

The Stuttering Frog



THE WILLIAMS RIVER VALLEY ARTISTS' PROJECT NEWS #2

NOVEMBER 2013

The Age of Consent

Imagine living at a time, or in a culture, where you could not deny consent to those who would use you for their pleasure and profit, and where the best you could hope for was to negotiate, in order to mitigate the violation.

Sound familiar? If you have had mining and CSG industry people knocking on your door, it should.

The time and culture is here and now. How can that be? When and how did we give consent to being treated this way, and for this to be accepted as a reasonable way to conduct an enlightened and post-feudal society?

I did not give consent. Did you?

How then could this come about? And most

importantly, how can this arrangement be allowed to continue when it is a mechanism greasing the wheels on which the world is hurtling towards a climate train wreck?

I recently organised for representatives of the Mining and Coal Seam Gas project of NSW Farmers to speak to a meeting of local farmers and residents at Mangrove Mountain. Most left stunned at how defenceless and powerless they realised themselves to be. It should be noted that the NSW Government funds the unit of NSW Farmers Association that gave the talk. It was an excellent presentation, thorough, non-political and factual, yet truly frightening.

One encouraging fact emerged. The regime of

'consent' is changing. The social licence to act for short-term financial profit at the expense of the welfare of all of us on the planet is slowly being revoked.

Despite the power imbalance, mining companies have been taken aback by the strength of community resistance and resolve. Powerful networks of community organisation have formed with the capacity afforded by technology to distribute information, coordinate actions, share significant scientific research findings, lobby and feed the media. Groups like Lock the Gate, The Better Planning Network, and the Hunter and Central Rivers Alliance are made up of many smaller groups covering a wide constituency of interests, but all refusing the assumed consent that is used to bulldoze short-sighted and inhumane 'development'.

People seldom give up their power, privilege or profits easily.

Companies with a stake in 'business as usual' have regrouped and changed tactics. Now they spend millions on public relations, sponsorship of community activities and press articles etc., most of which appeal to individual opportunism and ambition. All of these moves are legal and reasonable strategies, and not without some local community benefit.

However Neo-liberal political policies are about de-constructing and re-constructing behaviour through building systems in which pure self-interest (good for the economy and creates jobs) compels people to toe the line, and to treat this reality as natural and ideology-free.

So you will be seduced.

- A mining company is distributing a brochure using an Aboriginal-style dot painting of tunnelling termites as a metaphor for the naturalness and political correctness of their activities.
- Your hope for fairness and justice will be corrupted 'Obeid-style'.
- Legislation will be introduced to restrict your rights and enshrine the power imbalance in favour of the mining and CSG industries.

page 2 >>



Protest signage against NuCoal's Doyles Creek Mine, near Ian Moore's property on Appletree Flat, Jerrys Plains, upper Hunter Valley, NSW, September 2013. See also p. 2 Photo David Watson

Leave It in the Ground!

Leave It in the Ground at *Articulate project space*, 497 Parramatta Road, Leichhardt
To be opened by NSW Greens MP John Kaye
15 November 2013

Exhibition 16 November – 1 December 2013
Gallery hours Friday to Sunday 11am – 5pm

If your power's not generated sustainably, at the end of your instant 24/7 electricity rainbow lies no pot of gold, but trillions of pots of filthy, greenhouse-gas-emitting, atmosphere-warming, sea-level-raising, coal and gas.

In the face of irrefutable science which warns us daily about escalating climate change (witness, for example, the fire-devastation of the Blue Mountains in October) NSW continues to draw more than 90% of its electricity from coal-and-gas-fired power stations, and Newcastle has become the world's largest coal port. Already the most profligate per-capita energy user on earth, Australia appears intent on fouling not only its own precious nest, but those of the entire planet, by exporting global warming on a gargantuan and unprecedented scale. Are you

listening Clive, Gina, Twiggy, Gunupati, Gautam, Tony, Campbell, Barry?

Leave It in the Ground is a modest foray by nine Australian contemporary artists perturbed by the fossil-fuel bind in which most of us find ourselves. On exhibition is work by Neil Berecny-Brown, Sue Callanan, Noelene Lucas, Juliet Fowler Smith, Christine McMillan, Ian Milliss, Margaret Roberts, Toni Warburton and David Watson. Each artist has also contributed to this catalogue. Their words and images appear alongside key pieces by invited expert commentators – Sharyn Munro, Glenn Albrecht, Colin Imrie/Julia Mullins and Chris Ward – to each of whom we are gratefully indebted.

As a collective WRVAP shares a history of locally-focused environmental action (which you can read about on pp 4-5). It is our hope that both the works in **Leave It in the Ground** and the articles, ideas, propositions and provocations in this, our 2nd edition of *The Stuttering Frog*, will stimulate others to take an informed interest in, even a stand upon what is undoubtedly the great ethical, environmental, social and economic challenge (and opportunity) of our age.

ART, ACTIVISM AND US

The Williams River Valley Artists' Project (WRVAP) is a place where we as artists can work as activists to explore ecological issues through artistic practice. Via the creative means at our disposal we make art and produce 'catalogues' like the one you are reading to highlight and explore the issues that are important to us. But do we have any effect? How might we know? And does it really matter to us? These are some of the questions we've put to one another over the years we've worked together.

Sometimes we think that we've had some effect where it matters, as when in October 2010 Green's MP John Kaye distributed the first edition of *The Stuttering Frog* to every Member of the NSW Parliament, with a decision on the damming of the Williams River pending. But can we be sure that our newspaper didn't go straight into each parliamentarian's bin? Certainly we do not engage in arts activism because we are assured of results.

WRVAP's activities include research, residencies, exhibitions and publishing. We engage with

page 2 >>

The Age of Consent *from page 1*

At face value legislation recently put forward in NSW seeks to respond to community outrage at planning policy, but in fact legislatively limits the opportunities and grounds on which objections can be made or enforced.

For example:

- Strategic Agricultural Land Use Policy (protects only equine and viticulture in the Hunter - possibly)
- Gateway Process with no gate (appointed advisory scientists have no power to deny an application)
- Amendment to Mining State Environment Planning Policy (priority given to 'development' over other considerations)

Louis XIV enthused about greed as a mechanism for policing the burgeoning bourgeoisie. *Our* political masters, and the corporate business entities which are *theirs*, act as if they have a divine right to our future. Consent is claimed not asked for.

No, means NO.

Vast amounts are being spent on research, development and infrastructure to transform sequestered carbon buried in the earth for millions of years, into atmospheric carbon (e.g. CO₂ and Methane) and deadly particulate matter. Oh yes, and to industrialise our landscape and compromise our farming future.

Stop complaining, it will be over soon.

We have been told that Coal Seam Gas extraction is an interim measure while coal is being phased out and replaced by clean renewable sources of energy, yet we see coal mining being expanded together with an accelerated roll out of CSG projects, using technology that has not been proved to be environmentally safe,



Local farmer Ian Moore at 'Strathmore' near Jerrys Plains, on a blustery September afternoon in 2013. Over the past few years Moore, who is legally blind, has had to fight tooth and nail - in and out of court - to keep NuCoal at bay. Although supported at times in his battle to keep mining off prime agricultural land in the Upper Hunter by both local and national media, the 'fight' has been stressful, costly and infuriating. See also p. 1

while renewable energy research is starved of funding.

But we know this.

I read recently, 'The old Marxist postulate that awareness will save the species is blatantly false - look around you. Nobody cares what you think; only what you do.'

So what can we do to change the current regime of political policy that, according to accepted science, is acting contrary to our best interest?

We must assume that for the most part adherents of the current economic model are either stuck in a mindset and cannot see beyond what they have taken to be the natural order of things, or are doing very nicely thank you, are on a good thing, and will stick with it.... to the end.

And there is plenty of reason to believe that the end is indeed nigh, unless we make some changes very swiftly. We need a new form of consent, of consensual support for sustainable, renewal energy, and political support for the funding to bring that on line rapidly, even at the expense of curtailing economic expansion.

There will be no change unless we can raise the heat in the political climate and build a groundswell of public opinion that will give politicians the approval to vote with their hearts rather than their party.

Artists can use their professional skills to utilise whatever potency their creative works might have, and to work in networks with like-minded people passionate about a better future (or a future at all).

Yes we have heard this activist argument before at other times. But this time is not like other times. The capacity to coordinate, communicate and strategise via phone and computer, with speed and agility, and to involve large numbers of individuals and organisations, means that while the power relationship is still asymmetrical in conventional ways, in some regards the advantage is with local people - if we have the courage and resilience to take it up.

So let's help everyone pull their heads out of the sand, and **LEAVE THE CARBON IN THE GROUND.**

Neil Berecny-Brown

Farmer and Artist, Mangrove Mountain

ART, ACTIVISM AND US *from page 1*

grass-root activists (e.g. No Tillegra Dam Group, and more recently Sharyn Munro, Lock the Gate) to create work that speaks to and supports specific local struggles to save the environment. This creative dialogue and support empowers each of us. Sharing ideas, concerns and research around issues that we care about, issues in which we have a personal stake, provides a means for our individual and collective voices to be heard. We act together in the belief that we can do more than we might on our own, as lone voices in the wilderness.

We hope that we are able to create a conversation in the community about how we inhabit the earth, about what is being done to it and in what state the earth will be when we hand it on to our children. We wish to highlight the fact that money and self-interest has taken over, and that the health of the earth (which supports all life, including us) is now threatened.

We are voices from the other side with values other than fiscal and corporate. The obvious disregard for the well-being of our planet has to be countered, even if our voice is small. We know from our work as a group/collective that small voices together can have a large impact, and that art is sometimes able to cut through when people have stopped looking at slogans, graphs, figures and facts.

Art can reveal understanding of the big questions which face each and all of us in ways that circumvent conventional and often circumscribed forms of communication. It can work through metaphor, paradox and ambiguity; it can use the language of poetry and emotion; it can confront or seduce, it can draw one into contemplation, transcendence or outrage. Art that is about issues that affect people's lives can connect art with a wider audience. It can encourage participation in dialogue, increase public awareness, even empower individuals and communities to act for social change.

Perhaps the most important question is not whether we have an effect but rather: how might each and every one of us have *greater* effect in the world?

By working together and collaborating with others with shared values, we can achieve much. It might not be tomorrow, it might not be next week, but history (and art history) shows us that it has been done. If each of us affects just a few others, and together we change a few hundred, and so on, in time great change can be achieved.

At tipping points - such as RIGHT NOW - great and urgent change might, with your help, be brought about more speedily.



CONTENTS

Sharyn Munro	3
Williams River Valley Artists' Project	4
Noelene Lucas	6
Juliet Fowler Smith	7
Margaret Roberts	8
Sue Callanan + Julia Mullins/Colin Imrie + Very Crossword solution	9
Mine map of Hunter region	10
Toni Warburton	12
Glenn Albrecht + The Vital Few	14
Neil Berecny-Brown	15
Christine McMillan + Nuggets + Chris Ward Big Coal review	16
Ian Milliss	17
David Watson	18
Links + Very Crossword	20

The Stuttering Frog*

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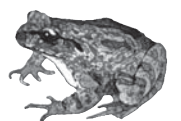
SALON CALLAN



The publishers recognise and pay respect to the Indigenous nations and traditional custodians on the land on which this publication was produced, and on which the exhibition *Leave It in the Ground* is mounted. We express solidarity with the ongoing struggles for land rights, self-determination, sovereignty and the recognition of past injustices.

*The Stuttering Frog

The Stuttering Frog, an endangered species on the Williams River north of Dungog in 2010, was adopted as the mascot for the first issue of WRVAP's *The Stuttering Frog*, a 16 pp agit-prop newspaper complementing WRVAP's exhibition *Cry Me A River* at The Tin Sheds in Sydney in October 2010, to aid in the fight against the proposed \$400 million Tillegra Dam. To read a copy of that first issue, go to <http://issuu.com/browncows/docs/thestutteringfrog>



Sharyn Munro

Words for commonsense

MY BOOK, *Rich Land, Wasteland* contained 454 pages of my most heartfelt and horrified written words. Since its release I've added my spoken words, delivering over 100 public talks in four states, all on invitation, and each specific and updated.

So I have a fair idea of the current state of battle against what I found to be a massive industrial invasion, by mainly foreign forces, but with full government support.

The organisers of those talks represent the 'fringe extremists' of whom government and industry warn: church groups, the CWA, rural groups like Property Rights Australia, communities worried about local survival issues like water – and the real baddies out to subvert our economy, the Knitting Nannas Against Gas, the KNAGs. I also confess to contact with the MAFIA, the Mothers Against Fracking in Australia.

Some events were put on by groups with 'environment', 'conservation' or 'climate action' in their name, but rather than being at odds with jobs and the economy, these concerns are integral; there are neither jobs nor profit on a dead or desperate planet.

I call myself a 'literary activist' or a 'commonsense activist'. Words are my weapon, and I act for a return to commonsense.

Like not killing the goose that lays golden eggs: don't mine our food producing areas, or permit any of the massive Galilee Basin mines, the coal to be shipped out via the Great Barrier Reef, industrialising and threatening what is not only World Heritage but our top tourism drawcard!

Like not fouling our own nest: don't allow coal and CSG to drain and contaminate our clean water sources, even the Great Artesian Basin, the lifeline of this country. Or beyond: don't fuel global warming with our coal!

The new Coalition government vows to keep backing the losing horse, Coal Power, even though it is clear Renewables would win if the race wasn't rigged, and there were no fossil fuel subsidies. And they will remove annoying federal environmental and water oversight – 'green tape' – as the loser industries panic and whinge and the vested-interest states demand open slather on their behalf.

Toxic globally, toxic locally.

The impact on people is *shameful*. All along the coal chain, from the mines to the uncovered stockpiles and rail wagons to the coal ports, residents are fighting to protect the health and futures of their people and waterways. We now see the same along the gas chain, from the gas fields to the pipeline routes to the LNG ports.

My sort of rich land can only exist where triple bottom line full cost accounting is respected: people, planet and profit. Our sham assessment processes certainly don't do that. I have



Me between my Camberwell heroines, Wendy Bowman OAM, 'The Genteel Guerilla General', (left) and Deidre Olofsson, 'Deidre the Dauntless', at Wendy's home, 'Rosedale' – wanted for another mine. Photo courtesy of *The Singleton Argus* (editor Di Sneddon), 28/5/2013.

watched communities and individuals, living in present or looming wastelands, learn that no matter how glaring the predictable damage, it will be found that the project will be 'unlikely to have any significant impacts'.

Government is not exercising its duty of care.

The Hunter has had over 100 air pollution exceedance alerts in 2013; you get email or SMS alerts, and if you have heart or respiratory conditions, you stay indoors. Singleton, where my grandchildren live, is one of the most polluted areas in Australia, from coal. The state average for reduced lung function in children is 1 in 9; in Singleton it is 1 in 3. Several schools keep the children inside on exceedance days.

Yet they propose more surrounding open-cut mines. As we know from Rio Tinto's Warkworth mine at Bulga and Yancoal's Ashton SE mine at Camberwell, our government won't even accept legal rulings or their own Health Dept's advice.

Camberwell's ongoing battle as it is choked by mines was Chapter 1, 'Living with open cuts', in my book, and I continue to support them, as in helping raise funds for the Hunter Environment Lobby court case against the mine's approval on the 'suss' second go, after being rejected.

The EDO is under pressure, and community groups can't get legal aid to fight for environmental justice. Goliath gets more muscle, while the powers that be don't want David to even have a slingshot. O'Farrell's appalling proposed Planning changes

would mean that no project can be rejected or appealed against because of health or environmental impacts. The 'significance of the resource' must come first; they aim to legalise the imbalance of profit over people and the planet.

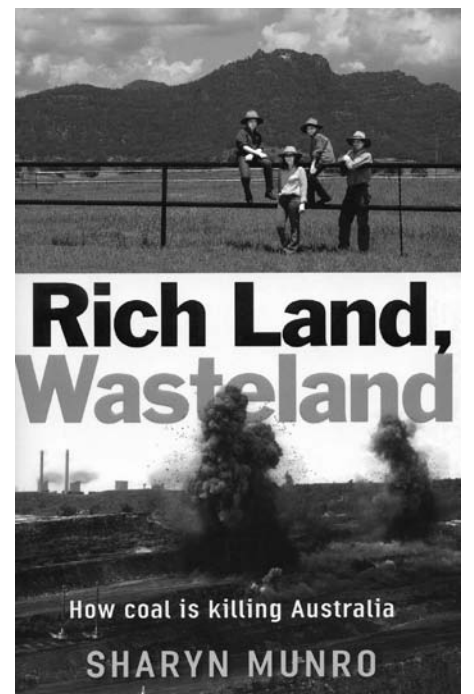
But a tipping point is approaching; from economics, not ethics – and from people power.

The price of coal has plummeted; Goldman Sachs advise the end of thermal coal investment, partly due to expected environmental regulations; thousands have been laid off, mines closed and new projects like Xstrata Wandoan mothballed; scientists warn our decreasing water supplies will make coal power (and coal mining) untenable.

With CSG, in NSW community resistance caused contradictory government kneejerks, shares to fall and companies to pull out of 'hot' areas.

Travelling back around with the book, I have seen the changes as the most conservative people have realised that their governments only consider the dollars, not the damage. There is an incredible social revolution building, a determination not to let this continue.

Hundreds of groups have sprung up, Locking the Gate, removing social licence; court cases proliferate; strategies like divestment grow; civil disobedience is an accepted option; bodies like the Uniting Church and the AMA are speaking out. This can only lead to more institutions – and businesses – feeling pressured to denounce any association with



Sharyn Munro's deeply felt, painstakingly researched *Richland, Waste Land: How coal is killing Australia* was published by Pan Macmillan Australia in 2012.

the demise of the planet or harm to communities.

Which is why these industries have escalated the PR war, with government backing, even in what feels like a war against its own people.

For the people, it's a fight to save Australia from being trashed for corporate bottom lines. For many, it's also to save a planet being rushed to the point of no return by an Australia riding, not on the sheep's back, but on that of global warming.

Which is why we *have* to win this fight. We need more of us in battle mode, to push for a return to commonsense in our benighted country.

Williams River Valley Artists' Project

A brief history

The Pareto principle: 80% of effects come from 20% of the causes. Which means a small group of purposeful individuals really can change the world.

— <http://www.areyouthevitalfew.org>

WRV ARTISTS' PROJECT, which commenced in early 2009, is a collective of environmentally concerned, dismayed, but determined, Australian contemporary artists. The group's evolution began in the Williams River Valley, Hunter Region, NSW, the location of the proposed (and now defunct) massive Tillegra Dam. The project began as an initiative of artist Juliet Fowler Smith, whose family farm lay in the inundation zone of the proposed dam. The number of artists has fluctuated over time with the core group now comprising Suzanne Bartos, Neil Berecny-Brown, Juliet Fowler Smith, Noelene Lucas, Margaret Roberts, Toni Warburton and David Watson. Some of the artists already had long-standing relationships to the valley, others were newer to it. All brought their own way to explore and express things relevant, and in response to, the crisis in the valley.

Over 2009-10 the artists developed work through a series of on-site residencies and forays into the valley and sites of power. They also met with local activists, community groups and fellow local artists. Collaborations, exhibitions and art actions were plotted with the purpose of protecting the Williams River and the locality's unique heritage, community and productive agricultural land.

In October 2010, just prior to the dam being cancelled, the artists published the first edition of *The Stuttering Frog* to accompany the exhibition *Cry Me a River*, opened by John Kaye MLC (Greens) at Tin Sheds Gallery, Faculty of Architecture, Design and Planning, The University of Sydney. Soon after this, in November 2010, plans for Tillegra Dam were abandoned. Despite this positive outcome, the Tillegra Dam planning process left the valley in disarray and it continues to struggle to recover from the displacement of families, degradation of land and an air of uncertainty.

Now, three years on (and still no land sales), there may be some hopes for a way forward following the AECOM consultancy and Hunter Water Corporation draft report – 'Tillegra Land Use and Management Plan'. Although widely questioned and disparaged in the community, the report has provided a stimulus for great ideas and practices to be considered. These include carbon offset farming, organic farming, and eco-tourism alongside traditional cattle farming and possibly commercial timber farming. The report offers the great model of Fosterton Farm (well known for its Biodynamic Bakery, Farm and Eco Accommodation), located on the Williams River outside Dungog (<http://www.fostertonfarm.com.au/>). Whilst not referred directly to in the report, local environmentalist Ken Rubeli's LIFESTREAM Project, a proposed complex showcasing sustainable living practice, based around historic Munni House and surrounding lands, is also worthy of support. Hunter Water Corp may yet pay its dues and give the valley and its residents a new beginning.

With the background of this experience and heartened by the win, shared interests and relationships, the group decided to continue. Members of WRVAP worked together both in Australia and overseas over 2012-13. During this time our attention was brought to the nearby Upper Hunter where coal mining and CSG exploration is degrading and destroying the environment. David Watson's work *Paddling the Grid*, shot in the Hunter wetlands threatened by the proposed Tillegra dam, foretold of future directions.



SAVED, Williams River. Artists at Williams River, 2009. Photo Toni Warburton



ENDANGERED, Goulburn River Valley, 2013. Photo Juliet Fowler Smith



Artists presenting Ville Niinisto, Finnish Minister for Arts and Environment (Greens), a copy of *The Stuttering Frog* earlier this year: (l to r) Noelene Lucas, Ville Niinisto, Juliet Fowler Smith, Suzanne Bartos. Artists were in Finland to participate in NAKYAMA Environmental Art Exhibition and Event 2013. Photo Sue Callanan



PADDLING THE GRID, 2010. Photo David Watson

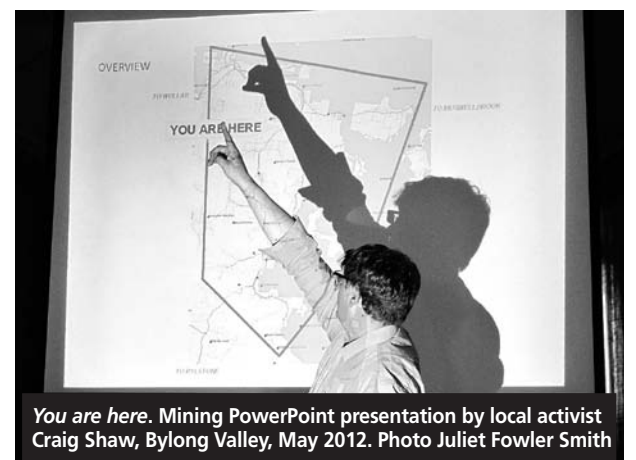


KANDOS, 2012. Photo Juliet Fowler Smith

Under the new curatorial leadership of Noelene Lucas project artists undertook residencies and exhibitions at Ann Finegan's Kandos Projects. Over 2012, nearby areas threatened by the coal industry were visited and contacts made. Work developed for the main street shopfront windows occurred throughout this time.

Kandos is surrounded by proposed and current mining activity. WRV Artists followed the past pattern of meeting and making links with local artists and activists and exploring the region. During these residencies in the Kandos region we became familiar with the Bylong Valley, Running Stream and other areas under the threat of destruction from coal mining. In May 2012 WRVAP paid a visit to the Bylong Valley for a picnic to meet local environmental activists and supporters. A presentation by local activist Craig Shaw shown in the local hall clearly showed the extent of the threat by mining to this rich food bowl, which includes 'Tarwyn Park', the property of 'natural sequence farmer' Peter Andrews and his family.

Our visit to Running Stream, 30km or so south of Kandos in June 2012 was memorable for the beauty of the landscape. Suzy Flowers and others

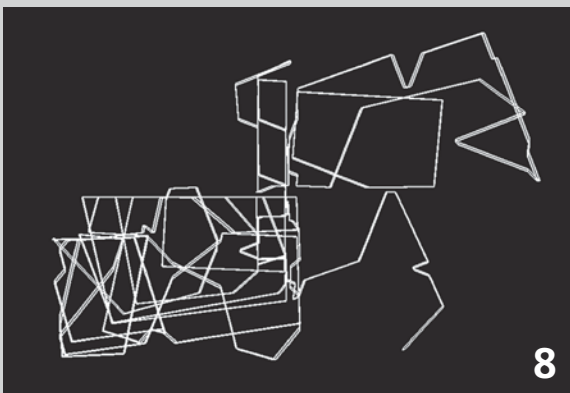


You are here. Mining PowerPoint presentation by local activist Craig Shaw, Bylong Valley, May 2012. Photo Juliet Fowler Smith

with the Running Stream Water Users' Group have battled to keep mining at bay there for 20 years. The topography around Suzy's spot is extraordinarily beautiful. The distant views north to Kandos (and the Charbon open-cut mine), overlooking a rugged mini Burragorang-like valley, were spectacular and poignant.

Our involvement with the people of the area who generously shared their knowledge, fears and shattered dreams with us, brought to our attention the huge threat the rampant mining industry poses to the communities, valuable agricultural land and unique ecology.

Since 2012 artists have explored further regions, with writers in this paper telling their stories. Our most recent recce was to the Goulburn River valley:



such gargantuan coal extraction/export operations are today hotly disputed. However, in the Kandos region relatively-small-scale mining has coexisted with agriculture for generations. The two windows show the shocking contrast.

6 Neil Berecry-Brown, *Emporium of Dreams*
 7 Neil Berecry-Brown, *Emporium - Opening Soon*
 'The path from dreams to reality is made by walking.'
From Dreams to Reality: Handbook of Creative Direct Action

8 Margaret Roberts in collaboration with Horst Kiechle, *Straight-line Residency 422 for Kandos projects*

Street view of how a particular straight line is bent by the interior of the Kandos Projects building, the installation of which is documented on <http://straightlineresidencies.blogspot.com.au>.

9 Toni Warburton, *May 2012, coal trains thread the hills in the Bylong Valley while WVRAP artists inspect Tarwyn Park with local activists from the Bylong Valley Protection Alliance (BVPA)*: <http://www.bvpa.org.au/>, watercolour

One of many productive farms threatened by coal mining in the Bylong Valley, 'Tarwyn Park' is where Peter Andrews pioneered his natural sequence farming methods to successfully restore groundwater and stream water to eroded, farm cleared land. <http://www.savetarwynpark.org.au/>

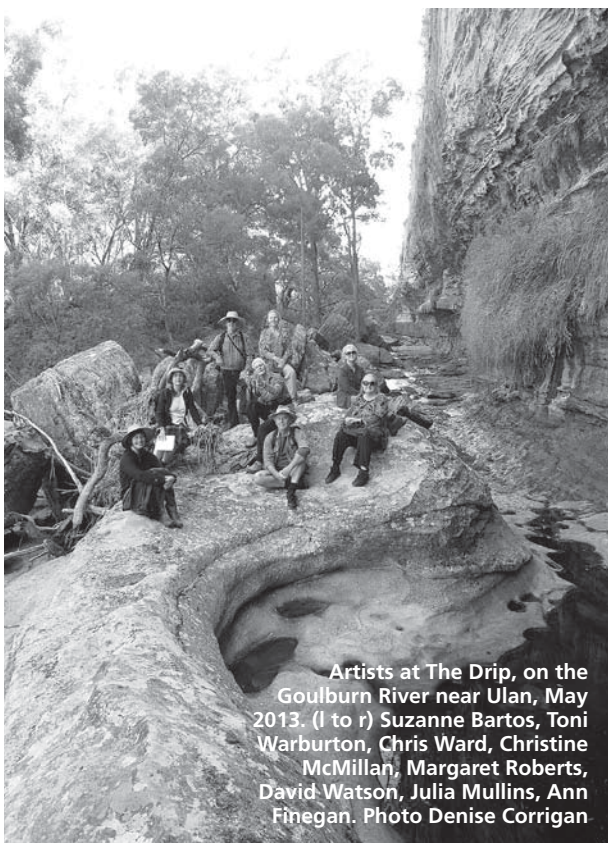
1 Kandos Projects' shopfront featuring: (left) Juliet Fowler Smith's, *Undermined*, a response to trying to explore the felt experience of losing the ground under your feet. The ground constitutes the physical place along with the social and psychological terrain. (right) David Watson's *Shoo, Cockatoo!* which depicts 'Tarwyn Park', the property of Peter Andrews in the Bylong Valley, under threat from Korean-backed Cockatoo Coal. On a stock rail sits a sulphur-crested cockatoo; in the distance trundles a long line of coal trucks.

2 Suzanne Bartos at work.
 3 Suzanne Bartos, *Pruning Parasites or They're the ones that kill trees aren't they?* Photo Noelene Lucas
 An over-abundance of local mistletoe became a metaphor for living with the reality of mining whilst managing its growth so that it doesn't destroy its host community and environment.
 4 (detail) Google earth aerial view of mining near Singleton.
 5 Noelene Lucas, *A Matter of Scale* Installation of Google earth images of mining between Muswellbrook and Singleton. Photo Noelene Lucas
 Aerial views of the upper Hunter reveal mine devastation on a vast scale. Claims by miners that agriculture can coexist alongside



to 'The Drip', and to Colin Imrie and Julia Mullins' property 'Gleniston', north of Mudgee, NSW. There we saw first hand something of what is happening to land being mined, and to vulnerable new tracts being (controversially) explored and staked out for future mining. Those of us who arrived at night saw from kilometres away the vast and dramatically lit-up Moolarben open-cut mine at Ulan, about 10kms south of 'Gleniston'.

As we criss-crossed the countryside following links and relationships, places unfamiliar to some of us were revealed to be under threat if not already damaged, degraded or destroyed. Internet searches revealed further horrors, but also well-organised local groups campaigning to save their homes, livelihoods and the environment and community that sustain



them. We are grateful to them for sharing their time and stories.

Leave It in the Ground is the sixth WRVAP

LEAVE IT IN THE GROUND

Works in exhibition:
 Neil Berecry-Brown *Social Licence*
 Sue Callanan *Going, Going, Gone*
 Juliet Fowler Smith *The area of Affection*
 Noelene Lucas *Rivers of Coal*
 Christine McMillan *Sludge*
 Ian Milliss *Viburnum with Coal*
 Margaret Roberts *Titled*
 Toni Warburton *coal clay water wood*
 David Watson *Welcome Mat, Checkout + Ransom Note* (with Denise Corrigan), *Mining Rash, Fuse*

ARTICULATE project space
 497 Parramatta Rd Leichhardt NSW 2040 Australia
 16 November to 1 December 2013 (Opening 6-8pm Fri 15 Nov)

exhibition protesting against threats to our environment. The artists work in close dialogue, sharing research, ideas and discussions that support their artistic endeavours.

WRVAP artists for *Leave It in the Ground* are Neil Berecry-Brown, Juliet Fowler Smith, Noelene Lucas, Margaret Roberts, Toni Warburton and David Watson. Three invited artists – Sue Callanan, Christine McMillan and Ian Milliss – join us in bringing their unique perspectives to the project.

Noelene Lucas

Water and Coal

DURING the first decade of this century I saw rivers in our country dry up. I saw the floors of dams and reservoirs dry and cracked. The people of Goulburn trucked in their water. Beyond these natural events of the drought, I saw the base of the Georges River in Sydney's west crack and its precious water drained into the rocks and the remaining water become polluted, as a consequence of longwall coal mining. Longwall mining caused similar destruction to the Upper and Lower Cataract Rivers; this time Sydney's back-up water supply was threatened as the Warragamba dam level dropped to below 30% capacity.

It was during this period that I started collecting video footage of rivers in Australia and around the world. I wanted to capture images of the rivers of the world while it was still possible and to highlight the beauty and vulnerability of this life-sustaining element of nature. Over the last 13 years I have filmed water in an attempt to create an inventory of the rivers of the world called *The Atlas of Water*. The seemingly clear fresh water seen in the videos is in stark contrast to what we see in our daily lives (e. g. the upper Georges River).

My video installation *Georges River* (2010) used this river as an example of how all is connected: the Georges River, in the Liverpool area of Sydney, is where fresh and salty waters meet. Water flows from the highlands, through suburbs to the ocean, which highlights that this river is part of the greater world. Rivers, like ourselves, are not autonomous; we are intricately connected to the whole of life on the planet.

In 2009 I was invited by Juliet Fowler Smith to join the Williams River Valley Artists Project, to protest against the proposed, now disbanded, mega Tillegra Dam. It was the Hunter wetlands in Newcastle that saved the Williams River valley from inundation, the Federal government having signed an international treaty to protect wetlands. This campaign alerted us all to the



Noelene Lucas, *The Atlas of Water*, 2012. [installation at 2nd Kathmandu International Art Festival]

massive destruction occurring elsewhere in, what used to be, the clean green Hunter. The equine, wine, agriculture and tourist industries are being forced to leave the Hunter because of pollution caused by mining.

Dust pollution from mining is a major issue in the Hunter as is water quality. Most coal mines in the Hunter are 'wet' mines. They draw up saline water and require fresh water from elsewhere for cleaning the coal, which becomes contaminated. The mines have holding dams but are permitted to discharge this into the creeks and rivers.

The destruction here, and across the nation, is of such a massive scale it can never be put right. The mining companies walk away and the land reverts back to crown title, then it is our clean up problem. A recent example:

The problem with the 15,000 abandoned mines in Queensland is now becoming so acute that flooding in central Queensland caused major pollution to nearby rivers, with some turning bright blue because of copper

levels and others had high levels of acid.¹

Not even our greatest treasure is safe. The World Heritage Great Barrier Reef is threatened. Nine new coal terminals and ports are in the pipeline including two mega ports, one near Bowen and the other near Mackay. These two alone mean over 6,000 extra coal ships in the reef area every year. Millions of cubic metres of the sea floor of the Great Barrier Reef World Heritage Area will be dredged. This is all going on despite the United Nations World Heritage Committee calling for it to halt.² The destruction here and elsewhere is of such a gigantic scale that once the destruction has occurred it can never be rectified.

Let us not forget that the burning of fossil fuels causes global warming. In 2011 fossil fuels constituted 82% of the world's energy consumption.³ The coal industry is, in effect, exporting global warming.

Climate scientists despair at the gap between what is needed to deal with global warming and what governments worldwide are willing to do. With the

continuation of business as usual they see that we have come to a tipping point and we should expect the worst. Fear for the future has led climate scientists to think of global solutions to this global problem. Basically they are of two kinds: solar radiation management and carbon dioxide removal. One geoengineering solution is the manipulation of the earth's climate by putting sulphur particles in the upper atmosphere to reduce sunlight hitting the surface of the planet ('global dimming?'). Another is to reflect back into space ultraviolet and other kinds of light these scientists see as 'junk' light, light that is 'superfluous ... for Biospheric purposes'.⁴ Do they really know what is superfluous to life? We now know 'junk DNA' has purpose. These 'solutions' have the potential to be even more disastrous than the problem. According to Clive Hamilton, 'the fate of nature has come to depend on the "goodwill" of humans...'⁵, and there seems to be very little of this about.

Daily in the news we hear and read horror stories of environmental destruction while our governments are seen to promote mining profits. It seems nothing will entice our governments to stop this greedy plundering. National and world heritage sites, our waterways, rivers, wetlands, aquifers, rich food producing land, and our health and well-being sacrificed. Governments don't seem to care. For further information and ways you can help see our back page.

1 *Courier Mail*, 2 August 2013. <http://www.couriermail.com.au/news/queensland/arsenic-from-abandoned-queensland-mines-poisons-rivers-and-threatens-public-safety/story-fnihsrf2-1226687063817>

2 'UN challenges Australia to protect Great Barrier Reef', *The Guardian*, 13 June 2013. <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/jun/18/great-barrier-reef-united-nations>

3 <http://www.globalization101.org/fossil-fuels>

4 Caldeira & Wood, 'Global and Arctic climate engineering', p. 4050. <http://media.cigionline.org/geoeng/2008>

5 Clive Hamilton, *Earth Masters* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2013), p. x.



Noelene Lucas, video still from *Inundation*, 2009

Margaret Roberts

Art and the status of place

UNDERLYING the disregard for the environment displayed by big mining companies and other powerful interests, there seems to be a broadly held view that the physical space in which we live either doesn't matter, or at the other extreme, is so invulnerable, can be so trusted to always bounce back, that it needs no protection. It is a suicidal attitude because, as we are spatially-dependent beings, the disregard for the physical space we occupy also reflects a disregard for ourselves (or reflects a child-like faith that we too are invulnerable).

It is tempting to see this attitude as too pathological to be true. However, if British sociologist Anthony Giddens is right, 'the devaluation of place' is a social value or belief that has been around for a long time. As he argues, it slowly evolved to enable our modern culture to develop from its first appearance in Western Europe in the 17th century to its current state of globalised 'high modernity'.¹ He contrasts the present-day devaluation with the greater value given to one's geographic locale in pre-modern or traditional times, when it was important partly because it was the source of the basic social information

(e.g. about time of day) that people in modern cultures now get from other sources (e.g. from clocks). To avoid the possible catastrophic consequences of this devaluation, he appeals for the redirection of modernity through programs of planetary care, preferably programs devised and implemented from the ground up. He argues that such programs need to construct new ways of valuing place so as to evolve a post-modern culture that may be barely imaginable now but which is self-sustaining instead of self-destructive.

Many people of foresight and courage are doing just this through environmental activism, political organisation and so on. As artists, we wonder how we can contribute to such a broad social movement through art practice. There are many ways in which art has been used for political ends, but one that can directly address the problem of the devaluation of place are spatial artworks such as installation and performance – or at least those that employ the actual space in which they are located as part of the language of the work, whatever their form is called. Such artforms reverse the convention of spatial autonomy used

by images and other artworks that seek to communicate without reference to their physical location, or that show no self-awareness of themselves as being one (virtual/imagined) space located within another (actual, physical) space. The spatial autonomy of the latter re-enacts the currently dominant view that their physical space does not matter (even though their other content may do other things), while artworks that recognise their physical location by making it part of their own language, enact a new and positive attitude toward it.

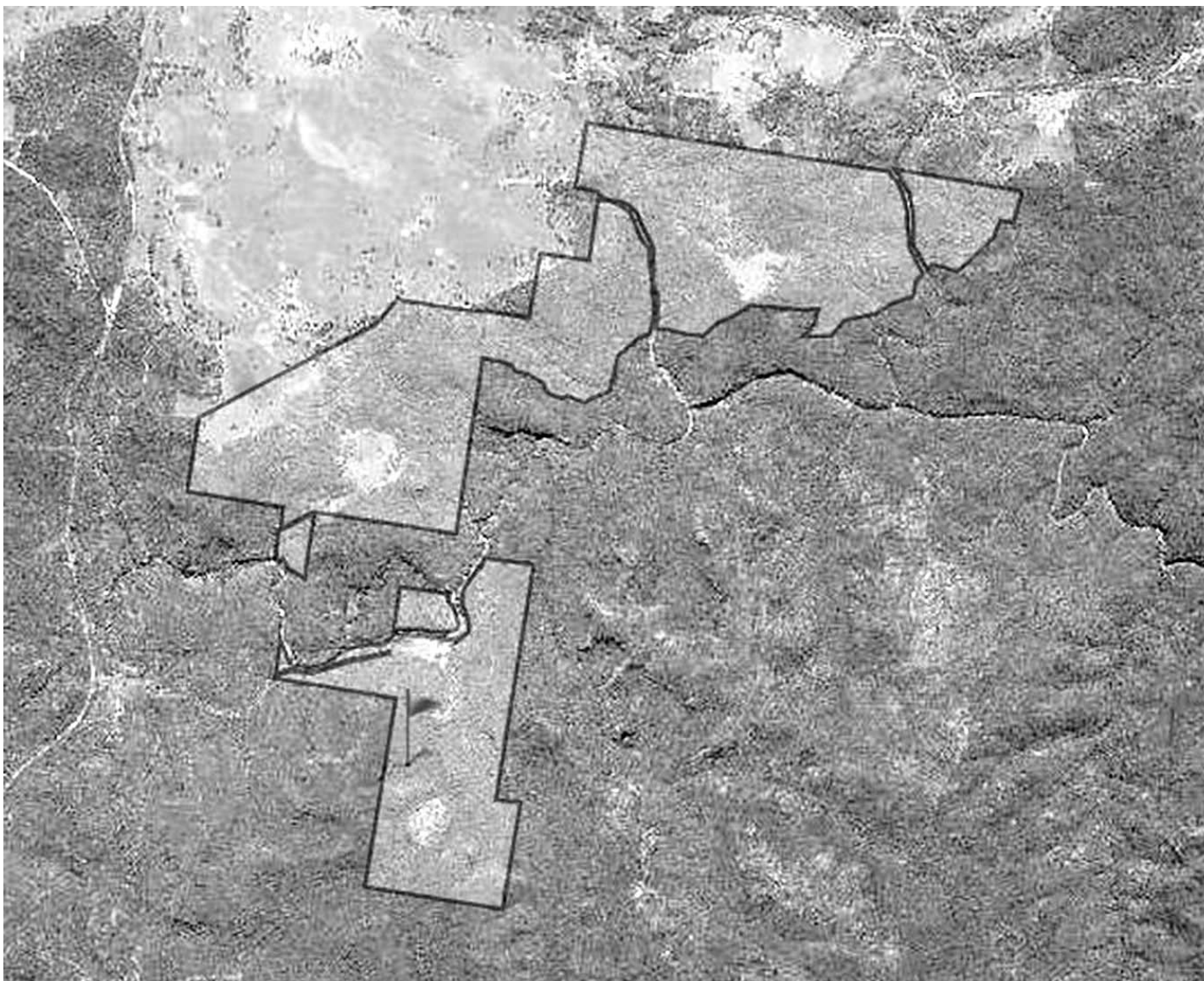
Its newness is in terms of dominant social meanings and values, which include the value given to place and the environment generally. It is not entirely new to art, however, as the artworks that led to installation and other spatial artforms (such as Duchamp's *Fountain*) are now a century old. But despite all that time, contemporary writers (such as US art historian Miwon Kwon writing on site specificity in 2002)² do not recognise the social and political significance of the spatial language invented by early-20th-century artists like Duchamp – a language reinvented several times throughout the century – that continues to be used today in

installation and related spatial forms. [While some has been discussed in terms of the related idea of anti-commodification, this was derived from the idea that site-specific work is immovable (and thus thought to be not so saleable), not from a discussion of the political significance of the value given to place.] One of the advantages of spatial artforms in this respect is that their form addresses the body (of viewers/visitors) through recognising the space from which the body is inseparable, leaving the mind to reflect upon that recognition or simply absorb the message. My hope is that in expanding the use of spatial artforms, artists are making a small contribution to developing a broader social belief in the value of the space we all inhabit.

With thanks to Denise Thompson for editing.

¹ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).

² Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Massachusetts and London: The MIT Press, 2002).



Earlier in 2013 members of the Williams River Valley Artists' Project visited 'Gleniston', Julia Mullins' and Colin Imrie's property on the Goulburn River near Ulan (north of Mudgee) and saw where existing and proposed mining threatens the environment (see letter on p. 9, facing). Julia Mullins' PhD research aims to improve understanding of connectivity between groundwater (aquifers), surface flows and water quality in the Goulburn River catchment.

I am planning an artwork for *Leave It In the Ground* that uses the shape of the title plan for the land that they are so courageously caring for (along with its adjacent environment). The artwork will be designed for visitors to physically engage with, so as to recognise and give voice to the actual physical space that we all need to keep inhabitable.

Sue Callanan

The Big Smoke

DRIVING up the New England Highway. A perfect day, sunny, crystal clear skies and sharp blue edges to the low lying distant hills. It's a scenic drive – one I've done many times before, since I was a girl, travelling back and forth from my home town, Singleton, to my grandmother in Sydney. It was a big trip then. 'Off to the Big Smoke?', the locals would ask with a touch of envy, almost a sneer. Yes, we were off to the Big Smoke. But now, many years later, The Big Smoke is the Hunter Valley itself.

Little would one realise at first. 'That's steam', says my brother, pointing to white clouds billowing from fat bellied chimneys, 'but those two tall stacks – they seem to have nothing issuing forth – 'that's where the smoke is'. We follow the road to what looks like a border control station. It blocks us from going any further. Signs at the entrance read 'WELCOME TO BAYSWATER POWER STATION', and 'PRIVATE PROPERTY: AUTHORISED ENTRY ONLY'

Beyond the barrier the sharp-edged blue hills give way to rising mounds of churned grey earth – one mine upon another. Enormous potholes, pock-marking the landscape, give the impression that the roads are what hold the fabric together – thin sinews with gaping holes on either side.

Camberwell, Jerrys Plains, Broke – places I hadn't been to for a long time – places of my childhood – picnics, the spot where we accidentally ran over my



Near Bayswater Power Station.
Photos Sue Callanan

favourite cat, the small farm we had, places from which children arrived in town by the school bus – all still there, but encroached upon from every side. Like threatened species, these jewels of places – ordinary and humble, but unique to a time and place – are about to be upended and covered over.

Perhaps those hills will, ultimately, be 'remediated' to form long low swathes of land with the tell-tale stumpy vegetation that signals their 're-arrangement', but the original vegetation, the cottages, families and farm sheds will be gone forever.



Letter to the editor

From: Julia Mullins & Colin Imrie at 'Gleniston'
September 2013

The Goulburn River catchment in the Upper Hunter Valley NSW has become a hotspot for coal mining. Existing mines have more than doubled in size and new mines are proposed for areas such as Bylong Valley and at Denman where the Goulburn meets the Hunter, while CSG exploration activity is set to cover the rest of the catchment formerly assumed to be safe from industrialisation. Despite the obvious potential for large-scale mining activities to have similarly scaled consequences for this sensitive water system, there has been very little scientific scrutiny of the long-term cumulative impacts.

The Ulan coal fields (at headwaters of the catchment) have a history of mine subsidence from longwall mining that has fractured and depressurised aquifers and diverted groundwater

flow creating a two to ten kilometre cone of drawdown around the underground footprint. The lowering of regional groundwater levels has had a profound effect on the interchange between the stream and surrounding aquifers that support surface flows and groundwater dependent ecosystems. In addition open-cut mining causes massive surface disturbance, a legacy of saline pits known as 'final voids', destruction of alluvial aquifers and the potential degradation of downstream water quality from sediment and solute laden discharge.

The Ulan Mine produces large volumes of excess saline water. A cocktail of this desalinated waste water plus intercepted groundwater is discharged into the river system dependent on operational requirements. This measurably changes downstream water chemistry, flow regime, and ultimately the

ecology of the riverine environment and stream biota. Though difficult to predict, the combined water interception and consumption by the existing three mines – Ulan (Glencore Xstrata), Moolarben (Yancoal) and Wilpinjong (Peabody) – is estimated to exceed 40 million litres per day over the next decade, while modelling indicates groundwater recovery will take in excess of 200 years after mining ceases.

The increasing scale and footprint of high-risk mining activities is alarming and there is an urgent need for properly informed public scrutiny. The current rush to expand and open mines in sensitive areas such as Bylong Valley and develop CSG along the agriculturally productive Merriwa plateau is being undertaken with no objective assessment of the serious cumulative and long-term consequences on the health and resilience of the Goulburn River system.

Solution to Very Crossword

1 Newcastle 2 renewables 3 EPBC 4 Coal 5 Adani 6 FMG 7 Galilee 8 Xstrata 9 global warming 10 BHP 11 Rio Tinto 12 GVK 13 Kaye 14 CO₂ 15 asthma 16 Peabody 17 noise 18 Cockatoo



Photo Beyond Coal and Gas



Photo Sue Callanan



Photo Sharyn Munro



Photo Sharyn Munro

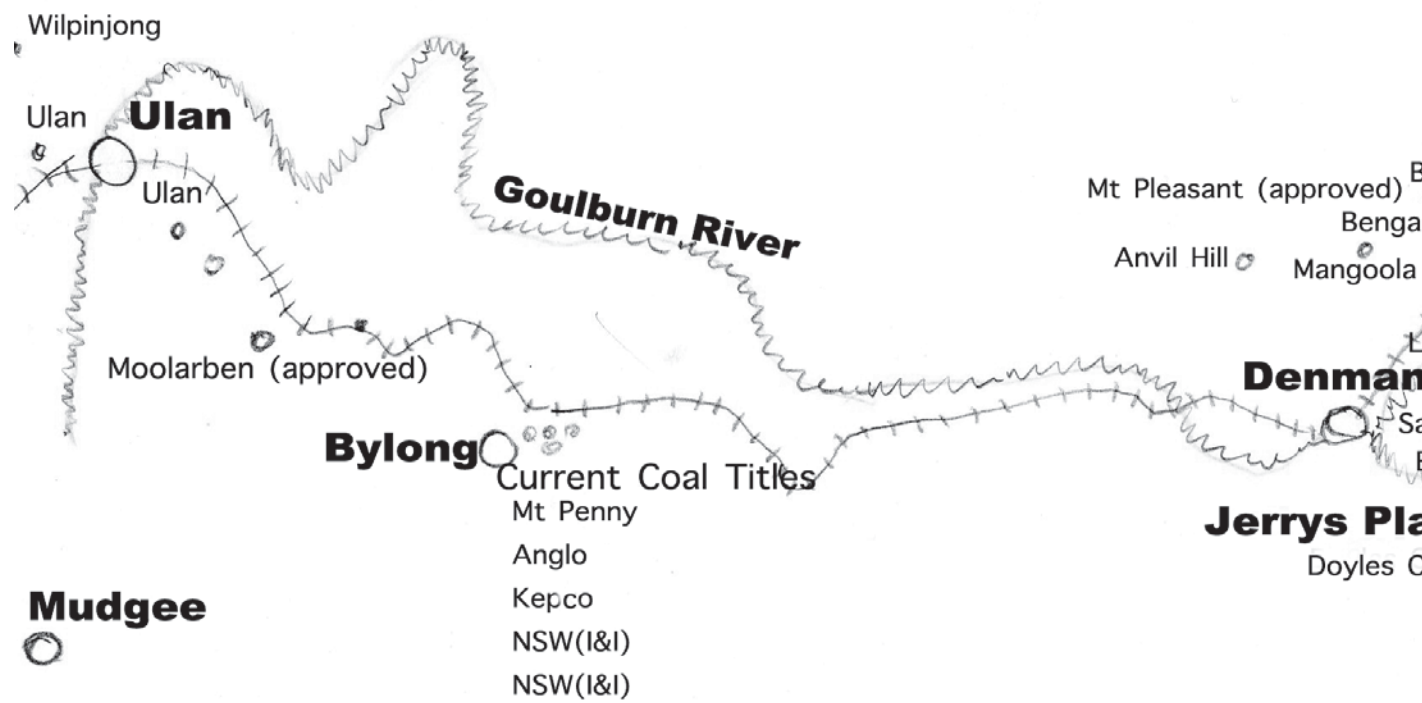




Photo Rising Tide

Photo Sharyn Munro



Photo David Watson



Photo Beyond Coal and Gas



Photo Sue Callanan



Photo Denise Corrigan



Photo Sharyn Munro

Photo Sharyn Munro

Toni Warburton

coal clay water wood

IN 18th-century Europe, a village with supplies of coal, clay, water and wood was a perfect place for pottery production. Ceramic practices today continue both to depend upon and to disrupt relationships between these 'resources'. As anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has noted:

the art of pottery narrows in the most radical way the gap between matter and form, its results are uncertain and subject to many risks, and this does not fail to effect the minds of those who practice it.¹

By dint of their experience of the irreversible changes wrought by ceramic processes on fired clay and minerals, ceramists can be acutely attuned to the irreversibility of interventions into the natural order. Many feel charged with a duty to make the very best of what they use from the earth and to take exception to circumstances in which they perceive precious materials being squandered. The ethical and sustainable uses of so-called 'natural resources' are daily considerations.

coal

What do Captain Cook, Count Dracula and Queen Victoria have in common? At the coastal Yorkshire town of Whitby, Cook launched the *Endeavor*, Dracula was shipwrecked in the *Demeter* and miners dug the Whitby jet that was made into the black jewelry and tiara that Queen Victoria wore, dressed in black, to mourn the death of Prince Albert. Jet, also known as *gagate*, is fossilised coal formed in the Jurassic period from the petrified wood of monkey puzzle trees that grew in abundance when England was closer to the equator over 150 million years ago.

The Queen's grief habit sparked a Victorian craze for ornamental mourning that led to over-mining and depletion of the rare Whitby jet seams. As supplies could not keep up with demand, jet was imitated in materials such as glass, rubber, and coal dust with glue. It now seems worthwhile to use imitation materials to create new mourning apparel to adorn and protest our grief for the damage and death to towns, communities and natural environments wrecked by contemporary coal-mining scourges.

Coal was formed from plant matter as part of a cycle of intense seismic pressure that began in the carboniferous period 300 million years ago. Wood became peat became lignite became coal became anthracite (pure graphite, of the kind used in nuclear fuel rods). Coal is concentrated carbon, naturally sequestered, often safely layered (here in Australia) between clay and sandstone. For a coal seam to form the pressure and depth of water and sediment must be undisturbed for aeons.

As an aquifer coal can contain water, as an *aquitard*, coal can repel it, as a washed, mined material, coal contaminates it. Lévi-Strauss discusses the mythological import of the merger of aquatic/chthonic zones in terms of synthesis, balance, confluence. Coal in situ contains fresh and salt water like the estuarine filtering peat swamps that mediate between river and sea.

Concentrated solar energy, coal is a fuel 'cooked' in furnaces to generate heat, smelt metals, power steam engines – and generate electricity. The methane and CO₂ formed from these processes outline our carbon footprints.

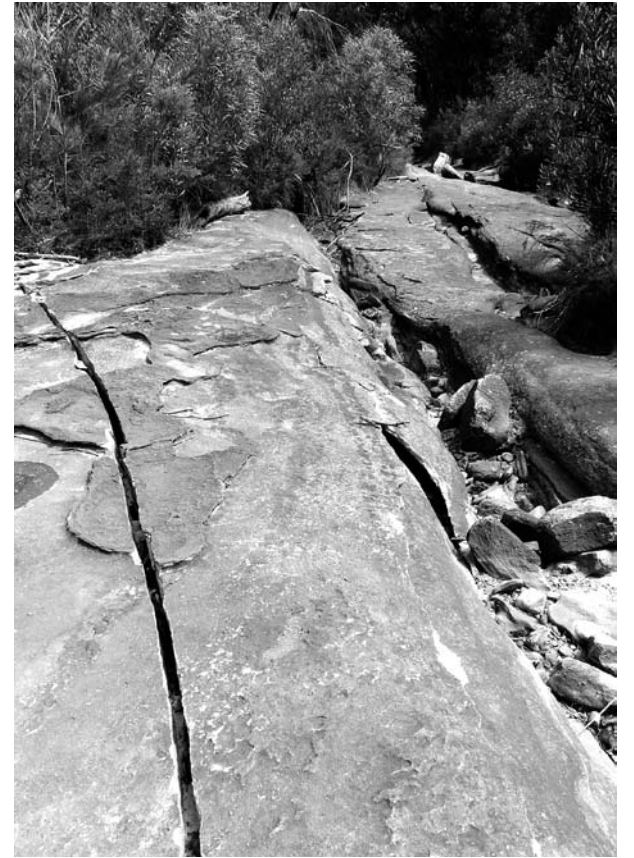
Longwall coal mining – a relatively new practice, which deploys massive coal-cutting machines underground – inflicts collateral damage upon a scale seen only in disaster movies or ravaged war zones, to animals, plants and landforms in above- and below-ground situations. Its vast, quickly exhausted underground caverns disregard basic principles of engineering and architecture: a post and lintel 'technique' leaves large columns of coal which are subsequently re-mined to 'maximise the resource'.

When the mining machine retreats it leaves an unsupported tunnel ceiling (often of permeable sandstone, a layer once-supported by the coal seam) which is prone to collapse. The removal of the natural geological architecture similarly destroys aquifers, rivers and streams. Urban water supply catchments such as Cataract Dam are not exempt.²

Although science recommends 'the precautionary principle', these days mining ignores it. With the blessing of governments, state and federal, mining corporations speak still in the pre-Marxist resource-boom language of the 19th century. It has a simple syntax and little nuance. It looks like this: \$

Legislation must be passed to protect freshwater catchments in farmland and bushland from wasteful

The 'collateral' damage of longwall coal mining: environmentalist Julie Sheppard captured dramatic images of Waratah Rivulet, part of the catchment for the Woronora Dam (just south of Sydney) in 2006. Because special catchments such as these are off-limits to the general public, such damage is often hidden from view. Sheppard's alarming images show vanished rivers and creeks, poisoned water and barren ground. The short film *Rivers of Shame* (2006) further highlights the devastating affect of coal mining upon our river systems.



In August 2013 a Fairfax Media investigation revealed that 180 tonnes of concrete piped in to 'grout' cracked cliff rocks caused by longwall mining beneath the Mt Sugarloaf state conservation area, near Newcastle, flowed underground then out via waterfalls to solidify like a lava flow along over 400 metres of a tributary of Cockle Creek. It is apparent that the full extent of the underground subsidence caused by longwall mining was not properly evaluated or understood by the mining company Glencore Xstrata or their contractors. Due to the cover up of this negligent and ill-informed 'grouting' attempt, valuable time was lost and it will be impossible to remove all the hardened concrete and restore this creek bed without causing further destruction. Photo Darren Pateman/Fairfax Syndication

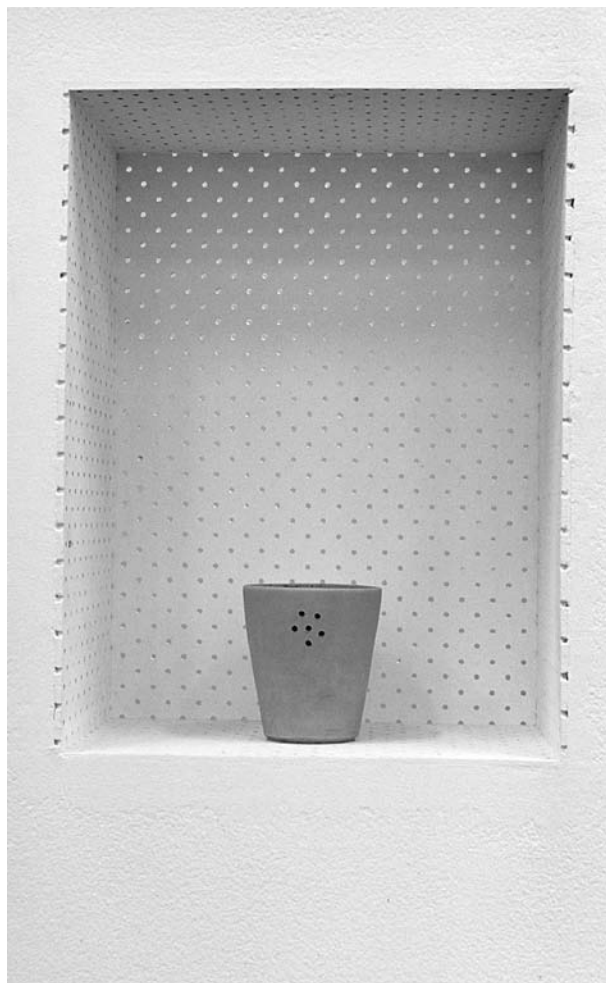
exploitation and contamination by the coal mining and coal seam gas fracking industries.

clay

In *Clay Objects and the Articulation of Place*, ceramist Patsy Hely discusses the complex implications of the brick hut that Bennelong asked Captain Phillip to build for him on Bennelong Point (the site now occupied by the Sydney Opera House).³ Hely connects her revelatory discussion of this

transaction to the Brickfields sited near today's Haymarket and to the 'overburden' removed in the process of extracting clay to 'turn country into object, space into place'.

Clay is formed from the erosion of weathered sedimentary rock layers. Compressed to mudstone, it contains fossils. When dry it is an *aquifer*, like coal, absorbing moving water. When clay has absorbed its equilibrium of water content, its plasticity resists water and, like coal, can also become an *aquitard*. Made plastic or liquid by



Toni Warburton, *Wingecarribee Swamp*, clay, peat moss and perforated masonite, 1999

mixing with water and particulate matter, it carries other materials, responds to gestures, can be imprinted and poured into moulds. Clay mediates the melt of glazes. By firing a mixture of clay and grass fibres, porous water filters can be made. Lévi-Strauss tells us that in the myths of South American Indians, clay is the child of the rainbow snake. It lies under and over coal seams. Eastern Australian Indigenous knowledge tells us that the Rainbow Serpent goes underground in the season of July, August.⁴

§

John Cole puts a long handled shovel and a rake into the back of my station wagon with my buckets plastic bags and hardened plastic trowel. In the Gulgong district, not far from Ulan and the gigantic Moolarben⁵ open-cut coal mines, the way to the Cudgong clay mine is a mirage of two tire tracks bruised into the soft wire grass that quivers in the breeze. Kangaroos travel across the paddock. It is a little after four in the afternoon, Sunday summertime. John opens various gates and closes them behind us. The track winds through paddocks and we cross a watercourse, not running fast but rather seeping across a low area of the field. I see the white mounds of China clay glisten like Sydney Opera House sails in the distance. Sheep take off in a flock; they eat the same native grasses as the roos.

This clay is weathered granite, formed from the volcanic steam heating it through fissures, so the soil around here is acid. The good clay fires to

1500°C and BHP use it to make bricks for their blast furnaces. It is industrial grade. The clay particles are electrolytic and stay in suspension. Puddles of soft fine clay: white ponds with milk waves. The clay mining machinery is kept in town. High around the edge of the clay pit, one can see the work of a claw excavator, grooves that form

the runnels that erode the sides. The clay I dug was from the sides of the clay pit pond.

water

The hydrological cycle constitutes the flows of water between underground, land surface, ocean and sky through coal, peat, porous stone, soil and plants consumed by living creatures. Water flows through living creatures, is excreted by living creatures, is mutable and can change state from solid to liquid to gas.

Water is a vehicle for solids, impurities and contaminants. It can wash and purify and remove contaminants, it can be purified from contaminants. Water can be poisoned. Water can generate and conduct electricity. Water is a force of nature, a spring, a river, a lake, a rock hole, a soak, a dam, a flood, a habitat, and a biosphere, essential to life and to the potter's craft.

For
travelling lightly, a
traditional Aboriginal woman's
kit contains a hand-sized wooden water
scoop used to dig and draw water (once a
recurrent resource) from the sandy ground of
soaks. An elliptical shape, hand carved from a
hardwood boll, its convex surface is engraved with a
scatter of emu's tracks. A visual analogue, it resonates
with conceptual and practical ingenuity. Implicit
gestures of access and restraint tell us that water is
sourced from ground laced with subterranean
aquifers that connect to creeks, rivers,
springs, clay pans, rock holes, lakes:
all of which imbricate into
song lines.

Cloven hooves of colonising herds of driven cattle, feral camels and pigs and the tracks of four-wheel-drive vehicles continue to damage, pollute and leave soakage places uncovered.

wood

Trees create their wood from sunlight, photosynthesis, cellulose and water. Trees provide habitat. Harvested wood is a structural material, a renewable resource, a fuel. Melted wood ash forms a glaze on ceramics. As a renewable energy, wood is the fuel of choice for the kilns of many potters who have done their carbon sums.

Trees and plants are the elements of the terrestrial carbon cycle. Gravity of the planetary system causes pressure on the earth's crust and this breathing of the planet causes a sort of peristalsis that makes the dead plant matter into mulch, then peat, then coal.

In *Green Imperialism*, British environmental historian Richard Grove reveals that for centuries, Europe, and Britain in particular, undertook massive clear felling of land for agrarian use and to obtain timber for urban and military demands. Subsequent European colonial expansionism deployed slave labour to slash, burn and deforest the invaded land to produce commodities such as sugar and tobacco. This caused massive erosion and loss of natural water catchments. In Australia as early as 1860:

the colonial environmentalists felt a steadily growing danger in which they argued the whole earth might be threatened by deforestation, famine, extinction and climate change.⁶

In the light of his recent research into the resources boom in Australia, Guy Pearce reminds us that, heeding the precautionary principle, we would do well to err on the side of caution rather than risk

irreparable harm, not only to Australia, but to the entire planet:

In truth we will not be dealing with climate change as a nation until we deal with the carbon liabilities we export to the world.⁷

Australian academic Glenn Albrecht created the word *solastalgia*⁸ to describe the profound emotional trauma associated with the destruction of our connections to a total ecology of place. With respect to the notion of the jealous potter, Lévi-Strauss interprets 'jealousy' as *the desire for something that you own that will be taken away or the desire for something that you don't have*. These desires underpin our *solastalgia* for wrecked and ruined country and places, and our determination to protect threatened eco-systems, habitats and communities, and sustain authentic ways of being within the world.

provenance

In my own work, the theme of potable water reflects and signifies psychosocial, aesthetic and biological continuities between people, place and country. My work seeks to create perturbations of emotional ambivalence around human interventions into natural systems.

There are now many places where inhabitants can no longer trust their knowledge of the local ecology to obtain potable water. What happens up stream matters.⁹ What happens in the ground affects other ground. Knowing provenance may be one of the most effective activisms left, a form of ethical reassurance about actions of consumption. Knowing the sources may ensure survival: of authenticity, knowledge, narrative, pattern and relationship.

A rest has been called beside a stream. Beakers are filled with water and handed around for the walkers to share. The water they drink is not from the stream. They collect water from the stream to test. In the secular sense, a ritual has been called. Sustenance still has a connection to the sacred in the redemptive sense of working on what has been spoiled. Water from the stream is not tasted, but tested: a sacred function.

A shaft of sunlight beams a replica of the drip and breeze rippled surface of the pool onto the rock face.

1 Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Jealous Potter* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p.178.

2 Work by artists Stephen Harrison, Catherine Rogers, Julie Gough, John von Sturmer, Deborah Vaughan and activist curator Jo Holder influenced my thinking for this text. Thanks to Chris Ward for editing assistance.

3 Patsy Hely, *Clay Objects and the Articulation of Place*, unpublished PhD dissertation, ANU, Canberra, 2007.

4 Francis Bodkin, indigenous botanist at Mt Annan Botanical Gardens,

5 <http://www.yancoal.com.au/page/key-assets/mines/moolarben/>

6 Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism: Colonial Expansion, Tropical Island Edens and the Origins of Environmentalism 1600-1860* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996) p. 15.

7 Guy Pearce, 'Quarry Vision: Coal, Climate Change and the End of the Resources Boom', in *Quarterly Essay 33*, March 2009, p. 94.

8 For an informed and insightful exposition about *solastalgia* (with respect to the proposed damming of the Williams River at Tillegra), see Juliet Fowler Smith, 'A place called 'the farm'' in *The Stuttering Frog*, October 2010, p. 4.

9 Artist Suvan Geer says 'to treasure a river and work to preserve it is an act of global kinship when it values the culture of the land through which it flows'. Suvan Geer, 'Keepers of the Waters', *Artweek*, April 1997, p. 19.

Glenn Albrecht

The Hunter Valley Carbon Conservation Park

Glenn Albrecht is professor of sustainability at Murdoch University in Perth. He is known for, amongst other things, the research domain of psychoterratic or earth-related mental health conditions, the concept of solastalgia (the lived experience of negative environmental change), and a slightly tongue-in-cheek plan for residents to collectively buy up coal deposits in order to leave them where they are. In this scheme the company would get a return on investments in lieu of coal mined, and the government would get offset royalties from permanently sequestered carbon...

COAL and gas miners and engineers love their children and grandchildren just as much as environmentalists do. We all need to give our progeny a sense of hope about their future by demonstrating that we are prepared to make sacrifices right now in order to take excess greenhouse gases out of our economy and our atmosphere.

This year CO₂ levels in our atmosphere reached 400 parts per million (ppm). My grandchildren will be only in their 30s in 2040 when carbon dioxide levels – at their current growth rate of 2% per annum – reach 450 ppm. At this point, the world's top climate scientists agree, a dangerous 'tipping point' could occur, with the world's climate spiraling out of control into much higher temperatures, polar meltdown with massive sea level rise, and totally unpredictable weather systems. From now on the Greenhouse Gas Index (GGI) will be far more important an indicator of our sustainability than the Dow Jones or the All Ordinaries.

In order to achieve a 'safe' level of greenhouse gases in our atmosphere (perhaps 350 ppm) a moratorium on all new coalmines, coal-fired power stations and gas extraction industries must be implemented.

Leave It in the Ground

The next generation needs to see right now a clear demonstration that their mature, well-educated and affluent parents and governments are

prepared to pay for past greenhouse-gas-intensive lifestyles, and to forgo the immediate and future benefits of cheap carbon-based energy, by leaving it in the ground for the benefit of the common good. While a number of students at universities are asking their institutions to divest themselves of investments in fossil fuels, I think we all need to work out a way to divest ourselves of the carbon economy and make a transition into the post-combustion economy. We must find a new way to invest to ensure that fossil fuels are not used.

One possible idea for enabling people to divest of their past and future carbon emissions is to create a market for conserving carbon by leaving coal, gas and oil in the ground. Rather than risky tree-based carbon credit schemes, I have been eyeing off the coal reserves and the gas fields in the Hunter Valley of NSW as a possible source of the coal and gas that I would put into my carbon safe. I want to prevent new coalmines and gas fields from opening and I want their carbon pollution left safe and secure in the ground forever. I think millions of others worldwide would also like to 'invest' in the idea of a carbon conservation park.

After a consultation with my carbon accountant, she recommends that, via the Carbon Conservation Company, I invest in unexploited fossil fuels in the Hunter Valley. I will purchase the equivalent of my past 10 years' generation of greenhouse gas emissions. As my financial situation

allows, I will be able to offset the total of my past 60 years of treating the earth as a 'free' waste bin for my greenhouse gas emissions.

As others worldwide make similar bequests of fossil carbon to their children and grandchildren, never to be used in the future, we speed up the decarbonisation of our economy. However, I still have to pay more in the here and now for carbon-based fuels in the form of other carbon taxes that are designed to bring the GGI down to below 350ppm. No purchase of 'indulgences' here, where I continue a carbon-profligate lifestyle without taking 'new' carbon out of the economy. I should pay twice for my carbon, once for my past consumption and again as I consume carbon in these last days of the combustion economy. Even if some unethical government should do the unthinkable and refuse to impose a carbon tax, then I could simply invest in my future emissions in the same way as I dealt with past emissions.

The Hunter Valley Carbon Conservation Park investment/divestment option looks like good value as it includes the complete preservation of landscape values, ecosystem services (water supply, arable soil, and biodiversity) and no additional cumulative impacts on farmers and residents of the Upper Hunter. The shareholders of the Carbon Conservation Company have a return on their investment and the government can still get 'royalties' from permanently sequestered carbon offsets. I see no reason why coal or gas from any other working coal or gas mine cannot be bought by those who wish never to mine or burn it; after all, it is a free market.

Moreover, it would be optimally ethical for the government to engage in direct action and re-invest all of its new carbon offset royalties into clean, renewable and safe energy with all new employment to go to ex-coal industry workers. A final bonus is that we will not have to develop hugely expensive 'cleaner' coal or carbon sequestration technology as we save a lot of money by leaving coal and gas in the ground. All this money also goes into developing clean, safe renewable energy. This is a win, win, win situation and the Hunter Valley Carbon Conservation Park becomes world famous as a pioneer that helped prevent the tipping point into global climate chaos.



The Vital Few

Climate change is the most high-risk, high-certainty event that will ever impact global investment. Superannuation and pension funds worldwide are largely exposed and ill-prepared for the pricing of pollution. The casualties of their short-sightedness will be ordinary 'citizen investors' and their retirement nest eggs held in superannuation and pension funds.

The volume of money tied up in these funds globally is staggering. Upwards of \$30 trillion, it is the single largest consolidation of money found anywhere in the world. Dwarfing the wealthiest individuals, the most successful companies and the most powerful governments, global retirement fund money is at the top of the wealth chain. So when it comes to solving the greatest challenge of our generation – reducing our reliance on fossil fuels to safeguard our environmental and economic future – logic follows that the pot of retirement wealth be called into action.

The Vital Few is a community of people who are being inspired to speak up and take action to make the investments made on their behalf more sustainable. The Vital Few are demanding disclosure and transparency on details about climate risk. They are determined to exercise their rights as superannuation fund members to ensure their future prosperity is secured - both financially and environmentally. Demanding that their funds tell the truth about what percentage they are currently investing in high-carbon assets, and asking them to hedge climate risk by increasing low-carbon investment from less than 2% to 5%, will redirect billions of investment dollars and create a tipping point ushering in the low-carbon economy.

The influence of The Vital Few draws on the Pareto principle, which states that 80% of effects come from 20% of the causes. Which means a small group of purposeful individuals really can change the world.

Come join us:
www.areiyouthevitalfew.org



Glenn Albrecht dedicating the Hunter Valley Carbon Conservation Park

Neil Bercry-Brown

Green Light for Green Fields Grab

THE executives of global resources giant, Hubris & Dominion, are celebrating Tony Abbott's victory, and a return to conservative government in Australia. Its shares have jumped 28.7% since the 7th of September.

A statement by H&D C.E.O. Thomas Lassiter OAM said the company expected to benefit greatly from the removal of financial imposts on companies that exploit the nation's finite non-renewable assets. This will increase profitability and create jobs, he said, as will changes to allow major polluters to pollute at no cost.

Proposed changes being introduced in NSW by Resources Minister Chris Hartcher, giving priority to projects deemed to be in the financial interests of resource companies and the government, were also welcomed, said Mr Lassiter. He added that he looked forward to working closely with both federal and state governments in creating more wealth, and jobs.

Hubris & Dominion will now move forward with its plans to mine the magic pudding deposits identified through its exploration licences throughout the commonwealth.

An environmental scientist employed by the corporation, who wishes to have his name withheld, dismissed objections raised by an increasing number of

community organisations, as 'the carping of tree-hugging luddites'. He went on to say 'It is not up to us to prove something is safe. We will be using Autoseverance Deperching technology. A process used around the world and considered best practice in the industry.'

However concerns are growing about detrimental effects of both Autoseverance Deperching and Fracking. As reported in *The Land*, 17th of September: 'NSW farmer groups have reacted angrily to the stridently pro-coal seam gas position pronounced by incoming Industry Minister Ian Macfarlane.' 'Farming lobbies caution against a "headlong dash" to development.'

'Mr. Macfarlane has dismissed the concerns saying: "I'm not interested in noisy protesters, minority groups, with no interest in the development of regional Australia. They simply want to politicise this issue and tell lies."' Hubris & Dominion has close ties with the Coalition, sharing its values, objectives of rapid resource exploitation and its attitude to alternative points of view.

While the election is over, and the new government claims a mandate for everything it so decides, there is an alternate claim that the result is invalid because many were unable to vote. The Australian Earth Laws Alliance, and the Australian Wild Law Alliance, led by barrister Chris McGrath, will run a test

case on behalf of IAMA to challenge the validity of the electoral process.

IAMA, the Iconic Australian Marsupials Alliance, supported by a GetUp! petition of over 300,000 signatures, is demanding that Koalas, as natural Australians, be represented in government. As sentient beings, Koalas not only have an intrinsic right to determine their own future, but play an important part in the economy. A spokesman for the Alliance condemned human arrogance, prejudice, and claim to dominion, and said they could not rule out direct action.

The manager of Koalas Kort on the Gold Coast says they are receiving an increasing number of complaints from tourists about Koalas biting, urinating, defecating, and feigning sleep. 'They can be a bit bolshy', she said, 'but I don't think they are organised, you just have to show 'em who's boss.'

If IAMA is successful, we could see a class action on behalf of soil organisms, an outcome that could have devastating consequences for industrial agriculture.

University of Southern California law professor Christopher Stone in 1972 proposed that people be allowed to claim guardianship of threatened natural resources unable to represent their own interests. He noted that established legal traditions recognised many non-human entities as full-fledged people for legal purposes.



Junior executive from Hubris & Dominion publicly demonstrates the efficacy and safety of the Autoseverance Deperching process.

This claim ultimately influenced U.S. Supreme Court justice William O. Douglas, who called for legal recognition of 'valleys, alpine meadows, rivers, lakes, estuaries, beaches, ridges, groves of trees, swampland, or even air that feels the destructive pressures of modern technology'.

In 2008, Ecuador became what is believed to be the world's first nation to include rights for nature in its new constitution. In Bolivia, the government passed wide-reaching laws in April, granting nature equal rights to humans.

Mr Lassiter denied rumours that Hubris & Dominion is diversifying into casinos, sporting clubs and other faith-based enterprises in anticipation of an inevitable collapse of confidence in magic pudding based economies.

SOCIAL LICENCE

ISSUED BY THE PEOPLE

The holder of this licence, either personally or as a corporate entity, is entitled to carry out the following activities.

To produce and distribute air-borne particulate matter injurious to the health of living organisms

To interfere with, and or contaminate, surface and ground-water

To put personal or company interests before all other considerations

To contribute to global warming through greenhouse gas production, either directly or via third party use of your products

To indulge in nefarious strategies using pseudoscience and financial inducement to call into question scientists and experts critical of your practices.

To run roughshod over local farmers and communities which are fighting to protect their livelihoods, way of life and heritage

To make the future pay for damage done by you.



This licence indemnifies you against any unanticipated consequences of the above activities

Christine McMillan

My mine story

MY grandparents lived down the hill from an underground coal mine on the south coast of NSW. My grandad Thomas worked in that mine. He grew up in Scotland and began mining at the age of 14, by 16 he was training a boy to use explosives. The mine looked as if it grew up out of conical-shaped piles of coal, with the geometric patterns of towers, conveyor belts and silos in the background. Electric lights burned on the structures.

Granny and I, with my hand firmly grasped in hers, used to cross the railway lines. We looked for steam trains pulling huge wooden trucks full of coal to the docks or returning with a light string of trucks waiting for a conical black load. We passed the old pine trees in the paddocks that were home to the retired pit ponies. We visited a friend of my grandmother's, who lived in a double-

storey terrace house in the middle of a paddock adjacent to the mine. In time the paddocks the pit ponies grazed on became the ponds for a coal washery and instead of walking through paddocks of grass we skirted the black banks that held the liquid, glossy and black that was part of the coal cleaning process. The trees died and the house was demolished. The dusting at home was done with hot soapy water to rid the surface of an extra oily layer of coal dust. The train line was closed and coal was transported by a steady stream of trucks on the road. Locals lobbied for covers on trucks. The mine footprint extended and the creek we crossed to pick blackberries for the many jars of summer jelly is now buried in a grey landscape.

When I moved west I visited my friends on the Goulburn River, Ulan and watched the familiar outline of

an underground mine grow massive and above ground. I saw the surface of the land change, knowing that the complexity of the shape, the dips, changes in slope and intricate combinations and diversity of vegetation would never be able to be accurately recorded to be 'replaced' or 'rehabilitated'. I did not see the aquifers broken, I see the changes in the river and in other areas cliff collapses. I witness and experience the instability of the climate.

From the banks of the Goulburn River the rumble of the mining can be heard and at night the bleeding of the lights from the mines into the sky is evident. The smell of the mines taints the air. The mines are headed closer to my town through the Bylong Valley. Are the changes in the landscape to be relived, are the impacts ever to be understood?

Freshly extracted Nuggets

'I refuse to condemn your generation and future generations to a planet that's beyond fixing' ... 'Power plants can still dump limitless carbon pollution into the air for free... that's not right, that's not safe and it needs to stop' ... 'We don't have time for a meeting of the flat earth society'. US President Barack Obama quoted in *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013

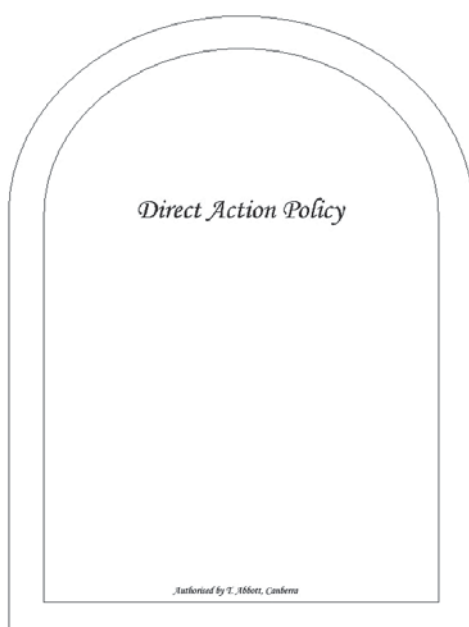
'Given that our political and business leaders are well aware of the extreme climatic risks we now run, in promoting coal they are willfully perpetuating nothing less than a crime against humanity.' Ian Dunlop (former international oil, gas and coal industry executive, now Chairman of Safe Climate Australia), foreword to *Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit* (2013).

The total area of Australia affected by coal and gas titles and applications in Australia is estimated at 437 million hectares, or 57% of the land mass. This equates to an area 18 times the size of Great Britain (which is 24 million hectares in size). http://www.lockthegate.org.au/meet_your_federal_mp

A 2013 court case mounted by residents of Camberwell opposing a new major mine proposal in the Hunter may be the last: 'Due to proposed changes to laws and regulations by the O'Farrell Government, it may be the last time a local group has the opportunity to challenge a coal mine approval in court.' http://www.lockthegate.org.au/camberwell_choking_as_hunter_air_pollution_notches_century

Australia is about to sign a free trade agreement with the USA which '... wishes to include a proposal called "investor state dispute settlement", or ISDS, which would allow foreign companies to sue governments which adopted policies that 'harmed' their investment.' Jemma Williams, *Coal Seam Gas News*, 21 August 2013

A name change for Coal Seam Gas: '... the New South Wales government last month recommended removing the term "coal seam gas" and its acronym CSG from official documents in the state. The federal Standing Council on Energy and Resources wants the terminology changed to 'natural gas from coal seams' as part of what it calls a 'national harmonization initiative.' - <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-Pacific/2013/1016/Australians-Lock-the-Gate-to-fracking>



Deep cuts to staff and funding by the NSW government have largely dismantled the state's ability to investigate and prepare for the effects of climate change such as more frequent extreme fire weather, [Peter Smith] a former senior scientist with the government said. Smith, who led the state's climate change science group until March, said his team of 10 had

been slashed to just three whose work remained climate-focused. A similar cut had been made to a separate team of 10 working on climate adaptation, he said. 'When you really see governments are going to take climate change seriously is when you see them spending money on adaptation, Dr Smith said. Peter Hannam *SMH* 21/10/13

'Carbon pollution is a heat-trapping greenhouse gas that is like putting the weather on steroids. It drives the greater extremes. It's not just warmer weather, it's wilder weather.' John Connor (CEO, The Climate Institute) *ABC 7.30 Report* 21/10/13

'You do not find many climate change sceptics on the end of [fire] hoses anymore... They are dealing with increasing numbers of fires, increasing rainfall events, increasing storm events.' - A senior Victorian fire officer, interviewed in 2012 for a recent National Climate Change Adaptation Research Facility report. Michael Howes, *The Conversation*, 23/10/2013

'One of the benefits of global warming is there's not as many icebergs...' - Clive Palmer, coal baron, climate sceptic, MP and Titanic II proponent, quoted in *Big Coal* (p. 60).

'Mining magnates are manipulating the debate in Australia just like they are doing elsewhere. Like the tobacco industry before them, they have known for years that climate change is happening and that burning fossil fuels is at the heart of it. But to maximise their profits they continue to sow misunderstanding and confusion, funding the sceptics to perpetrate the myth that global warming is junk science.' David Suzuki, *SMH* 18/9/2013

BOOK REVIEW



Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit

Guy Pearse, David McKnight and Bob Burton

NewSouth Publishing 2013

Reviewed by Chris Ward

Authors Guy Pearse, David McKnight and Bob Burton clearly explain the negative impact of coal and coal seam gas mining on the Australian environment and how coal has come to dominate policy formulation in Australia. Both major political parties are beholden to the coal industry supporting essentially a wild-west resources stampede.

Democratic processes are eroded (e.g. the demise of the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd after daring to introduce a resources super-profits tax). Community health is compromised by dust and noise from mine site to port. Environments including rivers and aquifers are degraded and destroyed. The Great Barrier Reef is threatened by dredging, coal loader ports and coal tanker traffic.

Ultimately climate change is exacerbated by the accelerating release of pollutants into the atmosphere through coal mining and burning in Australia and by the burning of exported Australian coal overseas.

One would expect a significant benefit to the nation counterbalancing such damage but this is not the case. The authors indicate that the royalty income from coal for NSW and Qld represents only a pitiful 3% and 5% respectively of State revenue.

The authors describe the 'charm offensive' waged by mining companies. Desperate coal-mine-beleaguered communities are cast a few trinkets.

Carbon Capture and Storage is carefully analysed and re-visioned for the mirage that it is, a mirage funded by Australian taxpayers at the rate of \$100 million annually to the Global Carbon Capture and Storage Institute.

Australia's biggest contribution to global warming is via coal exports which as expected by ABARE at 350 million tonnes in 2013-14 approximates to Germany's total annual output of CO₂ and is several times greater than our domestic output. Australia is indeed punching above its weight.

Ian Milliss

The Lure of Lithgow

THEY say you can't escape your upbringing. I know I've spent most of my life escaping mine and yet by a twist of circumstances a decade ago I found myself only metres away from where I had started, in the coal mining village of Wallerawang just outside of Lithgow, as if I had gone a complete circle.

I suppose I've been doomed to a connection with coal. I spent a big bit of my childhood at Blackmans Flat on the Mudgee Road, a place completely surrounded by open cut and underground mines. These days it is slowly being buried by the ever-expanding ash dump from Mt Piper Power Station. I had relatives in the mines, the power stations, the electricity companies, and my early school years were with kids whose parents also worked in those places. And although I left just before my teens to spend most of the next 40 years living somewhere around Kings Cross and Darlinghurst, hardly a year passed when I didn't go back to visit there or Portland or Bathurst. So small country industrial towns are in my blood, rough, working class, but something I understand and am proud of and feel free to vilify in a way you can vilify your own family knowing they are part of you.

So it was easy in the late 1970s to team up with Frank Watters who had exactly the same background but in Muswellbrook. We had been friends for a decade or more and Frank wanted to do a series of exhibitions up and down the Hunter Valley of work by community members that responded to the plans for open cut mining expansion. The exhibitions were a great success, unlike the accompanying film that Gill Leahy and I produced. It never got finished, probably because we were defeated by the immensity of the issue and began fighting as the shoot proceeded, taking our frustrations out on each other I suppose. On the other hand, while the exhibitions were successful as exhibitions – they failed as activism – they made no difference whatsoever to the mines that have now 30 years later devastated much of the

valley and its agriculture.

Despite or perhaps because of that failure, coal mining remained grimly fascinating to me. As an avid science magazine reader I was aware of James Hansen's early climate change warnings and in 1992 produced four large computer prints on the subject. Called *A Short History of the Human Race*, they ended abruptly with conflagration then extinction. My slide into the twelve stages of grief had begun I suppose.

I thought long and hard through the 1990s about what to do. I was in a sort of wilderness, estranged from the art world on one hand and also at the end of my long series of work within the trade union movement. I knew that I wanted to do something around climate change but I had long ago discarded the idea that there was much cultural effect in creating and exhibiting representations of the world. Whatever I did had to have a direct effect in the world as my union work had done. So when for a variety of other reasons it became possible to move into a coal mining area again I grabbed it. In fact I moved to the very town where I had first gone to school, a town with a coal-fired power station in the main street only a few hundred metres from the school and shops.

And I immediately regretted it. My rationale had been on the one hand that it was a cheap area to live where I could explore an important issue, that while it was imperative to oppose fossil fuels it was also imperative to create alternative economies to support the people dependent on fossil fuel industries. I didn't know how I could play any part in that but I wanted to try.

However, the Wallerawang and Lithgow that I had grown up in were working-class towns. Now they were more underclass welfare towns as changes in mining technology had massively reduced the workforce while coal and energy nonetheless remained almost the only industries bringing outside money into the area. The small workforce employed in these slowly dying industries was ageing and so were the mines. Nearly every mine



Wallerawang Power Station, in the main street of Wallerawang

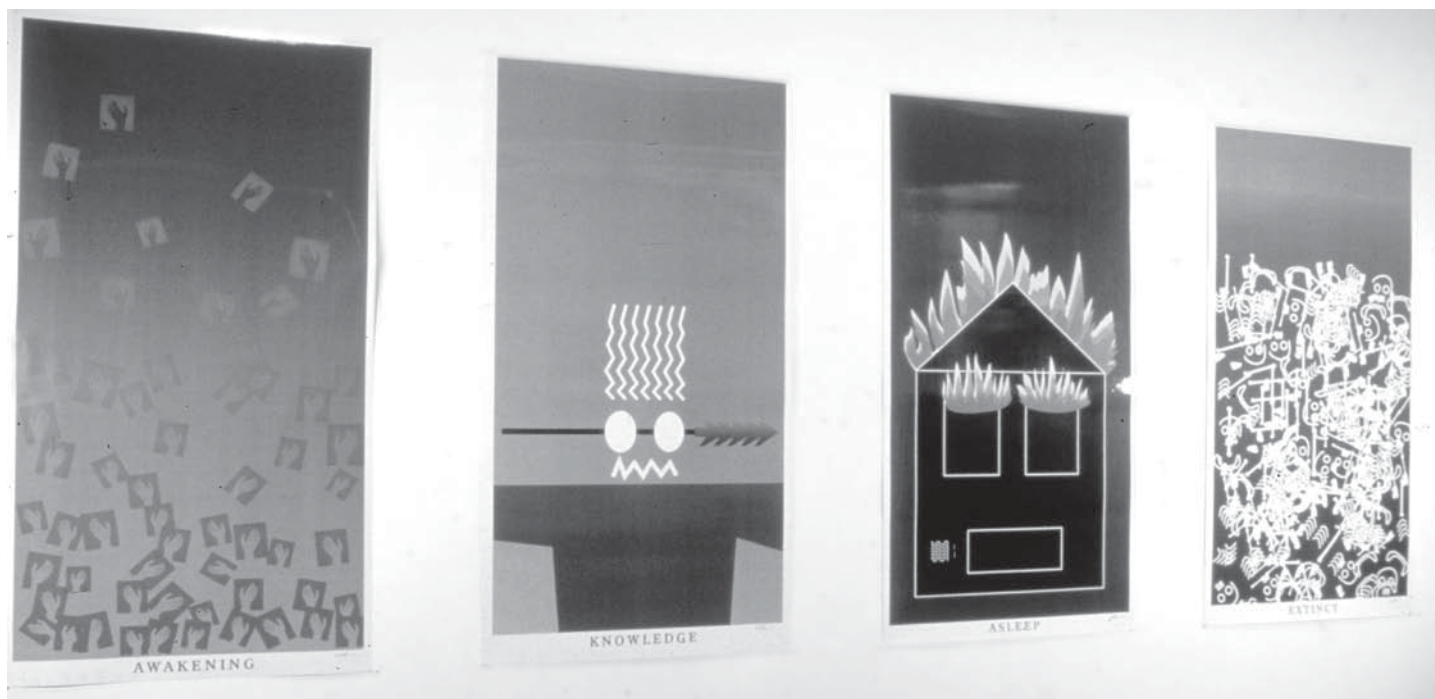
in the district was planning to close down within a decade while the power stations were planning to bring in coal from Ulan, over 150 kilometres away.

Over the next ten years from 2002 to 2012 I worked away at my general project. Over time, thanks to a small group of sympathetic council officers, I was appointed to a number of Lithgow Council advisory committees: first the Heritage Assets Working Group, then the Strategic Plan group, then the Economic Development Advisory Committee charged with developing a new long term economic strategy for the area, and finally the Environment Advisory Committee. I also provided specialist advice to council planners on heritage aspects of the Local Environment Plan (LEP) and to officers working on a heritage precinct study. A proposal I put up for that study has now developed into a large scale public art project that opened this month – the Lithgow History Avenue – twenty two sculptures and a website <http://www.lithgow.com/historyavenue/> by local artists and artisans celebrating moments in Lithgow's history. I also worked with council business development officers to set up a creative industry cluster and have Lithgow declared one of three NSW creative industry hubs. I had even played a role in getting a sculptural monument to Charles Darwin built in Wallerawang, the place where he had written his very first thoughts on the theory of evolution and captured his famous platypus specimen.

When I see it all written down like that I think maybe I did achieve more than I felt I did. All those activities had one objective and that was to promote other forms of employment – in tourism, education, creative industries – that were alternatives to fossil

fuel industries. Despite my endless lobbying and the fact that I was even to some degree accommodated in the local power structure I never ever succeeded in having climate change openly acknowledged in any council policy as an issue that needed to be directly addressed in future planning. Even the obvious fact that mining was abandoning the district was never publicly acknowledged. The grip of those industries on the internal culture of the district was so strong that basic truths, such as the fact that the history of mining is the history of mines closing down, could never be publicly acknowledged. Towns like Lithgow, in the country but comparatively close to Sydney, are forever limited by the fact that the most talented and imaginative young people leave as soon as possible while the least adaptive of all ages remain, clinging to a slowly collapsing social and economic structure.

By the end of 2012 when a reactionary business group backed by a geriatric former mine owner gained control of council I decide there was nothing more I could do and it was time to cut my losses and leave. What did I learn? Well, I was never naive enough to believe I was going to have a huge effect and I was right. But above all I was confirmed in the belief that I had also argued through my years of working with unions, that we are engaged in a cultural war, that the most important thing we must do using any and every means of communication available is to make people understand the world differently and to build up communities of people who share those different understandings. Although I have very little hope that the human race will avoid extinction that banal truth is still the only way it might be possible.



Ian Milliss, *A Short History of the Human Race*, inkjet prints, 1992



Spruiking Lithgow as a potential creative industry centre in the Lithgow Council business investment prospectus

David Watson

Power Walk With Me?

UNTIL 1931 coal was mined only a couple of kilometres from the centre of Sydney – in Balmain – via shafts sunk several thousand feet beneath the harbour, and for much of the 20th century imposing coal-fired power stations operated nearby, on Iron Cove and at White Bay. Coal-gas for street lighting, and later (with the advent of electricity) for cooking and heating, was produced up-river, at AGL in Mortlake.

But gone are the days when one's power source was local, tangible, malodorous and demonstrably dangerous. Today the filthy, increasingly gargantuan, planet-destroying processes of coal mining and coal-fired power generation are for city dwellers all-but invisible. And as our coal exports spiral (Newcastle is now the world's largest coal port) few Australians appear to have noticed or be fazed by the fact that we have become, over the past decade, one of the world's leading exporters of global warming.

When I was a youngster my family enjoyed car-camping holidays to remote parts of New South Wales. Even the matches we used to light the fire, which sported local municipal insignia of sheep, wheat and grapes, bore close relationship to the regions and communities we came to know and enjoy. But nowadays we mobile, frequent-flying Australians appear more familiar with Phuket, Vienna, Osaka and Los Angeles than with Putty, Mudgee, Gunnedah and Kandos. Meanwhile, whilst many a city-slicker may have been too busy to notice, many an increasingly coal-mining-dependent rural community has faced irrevocable (if not always entirely unwelcome) change. In the process, the very fabric of daily life, its interwoven social, spiritual and environmental complexion, has been altered.

In a 'coal rush' – dig it, ship it, burn it, before it's outlawed and worthless – money talks, and arms are swiftly twisted. It is also convenient and immensely profitable, particularly when you're a corporation based in Switzerland, Hyderabad, or Beijing, to remain blind to disturbed local terrain, and somehow remote from and blameless for the bigger, insanely damaged picture (ice caps melting, the Great Barrier Reef dying, extreme weather events costing us billions).¹

As a concerned artist/citizen attempting to wrestle with the scale, complexity and collateral damage of fossil-fuel extraction/power generation in the NSW Hunter region from the physical and psychological remove of Sydney, I am cognisant daily, too, as one of AusGrid's happy consumers, of my own complicity. What bothers me most is that I don't really know *where* our power comes from – how and where it is generated – and I suspect that this lack of understanding mirrors a broader public disconnect.² So, curious and having just leafed my way with increasing alarm through two recently published local coal-related exposés (*Rich Land, Wasteland: How coal is killing Australia*, and *Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit*), I decide to embark upon a modest (determinedly-non-fossil-fuelled) pilgrimage to find out.³

On a preternaturally warm winter's morning earlier this year I pedalled over the Anzac Bridge into the city hoping to locate a map of the New South Wales power grid. I'd remembered that the Electricity Commission had once had a shopfront on George Street showcasing wondrous new electrical appliances, including electric stoves, opposite Sydney Town Hall. And although I knew that times, tastes and government utilities had changed, I was still expecting that somewhere on the accessible ground floor of that brutally crisp 1960s office block (today branded Ausgrid) would be someone welcoming on a counter whom I could



Photographer
unknown, *Balmain
Colliery*, c. 1900

Leichhardt Library
Service



David Watson, *Welcome Mat*, Kandos Projects 2012

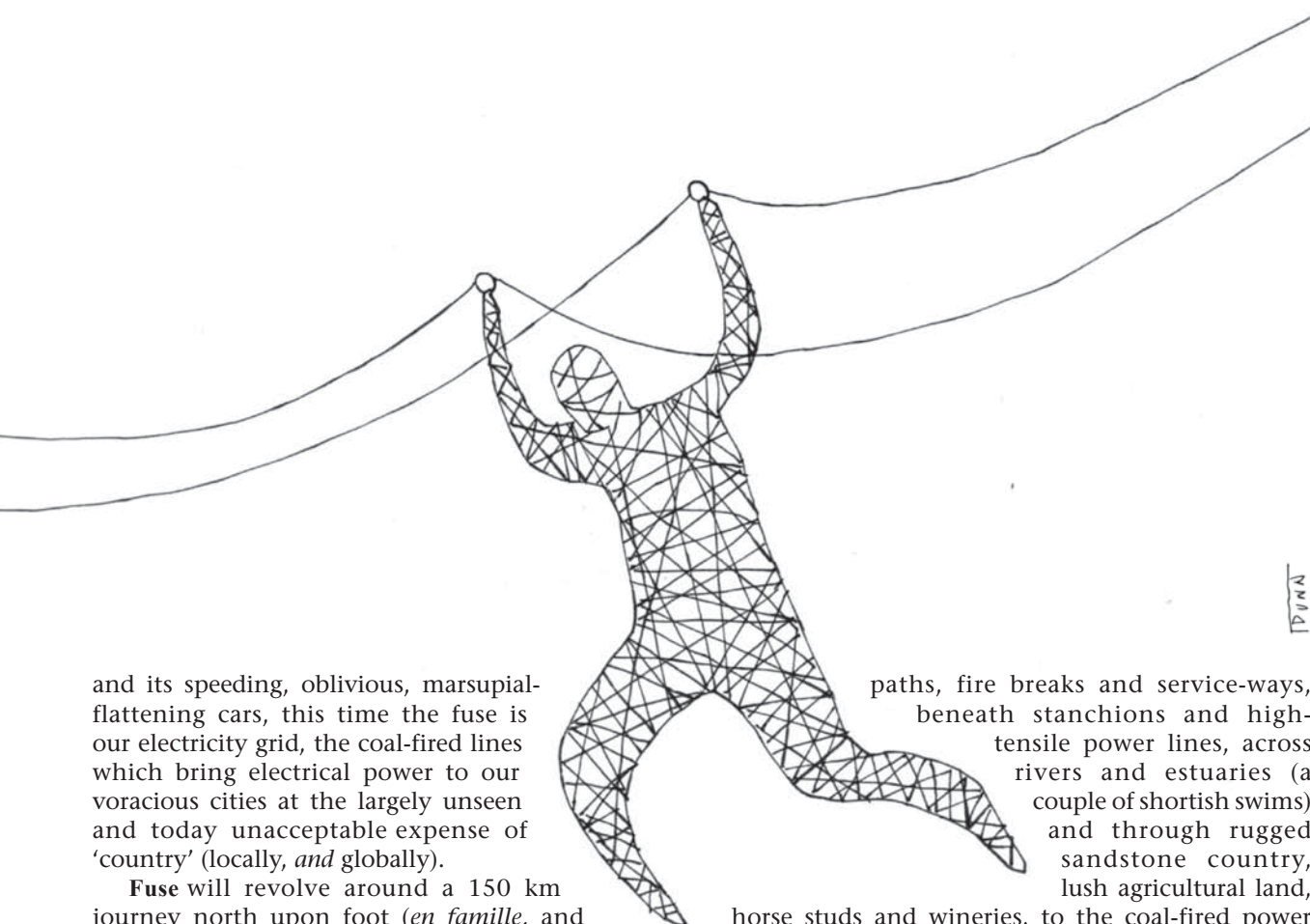
quiz re matters electric.

I'd been prompted finally to 'get on my bike' by reading earlier that morning that '\$4 billion in private funding would be sucked away from Australia's solar power and renewable energy industries' [when] the Coalition won government.⁴

A modest A4 notice blu-tacked inside the skyscraper's glinting glass George Street frontage informs me that Ausgrid's reception is now located around the corner, in Bathurst Street. There a shortish affable man behind a counter sits beside a busy office thoroughfare, looking more like a kindly concierge than the switched on face of the state's electricity grid. I chat briefly to the man and an employee friend who's stopped for a chinwag on his way out. I tell them both that, as an Ausgrid consumer, I'm attempting to find out precisely *where* my power comes from. Neither, it transpires, has ever really thought about it. As women in high heels and men in suits make a bee-line to lunch through electronically-activated but rather-last-century sliding glass, we agree – in a friendly, shoulder-shrugging, mutually powerless kind of way – that answers to contemporary questions such as these lie certainly beyond this hard-surfaced air-conditioned lobby and possibly beyond our ken.

Sensing 'though that I'm unsated, the concierge offers to ring 'upstairs' to see if there is someone (perhaps in corporate relations?) who might address my query. But after a few minutes' wait I'm informed that nobody up there knows, either. He suggests that I call the switch, and jots down the number. But because (unlike almost every other person out and about in the city today) I don't own a mobile phone, I am temporarily unable to 'let my fingers do the walking'. Instead (adopting plan B) I pootle off to the Lands and Titles Office in Macquarie Street in search of large-scale maps and aerial records detailing (as the Gregory's street directory once did, in pale red ink) the routes of high-voltage transmission lines feeding into the city. I am in luck. There are even aerial photographs on the verso of the 1:25 000 maps, with easements sometimes visible. I purchase several maps and pedal home, dreaming already of my route north across the Hawkesbury.

I decide that all this initial research, its dead ends and 'light globe moments', will form part of a yet-to-be realised art-action, potentially titled *Fuse* (2014). The work will re-inflect poet Judith Wright's metaphor of the sanctuary-destroying road which 'leads into the world's cities like a long fuse laid' ('Sanctuary', 1955).⁵ Rather than the road



and its speeding, oblivious, marsupial-flattening cars, this time the fuse is our electricity grid, the coal-fired lines which bring electrical power to our voracious cities at the largely unseen and today unacceptable expense of 'country' (locally, and globally).

Fuse will revolve around a 150 km journey north upon foot (*en famille*, and with a cast of invited walkers) to the seemingly invisible source of the current, the flow, the very lines which feed our power-hungry urban maw. Over the course of several months the multi-part walk will lead from the power board in our Rozelle home studio, via the sub-station at the bottom of the street, across bitumen and bush, via public

paths, fire breaks and service-ways, beneath stanchions and high-tensile power lines, across rivers and estuaries (a couple of shortish swims) and through rugged sandstone country, lush agricultural land,

horse studs and wineries, to the coal-fired power plants of the central coast/Hunter region; and thence to the coal mines, nearby.

A blog, uploaded via back-pack-solar-powered smart-phone, will record each leg of our unfolding journey to the increasingly desecrated source (we will pass, for example close to the hamlet of Bulga, currently at loggerheads with mining giant Rio Tinto over mine expansion plans).⁶ The walk's physicality, its serendipitous (if ultimately directed, ordained) route, its inquisitive eye, ever-changing complexion and semi-self-sufficiency will register initially, I hope, in contradistinction to the speed of electricity and to the slicing geometry of the power grid. Most importantly (via the blog, attendant media exposure and a potential future exhibition and publication) **Fuse** will draw public attention to some of the dirty, destructive, today unacceptable downsides of coal-fired power generation. Its take home message will be 'leave it in the ground'.

SMH reader David Nash summed it up neatly recently:

Australians need to come to terms with the idea that coal needs to be left in the ground. This was one of the key findings of the Climate Commission's report, published in June. Australia's dirty secret on global warming, the export of coal, is an issue unlikely to be raised [during the 2013 election campaign]. But there are compelling moral reasons to think more critically about the global consequences of this industry, and if politicians are unwilling to do so, it is inevitable that people will take action themselves, both through divestment, and through civil disobedience. It is already happening.⁷

As we know, sometimes contemporary art can flick



Back-pack-solar power



Guy Ben-Ner, *Treehouse Kit*, 2005

our switch or light up our grid.⁸ It can take us beyond our comfort zone, wrench us from our consumer treadmill by suggesting that we contemplate destroying all our possessions⁹ or living in an abstracted flat-pack-DIY-style tree-house.

Over recent decades art actions and relational works have sought not only to engage the public imagination, but to involve and evolve by facilitating serendipitous collisions and collaborations. Such quasi-directed 'art situations' can proffer a powerful social and/or political shorthand.¹⁰ Productive frissons of empathy often radiate from such situations (as from any true action) both directly and indirectly. Sometimes viewing documentation, reading about, or catching a radio program inspired by a work/action is all that is required.

I see **Fuse** as a curious, somewhat surreal intervention located somewhere between Monty Python's *Climbing the North Face of the Uxbridge Road*¹¹ and Francis Alÿs' *The Green Line (Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic)*¹² with a reverential nod to the protest walk, the freedom ride and the hunger strike.¹³ Potentially fraught, unscripted and at times perhaps physically impossible, the concept of the walk remains nevertheless deeply felt and I hope – with input from others and a little ingenuity – pregnant with possibility.

As the regularly dissident (and remarkable) Chinese artist/citizen Ai Wei Wei noted recently:

If you don't act, the danger becomes stronger.¹⁴

Perhaps you'd like to join me? Autumn 2014?

David Watson bombora@bigpond.net.au

David Watson's most recent project **Wild Ryde** (swimming home (2006-12) involved a meandering pilgrimage upon foot across the suburban postcodes of his youth + a return swim down Sydney's 'original highway', the Parramatta River. See, for example: <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/offtrack/the-pace-of-place3a-david-watson28099s-wild-ryde/4502380>

1 'Indeed, one major natural disaster exacerbated as a result of global warming can easily wipe out in one hit several years' worth of [coal] royalties. Cyclone Yasi in 2011 is estimated to have cost the public purse \$7 billion, with a similar amount borne by companies or individuals.' Guy Pearse, David McKnight, Bob Burton, *Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2013), p 211.

2 I swiftly discover that 90% of NSW's electricity is generated by coal-fired power stations.

3 Sharyn Munro, *Rich Land, Wasteland: How coal is killing Australia* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan, 2012); Guy Pearse, David McKnight, Bob Burton, *Big Coal: Australia's Dirtiest Habit* (Sydney: NewSouth Publishing, 2013).

4 Ben Cubby, Tom Arup, 'Climate of uncertainty', *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 August 2013.

5 Judith Wright: *Collected Poems 1942-1985* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 2002), p 139.

6 Matt Siegel, 'Coal Mine Fight Embodies an Economic

Struggle in Rural Australia', *New York Times*, 13 August 2013. http://www.nytimes.com/2013/08/14/business/global/in-australia-signs-of-a-tilt-in-economic-equilibrium.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

7 David Nash, 'Public will act on coal's perils if politicians won't', Letters, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 10-11 August 2013.

8 Artists have on occasion also explored the invisible, ineffable power (and legacy) of electricity itself: Ceal Floyer's *Light Switch* (1992-99) projected a light switch onto the gallery wall; Martin Creed's infamous *Work No. 227, the lights going on and off*, won him the 2001 Turner Prize; Margaret Roberts' *No Big Coal* (2012) explored the notion that we are all complicit by offering up giant pieces of felt cut into the up-scaled shapes of elements of the gallery's own power board, for visitors to reconfigure; volunteers were also invited to hold the shapes 'with their backs against the wall'.

9 For *Break Down* (2001) Michael Landy inventoried, boxed up and destroyed all of his possessions.

10 Lucas Ihlein's *Bilateral Petersham* (2006), for example, was a

blog-based work which engaged with a cast of locals, confrères and itinerants to chart a quotidian array of adventures and discoveries whilst the author/artist confined himself for two months within the municipal boundaries of the Sydney suburb of Petersham.

11 www.youtube.com/watch?v=9U0tDU37q2M, accessed 9 September 2013. The sketch formed part of *Monty Python's Flying Circus* (Episode 33), broadcast November 1972.

12 Alÿs' 2004 walk along 'the green line' (Moshe Dayan's pencilled 1948 armistice border between Israel and Jordan) with a small pierced can of light-green paint, variously bewildered, upset and pleased locals at a time when a decidedly less transient concrete barrier was being erected across Jerusalem.

13 For example, 'Over Our Dead Bodies', an August 2013 hunger strike in Brisbane protesting a deal to unlock Queensland's Galilee Basin coal reserves, joined by former Australian Democrats senator Andrew Bartlett: <http://overourdeadbodies.net/>

14 *Ai Wei Wei: Never Sorry* (Alison Klayman, 2012) screened 8 September 2013 on ABC TV.

100% RENEWABLE NSW

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Authorised by Greens NSW MP John Kaye NSW Parliament House Macquarie Street Sydney NSW 2000 August 2013



<http://williamsrivervalley.blogspot.com.au/>
Artist activist group and publisher of
The Stuttering Frog.

The Stuttering Frog #1 (Cry Me a River, 2010)
<http://issuu.com/browncows/docs/thestutteringfrog>

Activists and activist groups

<http://areyouthevitalfew.org>

The Vital Few are a community of people who speak up and take action to make the investments made on their behalf more sustainable. (see also p.14).

<http://bimblebox.org/>

Bimblebox is a Nature Refuge in central Queensland threatened by a massive new coal development proposed by Clive Palmer's Waratah Coal.

<http://www.bvpa.org.au/>

Bylong Valley Protection Alliance reports on mining plans for the Bylong valley, including the ICAC investigation.

<http://www.cat.org.uk/>

Centre for Alternative Technology, Wales, UK. Includes an 'Artist in Residence' program which encourages artists to use their capacity to communicate, collaborate, and to support the work of the Centre.

<http://gofossilfree.org/australia/>

(linked to 350.org <<http://350.org>>)

National campaign to move public institutions' and individuals' money out of fossil fuels and into clean energy.

www.greenleft.org.au

Weekly newspaper on left politics and the environment.

<http://healthearth.blogspot.com.au/>

Blog of Glenn Albrecht, transdisciplinary philosopher and Professor of Sustainability at Murdoch University, Western Australia (see also p.14).

<http://huntervalleyprotectionalliance.com/>

Focuses on the protection of the Hunter environment against coal mining and CSG.

<http://jerrysjeopardy.blogspot.com.au/>

Blog on coal issues at threatened Jerrys Plains in the upper Hunter Valley.

<http://www.nccns.org.au/>

Nature Conservation Council of NSW is a non-profit, non-government organisation representing more than 120 community environment groups across NSW.

<http://www.nonewcoal.greens.org.au/>

The Greens' campaign to stop the expansion of the coal industry in NSW.

<http://m.wwf.org.au/>

World Wildlife Fund aims to preserve the planet's natural resources.

www.riverssos.org.au

Rivers SOS is an alliance of environmental and community groups concerned about the destruction of rivers in NSW by mining operations.

www.lockthegate.org.au

National coalition of community groups across Australia working to protect our land, water and future from reckless coal and gas expansions.

<http://risingtide.org.uk/>

Network of groups and individuals who take direct action to confront the roots causes of climate change in the UK.

<http://www.risingtide.org.au/>

Network of groups and individuals who take direct action to confront the roots causes of climate change in Australia.

<http://www.risingtidenorthamerica.org/>

Network of groups and individuals who take direct action to confront the roots causes of climate change in North America.

<http://www.savethedrip.com/>

The Drip and Corner Gorge and adjacent escarpments are National Trust listed but are now under threat from Moolarben Coal Co.

www.sharynmunro.com

Sharyn Munro is an author, activist and tireless worker for people and the environment affected by mining (see also p. 3).

<http://www.sunriseproject.org.au/>

Provides information, training, strategy support and small grants for the protection of the environment and to combat the impacts of the fossil fuel industry.

<http://www.thecostofcarbon.org>

Documents the price we are all paying for carbon pollution.

<http://www.world-classminers.com.au/>

An anti-mining/spoof website by Rising Tide, Newcastle.

Art and Art Related

<http://www.apeak.org/>

Musicians create albums to fund initiatives to raise awareness of and combat climate change.

www.artlink.com.au

Art magazine with many issues on environmental concerns.

<http://www.crossart.com.au>

Curatorial initiatives reflecting art, life and the public sphere.

<http://clui.org/category/ludb-keywords/land-art>

Art-focused information about how land in the USA is 'apportioned, utilized and perceived.'

<http://www.ecoartnetwork.org/>

Ecological artists who work across disciplines and within communities in the USA.

<http://greenmuseum.org/>

Online museum for environmental art.

<http://www.ianmilliss.com>

Artist activist who envisioned a revitalised Kandos (Australia) for Cementa_13.

<http://kandosprojects.wordpress.com>

Artists' and writers' research and exhibition space in Kandos.

<http://inhabitat.com/ohio-professors-remediate-streams-to-turn-toxic-runoff-into-vibrant-paint-pigments/>
Green design for a sustainable future, including turning toxic mine waste into pigments.

<http://www.keepersofthewaters.org/default.cfm>

Inspires and promotes projects that combine art, science and community involvement to restore, preserve and remediate water sources.

<http://www.no9.ca/mission.php>

Canadian arts organisation which uses art and design to bring awareness to environmental concerns.

http://issuu.com/browncows/docs/re-visioning_the_valley

A proposal for the future of the Williams River valley by Neil Berecny-Brown.

<http://www.rillitoriverproject.org/>

Artists and scientists respond to climate change in Arizona, USA.

www.strataproject.org/agnes-denes.html

Agnes Denes' environmental artwork 'Tree Mountain' in Finland.

www.strataproject.org/nancy-holt.html

Nancy Holt's 'Sun Tunnels' in Finland

Green Options

<http://www.ceres.org.au/>

Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies at an environmental park in East Brunswick, Melbourne.

<http://cleantechnica.com/2008/07/29/4-reasons-why-germany-is-a-renewable-energy-success-story/>

Documentation of internationally successful renewable projects.

<http://www.ecomagination.com>

Unusual renewable energy projects.

<http://www.edenproject.com>

Environmental educational Initiative running transformational social and environmental projects.

<http://www.ewon.com.au/index.cfm/help-for-customers/managing-your-account/green-energy/>

Energy and Water Ombudsman NSW.

www.energymadeeasy.gov.au

New price comparison website to assist households in comparing electricity offers (including the Green Power component) of different providers.

<http://www.greenelectricityguide.com/types-of-renewable-energy-a-cost-comparison>

Guide to renewable energy resources.

<http://www.greenoptions.com/>

Blog re healthy sustainable living.

<http://www.globalpowershift.org>

International climate change movement.

<http://www.landcareonline.com.au/>

National network of locally-based community groups who care for the natural resources of our country.

<http://sustainability.psu.edu/live/what-penn-state-doing/buildings-teach/learning-grounds>

A sustainability educational website documenting their projects.

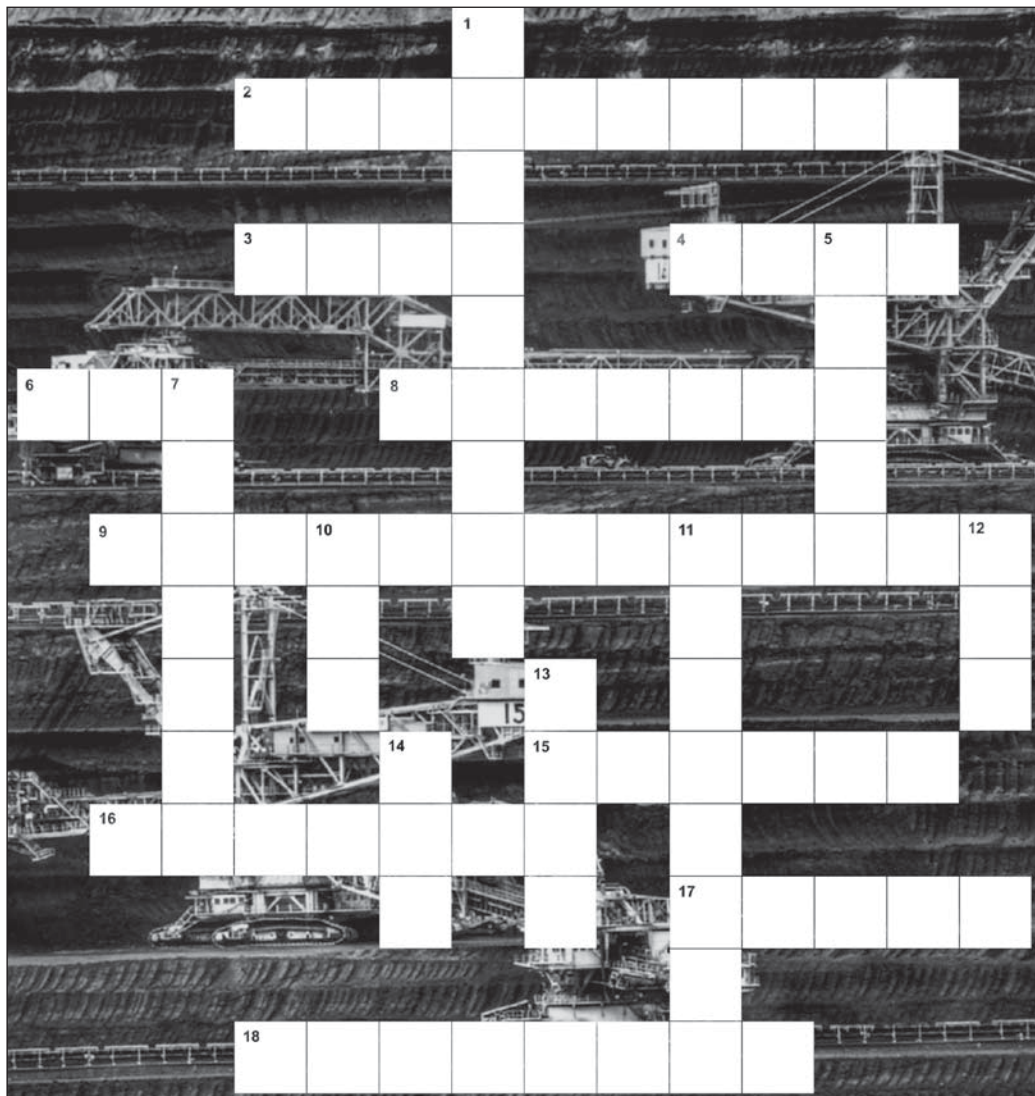
<http://www.taranakifarm.com.au>

Organic farming, Victoria.

<http://www.earthgarden.com.au>

Earth Garden is a magazine full of practical solutions for green living.

Very Crossword



Down

1 World's largest coal port (9)

5 Indian coal giant proposing gargantuan Qld mine (5)

7 Coal reserves (of biblical proportion) in central Qld set to exponentially increase Australia's contribution to global warming (7)

10 The 'big Australian' (76% foreign-owned) - one of this country's 'big-four' coal extractors/global warmers (3)

11 The tiny Hunter Valley hamlet of Bulga is engaged in a 'David and Goliath' struggle for its survival with this Anglo-Australian mining conglomerate: another of our 'big-four' global warmers (3, 5)

12 Indian billionaire poised to exploit 'the jewel of the Galilee' in joint venture with Gina Rinehart's Hancock Coal (3)

13 Greens' MP proposing '100% Renewable NSW' (4)

14 Burning coal to produce electricity emits today-unacceptable quantities of an invisible gaseous compound which Gina has dubbed 'plant food' (3)

See page 9 for solution

Across

2 Non-fossil-fuelled energy alternatives - solar, solar thermal, wind (9)

3 Australia's most important environmental protection Act, which has never rejected an application for a coal mine because it is not required to consider the cumulative greenhouse gas emissions of coal mined (4)

4 A combustible black or brown organic rock formed by fossilised plants (4)

6 Twiggy's getting into coal, too (3)

8 Anglo-Swiss miner (acquired 2013 by multinational Glencore), today world's largest exporter of coal for electricity; one of our 'big-four' (6)

9 The great moral, environmental and economic challenge of our age (6, 7)

15 One of a long list of respiratory, pulmonary and mental afflictions exacerbated by exposure to the toxicities and stresses of coal mining (6)

16 US-owned energy giant working its magic in the NSW Hunter Valley and in Qld (7)

17 Insidious, mounting and notoriously difficult-to-prosecute aural imposition of coal mining (5)

18 Coal miner of Korean descent currently raising its sulphur crest in central Qld, with a beady eye upon the Bylong Valley north of Kandos (8)