temporality) → more trips (spatiality). Their fast rhythm generated their frequent trips as a spatial practice, and their trips further accelerated their embodied rhythm.

The rhythm was also translated into a relational/corporeal theme as Don's statement suggests: fast rhythm (temporality) → less commitment with more people (relationality/corporeality).

As Merriman (2004) correctly pointed out, transitory non-place is not a semantic void. As the above interpretations indicate, transitory non-place was existentially translated, thus meaningful for the participants. Lefebvre (2013, p. 19) wrote that the body actively organises rhythms, and by doing so, it generates meaning in relation to its existential conditions.

In the case of the four SA students, the meaningfulness of their time in Australia (including their travel experience in EAL) was marked as a difference from their everyday time at their home countries. In addition, the SA students existentially translated their bodily faster rhythms to organise their experience.

### ***Creative non-place, or slow time***

In Point Leo, I wished that it would have been a little bit more time for reflection ... I think it felt just pretty flash to me. I felt like we got to a place and 'ok, sit down and you can write your journal for an hour.' I barely had time to crack my thought, then we were leaving on to the next area. Wilsons Prom was the perfect amount of time for me. I wouldn't have wanted the trip to be longer. I couldn't have handled more. (Brigitte)

If I compare Point Leo and Wilsons Prom, Wilsons Prom didn't do a lot to me. I mean, it didn't leave a huge mark on my soul. I really enjoyed it, but in Point Leo ... walking by yourself and think about what you see and writing in your journal ... they really made me pay attention to more stuff out there. I guess I didn't pay attention in Wilsons Prom (Abby).

I'm not a big fan of staying in one place for one time (Chris). I was in Thailand the week before Wilsons Promontory. Back for one day and leaving again, so it was just like constant coming and going and it's not like I felt settled in but felt like it was just another weekend trip to me as far as it goes (Don).

Meaning of non-place was translated, as indicated in the last section, within the body in transit. The body actively and interpretively organises temporal rhythms. The creative non-place acknowledges that even if the body is trained to practise a certain rhythm repeatedly as a form of disciplinary education for a utilitarian purpose (Foucault, 1995), the repetition may not guarantee the same outcome every time. The repetition sometimes creates irregularity (Lefebvre, 2013, p. 16). Or, using Latour's terms, an accident can occur even in 'transport', as well as in 'translation'. It is this impossibility of ultimate repeatability (Frost, 2010; Grosz, 2010)<sup>5</sup> of temporal rhythm that adds the creative aspect to non-place.

In EAL, comparatively 'slow time' was critically and pedagogically emplaced with the SA cohort during the two field trips as a means to facilitate the learners' place experience (particularly more so



during the first field trip at Point Leo). However, as the quotes indicate, the four SA students' 'repetitive' experience of this particular emplacement of slow time varied, hence indicating the elusive creativity of non-place. Evaluating slow time at Point Leo where they stayed at the same campsite for two nights and three days around which daily activities were organised:

- Brigitte thought it was not slow enough to feel the place, the intended pedagogical goal of EAL;
- Abby thought it was adequately slow to feel the place, hence achieving the EAL goal;
- Chris and Don did not enjoy Point Leo much because of the strict implementation of slow time. They preferred their field trip to Wilsons Promontory where they walked through the National Park for four days faster and more actively.

As the above points suggest, *different bodies* responded and reacted differently to slow time at Point Leo. Due to the small sample size in this case study, it is sociologically impossible to determine and/or to explain what variables or attributes caused the differences in their interpretations. While some implications may be read into the participants' differently socialised/culturalised bodies, the potential implications of this insight require larger sociological projects to investigate the variabilities of the relations among human and non-human beings in the environment.

The repetition of slow time within an *individual body* also generated different interpretations of slow time, depending on the environmental setting and his/her bodily adjustment to it. Brigitte thought that time in Point Leo was not (slow) enough, but time in Wilsons Promontory (which appeared faster than the one at Point Leo due to the intensive four-day bushwalking, a active mode of movements) was 'the perfect amount of time'. It is important to note that her judgement of 'the perfect amount of time' was made in reference to her own physical ability and condition ('I couldn't have handled more') rather than to the clock-time durations of the two field trips. When it was physically comfortable, Brigitte preferred more/slow time; when it was not, she preferred less/fast time. Her moving body organised the meanings of physical and pedagogically constructed time.

We suggest that experience in creative non-place is elusive of any static emplacing, and this indicates that much greater scrutiny should be given to the theory–practice gaps created by certain pedagogical experiences. Such experience may be 'repeated', yet its meaning remains creatively open and bodily contested.

### ***Re-normalising non-place, or Australian time***

When Australians say they are going to stay outdoors, they actually mean they are going to take their cars and just park in one place. Australians just explore the area. But usually abroad, when I went on my trips, staying outdoors means just getting to a point during the day, put up your tent, make food and go to sleep, and then the next morning start walking again (Abby). Americans are just very fast paced and they want to go somewhere and see something but then they got to get back to their life. They don't really take time to experience things. I think a lot of Americans are guilty of that. Australians most part are laidback (Chris). At Wilsons Prom, it was not really an awesome feeling to wake up and hear animals right outside your tent, which kind of freaked me out, but at the same time, it was really cool, if you like, back to your roots, back to how people once lived. (Brigitte). It influenced my view of the environment. By submersing myself into the wilderness, I realised that life goes on regardless of human interaction in parts of the world. (Don).

The significance of this third aspect of non-place may be rephrased as the question of whether, or to what extent, the four SA students were willing to accept the Australianness of the Australian landscape as a creative yet elusive experience, when they were also expecting something extraordinary and 'once in a lifetime' in Australia. This dilemma, perhaps with an emphasis on the latter, led to the third aspect of non-place, re-normalising. Importantly, the participants utilised their experiential and academic learning in EAL to justify their re-normalising of the Australian landscape.

Aware of the limits of our access, knowing and representation, we still tend to insist on making a particular and unique meaning out of space, into place. As Massey (2005) reminded us, place is 'a crucial element in our ordering of the world, positioning ourselves, and others human and nonhuman,

in relation to ourselves' (p. 105). Perhaps, we, including posthumanists, are still all too human (Bogost, 2012, p. 8) needing place. While re-normalising non-place may be critically viewed as *a crude operation of neoliberal global capitalism* (Gregory, 2011; Poole, 2007; Pütz, 2012; Sharma, 2009), post-critically, it is also a manifestation of our *human(ist) desire*.

With our post-critical perspective, it is crucial to make a point here that this third aspect of non-place as re-normalising is indeed an aspect of non-place, rather than of place. Non-place is not merely the opposite of place. Instead, with a post-critical acknowledgement of the enigmatic ontological overlaying (James, 2006), we argue that non-place is a meta-concept that non-dialectically incorporates the place/non-place binary. Put simply, non-place is both 'place' and 'non-place': non-place rejects an argument of either place or non-place.

The collective quote in the beginning of this section clearly indicates that the SA students utilised the pedagogical discourse of slow time in order to re-normalise their experience of the Australian landscape into the extraordinary. They pinned down transitory and creative Australian non-place in their learning, to simulate it into the Other space to be consumed more meaningfully.

The SA students interpreted the Otherness of re-normalised Australian non-place in relation to the temporality they experienced in EAL. The typically Australian way of spending time outdoors (as the four SA students did at Point Leo) was then linked with the typically Australian temporal way of being, that is, 'laidback'. Who 'Australians' are and what they were like were also re-normalised in this process as an important feature of the Other non-place. In addition, this flagged the difference between 'slow' and relaxed Australians and 'fast' and busy Americans/Israelis.

The binary logic (i.e. slow/fast, Australian/non-Australian) was also applied to the Australian landscape experienced in EAL. Waking up 'slowly' in the wild reminded Brigitte of the past, or her 'roots, back to how people once lived' (binary: past/present). By 'slowly' moving inside the National Park, Don felt that 'life goes on regardless of human' (binary: nature/human). Finally, those temporal binaries were collapsed into a meta-binary of Australianness as the Other and non-Australianness as the Same, completing the re-normalising non-place at the both polarities (Table 2).

The Other is a seductively alienated mirror image – hence 'the imaginary' – for the Same to confirm its 'real' identity (Baudrillard, 1993, p. 133). MacCannell (1999) wrote that 'self-discovery through a complex and sometimes arduous search for an Absolute Other is a basic theme of our civilization' (p. 5). Regardless of MacCannell's problematically universalising use of 'our civilization' here, being a 'human' may entail such an existential desire for the Other. Travelling (including SA) enables the traveller to interact with the imaginary Other, although the Absolute Other always recedes beyond our epistemological horizon. MacCannell (2011) is humanistically optimistic, believing in a positive link between the appearance/signifier of the Other and the essence/signified of the Other.

Post-humanistically, we are sceptical about that positive link. However, as post-critical humans, we are empathetic with MacCannell's existential human desire for the Other, and for the four SA students' re-normalising of their experience in non-place. At the same time, we also believe that we humans should also accept that the Absolute Other is something we cannot reach or, perhaps, attain. As Jean Baudrillard would say, the Other we can experience belongs to the imaginary. It is a simulacrum, no matter how great a pleasure that brings us. This cool yet truly posthumanist re-conceptualisation of the Other perhaps indicates an essence of the post-critical non-place that we are suggesting in this paper. That is, the Other in non-place is both phenomenally present and absent. The Other, however significant that is, is only an uncanny phenomenon (Trigg, 2012, p. 27). Living in a post-critical non-place

**Table 2.** Temporally re-normalising the Australian landscape the Other.

The Other	/	The Same
Slow time		Fast time
Australian time		Non-Australian time
Past		Present
Nature time		Human time

is to participate in this uncertainty. However, this is not necessarily bad, because if the Other is fictional, the Same, as its mirror image, is also fictional. This indicates the educational possibility for us to become someone else – perhaps into more ecologically responsible members of the world.

### Summary

To summarise the three aspects of non-place in the four SA students' experience of the Australian landscape in EAL:

- *Transitory non-place* is not a semantic void. For the four SA students, the Australian landscape was meaningful as an *extraordinary* time. The faster rhythm that dynamically marked the various movements in and of transitory non-place was bodily *translated* to generate a wide range of embodied meanings.
- *Creative non-place* is based on the impossibility of ultimate repeatability of phenomena. Both the subject and the object are vitalistic, thus there is no perfect correspondence between the two in experience. The Four SA students' allegedly 'repetitive' experience of 'slow time' in EAL place-pedagogy was diversified due to their *collective* and *individual* bodies as they moved through various environments.
- *Re-normalising non-place* is an expression of our *human desire* for the Other as well as *a means of neoliberal global capitalism*. In pursuit of the extraordinary in the Australian landscape, the four SA students reconstructed the meaning of Australianness as the Other through a range of temporal binaries, utilising their learning in EAL.

### Discussion: post-critical listing and ecopedagogy

The three experiential aspects of non-place we have empirically found and partially theorised following James's (2006) constitutive abstraction may be *critically* represented as a dialectic *narrative*, indicating a process of non-place being absorbed into place. In this reading, EAL 'educationally' assisted the four SA students in reifying 'the Australian landscape' as the Other with a particular pedagogical authority.

Instead, for discussion, we outline a pedagogical method of *post-critical listing*. There, all three aspects of non-place are acknowledged to be co-present, if unevenly, in relation to the participants and their existential conditions. We feel this latter option is a more appropriate and relevant approach to representation in the increasingly fluid and mobile contemporary world. True, the fluidity and mobility of experiences in and of nature and its numerous environments are ethically concerning for us. However, the question here is whether pedagogically denying them and counter-solidifying with place is sufficient to deal with the massive flux and turmoil of our existentially ecologically problematic conditions (Bauman, 2000).

If so, instead, perhaps, education should humbly yet (pro)actively make an ontological acknowledgement of the likely socio-ecological flux of non-place. That may open up a less anthropocentric and less epistemologically driven conceptualisation of ecopedagogy (Payne, 2014), which is much needed for a more environmental and sustainable form of education.

In the following, based on our empirical interpretation, we briefly elaborate our argument in two points to invite further discussion and deliberation about the inclusion of non-place in the material and discursive spaces of pedagogy. They are: post-critical listing for ecopedagogical becoming; and post-critical listing as an environmental educational research method.

### Post-critical non-place for ecopedagogical becoming

Metaphorically, post-critical non-place is like a listing. It is a listing because it incorporates all the three aspects simultaneously, if unevenly. A listing problematises the dialectic where non-place is critically

synthesised into place. Rather, non-place as a post-critical listing overlays both 'place' and 'non-place' within.

In this study that aims to be heuristic for other studies, we have demonstrated the overlaying of non-place, pointing to its three possible simultaneous aspects: transitory, creative and re-normalising. Identifying and describing those aspects, however, was not our sole purpose. That is because, by doing so, non-place is theorised, thus named, placed and humanised. For this reason, a post-critical listing needs to be kept open, not to be completed. Additional aspects of non-place in postmodern nature and their environments should be generated continuously for heterotopic (Foucault, 1986) and less anthropocentric notions of non-place and its material and discursive practices, subject to ongoing inquiry and critique.

Non-place, practised as an open listing, offers a potentially useful ecopedagogical tool for considering our becoming (St. Pierre, 2013). It acknowledges that what we know as the Other is fundamentally incomplete, and more importantly, thus fictional. It is a mirror image of Us (Cronon, 1996). If so, what we anthropocentrically know as Us (also a mirror image of the Other) must be also fictional. 'The real' and 'the imaginary' are equally simulacra, according to Baudrillard (1993). This ontological lightness of de-centred identity provides an educational basis for the learners to become creatively something else. It also facilitates, we hope, a less anthropocentric repositioning of us as 'lame' humans, so that we can be more humble and modest, and thus ecological (Morton, 2013).

That being said, however lame that is, if we are to take it seriously that we are human *beings*, as well as posthumanly *becoming* in our aspiration, we cannot discount the temporary significance of the real/Same (e.g. self) and the imaginary/Other (e.g. nature). Even in a less anthropocentric version of ecopedagogy, we cannot deny our *being* human accompanied with our human perspectives. Indeed, ecopedagogy is always constructed from a human perspective, if not an initially anthropocentric one (although we aspire to move from less to non-anthropocentric, or even ecocentric). Meanwhile, however, we continue to be haunted by the imaginary of the Other for the real meaning of *being* human, as not only MacCannell (1999, 2011) but also the four SA students in this study indicated.

In acknowledging the inseparability of the imaginary of the non-human Other from our real existence, pedagogy converges with ecopedagogy in non-place (i.e. 'eco' incorporates both human and non-human). In that process, the fictionality of the Other must be defended, because it may provide educational opportunities for the learners to deconstruct their identities for their potential ecological becoming.

In summary, ecobecoming requires a space where learners' identities are flexible enough to appreciate their ecological transformations, and non-place with its complex and/or contradicting ontology provides an appropriate ecopedagogical setting.

### ***Listing as an environmental educational research method***

Listing, in our view, functions as a valuable ecopedagogical tool as a partial and contingent way of both theoretical representation and embodied practice of being and becoming in post-critical non-place. Methodologically, an ecopedagogy for non-place must deconstruct the illusion of place as the Absolute Other. As Trigg (2012) suggested, 'place emerges as neither a realist or an idealist concept, but rather somewhere *in between*' [original emphasis] (p. 6). This is 'where we gain a deeper understanding of the ambiguous relational balance between body, time, and world' (p. 122). Non-place is neither true nor false, but fictional and creative, and it is in this fuzzy middle ground where ecopedagogy takes (non-)place.

Trigg also implored us to examine the 'memory of place' and 'place of memory' and the relationships between them, in a manner similar to Ted Toadvine's (2009) ecophenomenological invitation to examine the 'experience of nature' and the 'nature of experience'. For our purposes, the ecopedagogical relation between those two twinned questionings and openings are valuable for further ecopedagogical inquiry (Nakagawa, *in press*).

In this context, we endorse the use of James's (2006) constitutive abstraction across time, space, bodies and their interrelated ecopedagogies, because it will provide a post-critically comprehensive

interpretive tool for research work inquiring into educational forms of experience (Payne, 2000) and research as a 'way of doing' (P.G. Payne, 2005, 2013; P. Payne, 2005). It is also useful to reveal the underlying ontology-epistemology tension warranting methodological deliberation, as Payne (2014) asserted in his post-critical approaches to environmental education research that depart from the overemphasis of epistemology.

A non-place ecopedagogy will facilitate an understanding of the relational process of our being in and becoming with the environment for the designers of education as well as among the learners. How might this processual understanding of ambiguity in non-place lead to the learners' formations of a postmodern environmental ethics? How do we apply non-place ecopedagogy in curriculum and practice? These questions are beyond the scope of this paper but remain important, both pedagogically and methodologically. Further research in various educational contexts and (non-)places is recommended.

We invite researchers to consider how we can creatively contribute to opening up for further inspection of non-place through our research practices. This is an open-ended question and we invite a variety of efforts – conceptually, methodologically and empirically. Our suggestion, based on our exploratory small-scale findings, is to avoid the excesses of a critically anthropocentric dialectic narrative that may simplistically represent a gloomy ending with the re-normalising of non-place, although, admittedly, such narrative may reveal a certain political and educational urgency. Instead, we post-critically encourage less anthropocentric 'slow researchers' to be patient with listing for non-place. This research practice may not provide the researchers with an instant gratification (with something to be critical about, which is always satisfying) or certainty about the objects of inquiry. However, the very fact that there is no such thing as a quickly representable meaning of place lies at the speculative heart of our somewhat empirically qualified theorising (or, to be precise, detheorising) of non-place. As non-place is ephemeral and enigmatic, non-place experience is also hard to pin down. The researchers must be patient, like an *ant*, in order to understand the learners' experience (Latour, 2005). For that purpose, our methodological act of listing, we believe, is a good (non-)place to start.

## Notes

1. SA is an exchange programme Monash University offers. International students from more than 115 universities (Monash University, 2014) study for one or two semesters at Monash University with no extra cost while fully enrolling in their 'home' universities.
2. For purposes of contrast, a related study (Payne, 2014) investigated local Australian students enrolled in a different module of EAL that developed a slow ecopedagogical version of vagabonding and nomadic ethics.
3. Rhythm of non-place may be also generated materially: '[non-]places have a particular pace which is part of their character' (Shaw, 2001, p. 120). While it is possible to interpret this 'materiality' at the level of our phenomenally embodied engagement with non-place (e.g. being a SA student in Australia, as we do in this paper), it is also likely that the various physical and environmental designs (e.g. a minimally furnished university dormitory room) do impose certain rhythms on our ecological becoming (Payne, 2015). Unfortunately, however, the latter is beyond the scope of this paper, and further research is recommended in that area.
4. Latour (2005) usefully distinguished 'transport' and 'translate'. In transportation, a person or a thing 'transports meaning or force without transformation' (p. 39). In translation, on the other hand, the actors 'transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning of the elements they are supposed to carry' (p. 39). As actors, the SA students translated meaning of the transitory non-place as they carried themselves through it, rather than transporting themselves.
5. In a version of 'new materialism', non-repeatability of a phenomenon is conceptualised based on a non-corresponding relationship between heteronomous subject (Grosz, 2010) and heteronomous object (Frost, 2010), meaning the condition of either subject or object is not necessarily the same all the time, hence the impossibility of ultimate correspondence and repeatability in a phenomenon. It is this vital (Bennett, 2010) creativity of matters (both subjects and objects) that are particularly relevant for the second aspect of non-place,

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