ETHNO-ECO DIALOGUE:
Filmmaking for Environmental Sustainability

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Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Visual Arts at Charles Darwin University is the result of my own investigations, and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that the work embodied in this exegesis and creative work has not already been accepted in substance for any degree, and is not currently submitted for candidature for any other degree.

Signature of Candidate

Ms Birut Zemits

Date
4th March 2010
Abstract

In the 21st century, a large proportion of the world’s population find themselves in far-flung corners of the earth, without physical contact with environments their ancestors struggled to call their own. In Australia, people come from other continents to create a multicultural society in a land where Indigenous people have lived for thousands of years. For all these people, there is an urgent need to respond to issues that result from natural environments being subsumed and consumed to resource human needs.

Seeking ways to engage people in the pressing need to protect the environment, this doctoral research is driven by two main questions. How is cultural identify linked with affinity to the natural environment? How can filmmaking represent this affinity to promote ways to protect a particular environment? This research explores the proposition that documentary film is a powerful and persuasive means to extend dialogue that considers issues of identity in place and action for environmental sustainability.

This thesis comprises two main documentary films and an exegesis of 30,000 words. The exegesis provides a context and explanation of methods used to research these films. Six supplementary short films inform the filmmaking practice. The first main film, *Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are)*, is bilingual in English and Latvian. It explores cultural and generational shifts in affinity to natural places. The second, *Sharing Vision*, is set in Darwin. It is a composition of workshops, interviews and events that explore actions for environmental sustainability.

If I have extended dialogue about the inter-relationship of people and natural places, I have achieved the aims of this research.
Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the place where I completed this work and thank the Larrakia people of Darwin for sharing insights into the place that I now call home.

I thank my panel of supervisors, without whom I could not have finished this journey of learning and discovery. Dr Sylvia Kleinert shared her understanding of how to succeed in this endeavour and her academic rigour helped me define the research. Dr Julie Roberts encouraged me to begin and to complete this work in film and exegesis form. Bill Wade shared his knowledge about quality in production methods. Dr Carole Wilson provided support and constructive criticism towards the end of the candidature. I thank David Woodgate for the long conversations over coffee, sharing ideas and believing in my capacity as a filmmaker in the initial stages of this work.

I must thank my creative and supportive family. Dirk Peek, my partner, who gave me a reality checks when I needed them. Lara Doolette (BA Fine Arts), my youngest daughter, was the cinematographer in Latvia whose creativity enhanced the filmmaking experience. Maiya Doolette (BEnv Science) my eldest daughter, for long discussions about concepts related to environment and identity. I could not have completed the work without my mother, Vaira Zemits, who helped with translating sub-titles for the film and Dzintra Briedis for translating and collating the Latvian survey materials.

Many participants are credited in the films and I thank them all for their reflective comments about identity in place and action for place. I am also grateful to Charles Darwin University students and Latvian people who engaged in surveys and workshops within the research process. There are many peers with whom I discussed ideas. Dr Daphne Cazalet and Radha Chandrashekeran shared conversations about cultural identity. Aly de Groot highlighted the importance of art in defining identity and
environmental actions. Gary Lee, Dr Linda Ford and Cynthia Coyne contributed to my understanding of Indigenous perceptions of this research through café conversations. Greg Williams and Michael Michie helped me consider the intersections between quantitative and qualitative research. Kate Smith and Dr Jennifer Pearson provided insights into environmental education.

I appreciated sharing my visual arts studio space with David Rolfe and also thank Kate Roseth, Emma Duff, Georgia Glen and Julie Fairless for assistance in various processes related to editing the films.
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<td>Australian Association for Environmental Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>B&amp;W</td>
<td>Black and White</td>
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<td>CAAMA</td>
<td>Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association</td>
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<td>CDU</td>
<td>Charles Darwin University</td>
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<td>DP</td>
<td>Displaced Person</td>
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<td>NAILSMA</td>
<td>North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Association</td>
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<td>NIMBY</td>
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Introduction
There is an intimate reciprocity to the senses; as we touch the bark of a tree, we feel the tree touching us; as we lend our ears to the local sounds and ally our nose to the seasonal scents, the terrain gradually tunes us in, in turn. The senses, that is, are the primary way that the earth has of informing our thoughts and of guiding our actions. Huge centralised programs, global initiatives, and other 'top down' solutions will never suffice to restore and protect the health of the animate earth. For it is only at the scale of our direct, sensory interactions with the land around us that we can appropriately notice and respond to the immediate needs of the living world (David Abrams 1997 p268).

The beginning of the twenty-first century is a time of crisis for the natural environment. ‘Touching the bark of a tree, and have it touching us’, as Abrams suggests above, can be a strong sensual experience but will that solve problems that threaten the living world? ‘Tuning in’ to nature can raise a sense of ‘reciprocity to the senses’ but is this reliant on a sense of belonging to that place in nature? This work uses the film medium, with its capacity to engage the senses of hearing and vision, as a tool to communicate about topics related to human responsibility for ‘the health of the animate earth’.

Intercultural dialogue and actions that will protect the living world are urgently needed if there is any hope of maintaining and nurturing what remains of bio-diverse ecologies. This must happen at a ‘top down’ level but also must be driven by greater connection with the environment at an individual level. This research is motivated by the hypothesis that creative approaches in filmmaking can extend discussion about the inter-relationship of people and their environment. It posits that filmmaking plays a crucial role in linking hearts, minds and hands of people to work together for a sustainable future in a variety of ways.

This research aims to explore two elements related to addressing issues linked to environmental sustainability through the process of filmmaking. Firstly, the question of how emotional ties to natural places are culturally defined is explored as this affects attitudes to environments in which people live. Secondly, the question of how filmmaking assists in intercultural communication about environmental issues on a local and
global level is examined. Throughout both of these explorations I argue that film is an essential part of creating a ‘meeting place’ where discussions for the environment can be extended. I also consider how filmmaking can be used to move beyond definition and reflection, to become a participatory tool defining environmentally sustainable behaviour.

Global initiatives for environmental issues cannot work without positive environmental attitudes on an individual and group level. This requires involvement and commitment to sustainability. Given the complexity of this task, how can this be done? The problem with building links to the ‘non-human living world’ (Abrams 1997 p268) is that many natural environments are subsumed in urban landscapes, populated by people, like myself, with ontology linked to other places, described in other languages. At the very time when it is urgent to take actions to protect the environment, people are frequently disconnected from the places that need protection. New methods for communicating about relationship to and responsibility for the natural world are urgently needed.

In the second part of the twentieth century, environmental movements developed networks for sustainable living but these were considered outside mainstream culture in the developed world. In Australia, those who chose alternative ways of living, such as advocated by Permaculture, were stereotyped as ‘tree hugging hippies’ or ‘radical greenies’. However, environmental issues have moved to the centre of social concern as the iconic Murray River is dredged to flow into the sea and climate change is irrefutable. In addition, issues that affect less developed nations such as rising sea levels on Pacific Islands call for urgent responses from all nations. This research seeks to identify ways filmmaking can address environmental issues.

The research for this PhD in Visual Arts culminates in two main films in DVD1. These are essentially community case studies exploring people’s relationship with the natural environment. The first film Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are) is a bilingual study and focuses
on cultural connections to land among people of Latvian background. The second film, *Sharing Vision* is principally set in Darwin, in the Northern Territory and explores how to build a discourse about environmental issues. Additionally, in DVD2, six Short Films provide background material supporting the research and the main films. Elements from some of these are also included in the main films.

I coined the title of this thesis; ‘Ethno Eco Dialogue’ to encompass the various strands of this interdisciplinary study. The Greek prefixes, ethno- and eco-, reflect the heritage of the language in which this is written and the history of western philosophy. ‘Ethno-’, meaning ‘race or nation’, relates to the heritage of social and environmental values within communities. It also refers to the experimental ethnographic approach that I apply to my film practice. ‘Eco-’, (from ‘oikos’ meaning ‘house’), is used in studies of the ‘inter-relationship of organisms and their environment’ to emphasise the connections between people and the region in which they live (Belote and Belote 2003). My work prioritises natural ecology but recognises that *economics* of human activities in a region must be considered alongside the environment.

‘Dialogue’ is central to the social and cultural process of defining identity in, and actions for, places. Individuals and groups need to discuss and define what sustainable environments might be. As Ron and Suzanne Wong Scollon (1995) suggest, the relationships between ethnicity, ecology and livelihood can be communicated across cultures if one remains aware of the varieties within cultures. Film, as process and text, is a means of building broader discussions about perceptions of identity in place because it can communicate ideas with sound and vision. This work contends that film is central to extending dialogue relating to actions for more sustainable environments.

The filmmaker brings personal experience into the work they create. My personal experience and relationships with people in the films has been a catalyst for this research. As an Australian born into a Baltic refugee family
in Sydney, English is my third language after Lithuanian and Latvian. Drawn away from a large urban centre, I have spent most of my adult life as an educator in language and culture in Darwin, Northern Territory. I am also a mother and have been involved in environmental groups for many years. These experiences bring a particular view of what my identity is in the place that I call my home. I am aware of the effects of my cultural displacement but recognise that this is individual and adapts over time, influenced not only by adaptation to a new place, but also changes in local and global constructions of reality.

This work recognises the influences of Indigenous perspectives on the way environmental sustainability is constructed in Australia. It seeks to uncover ways that people can link to the love of a natural place in a way that recognises responsibility alongside the effects of dislocation. Examining perceptions of place and how individuals and groups can move towards more sustainable environments presents questions that drive this research.

If a person is to understand her or his place in the natural world, shouldn’t they consider their emotional response to the region in which they live? But, if a person doesn’t feel a strong connection to a place, can this really influence their capacity to protect the natural environment of that place? Also, what is the role of culture and social interaction in responding to these questions? And, finally, how does film provide ways to extend the discourse linking people in place to action for sustaining natural environments? These questions are briefly extended below and addressed in the chapters that follow.

On a personal level, an individual’s relationship to her or his surroundings is a complex mix of culture, social experience, location and philosophy that cannot easily be defined. This is particularly true in Australia where people have come from many countries, bringing multiple viewpoints and experiences of place. This inter-relates with the history of how a place has been defined by Indigenous people and colonists. How a person relates to the natural world in or near any one place is culturally and historically
constructed. This work does not seek to present generalisations or suggest stereotypical attitudes, but to portray various viewpoints with the intent to question relationships to natural environments.

Filmmaking is a tool that is influenced by the technology of production, the language and culture of the filmmaker and the social context in which the action of filmmaking takes place. This work aims to contribute to knowledge in the area in that it is concerned with acting to 'transform the world from what it is to something better... concerned with intervention, innovation and change' (Scrivener 2000 p2). While this research is not proposing film as some utopian solution to complex issues of identity and sustaining environments, it contends that filmmaking, particularly as a participatory process, has the potential to move discussion towards defining and solving environmental problems.
**Theoretical Framework**

To describe and analyse relationships between individuals, film and sustainable environments, theoretical frameworks are needed. This work is underpinned by three theories within which the inter-relationship between people and perceptions of the natural world is defined. Phenomenology as multiple perspectives on the experience of ‘being in the world’; Dialectic Hermeneutics as how people interpret texts (including films) that define the world they are in; and Actor Network Theory (ANT) to identify how people inter-relate text with action in the world.

The diagram in Figure 1 seeks to illustrate how the three theories discussed below have been combined in this research. The underpinning focus is on film texts that explore phenomena in the left as a depiction of a DVD. In this case the phenomenon being examined is the capacity of documentary film to provide a ‘meeting place’ to share views on environmental sustainability across cultures (ie ethno-eco-dialogue). Films texts are seen as ‘objects’ that are viewed and interpreted for meaning, as part of a Dialectical Hermeneutic process. This in turn extends the discourse about the phenomenon through dialogue. The meaning is influenced by the context in which the film is constructed and received.

Impacting on this flow of understanding is a combination of unpredictable environmental, cultural, historical, technological and educational influences depicted in the right side of the diagram. These influences impact on the filmmaker, the viewer and the text constructed as part of an Actor Network. In this case these are individuals and groups participating in the research process that have helped to define the phenomena. These circles of interaction are not confined to a static process and are part of a network of influences that inform and change meaning. Herein the meaning and interpretation of films is considered within the domain of social action, extended by individuals and groups outside any constricting circles in a diagram.8
Figure 1
Linking elements of Theory.

The individual response is seen as an essential part of understanding the world within a phenomenological viewpoint. Philosopher, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962 p317) sought to analyse relationships between individuals and the natural environment. He described the natural world ‘not pre-eminently as sensory contents but as certain kinds of symbioses, certain ways the outside has of invading us and certain ways we have of meeting this invasion’. Merleau Ponty’s (1962; 1968) theory on mimesis underpins discussions about how far the text of a film can create a direct sensual experience of life. 9
In her research, Laura Marks (2000 p151) supports the notion that the film medium is ‘yielding-knowing’ and close to a true sensual experience for the viewer. However, Vivian Sobchack (1992 p10-15) argues that the viewer of the film does not experience film as an illusion but as an extension of ‘embodied experience’ and therefore produces the film in their mind. I argue that both these viewpoints must be considered as the filmic experience works alongside the lived experience in the natural environment in an individual and interactive way through the heart and the mind.

Another aspect of phenomenology that is central in the film production and editing process is to find what Gaston Bachelard (1958 p4) described as the ‘germ of the essential’ reflecting inner and outer spaces. I use this perspective as an underpinning approach to synthesise interviews and opinions given in a questionnaire from migrants, educators and students from various cultural perspectives to find the essential links between people, places and actions for place; or biophilia in bioregions. My own inner spaces influence the narrative of the documentary filmmaking and in defining environmental attitudes. This becomes part of the creative product of the film.

In extension, Dialectical Hermeneutics, derived from Phenomenology, deals with interpretation and meaning of texts. From the traditions of Martin Heidegger (Heidegger 1962) and Hans Gadamer (1989 p63-78) a text (as film, art, writing, or the spoken word) is central to any dialectic. This text is reliant on the context in which it is produced and received. Film text is influenced by history and culture of the people who created it and the people who view it in an interaction. To interpret environmental sustainability in its multiple forms, one must first use familiar terms such as identity and environment, recognising that there are many meanings to these terms. Culture and history influence the production and reception of film texts so these need to be explicitly recognised. When the context is established, discussion can move to specific, less familiar terms developed later, such as ‘biophilia’ and ‘bioregion’.
However, neither Phenomenology nor Dialectic Hermeneutics provide a clear theoretical basis for explicit ‘intent’ such as in activist films. By linking Actor Network Theory to filmmaking, the subjects and the viewers are recognised to be part of broader networks, having identities that inter-relate with various ‘actors’ or ‘things’ as participants in a process of defining reality. ANT proponent, Bruno Latour (2005 p35) contends these can include a variety of living and non-living facets including natural places, cars and ideologies. These ‘actors’ influence and are influenced by ‘actants’ or the processes and events that can create new situations.

**Literature Review**

In seeking to define filmmaking for sustainability in socio-cultural and environmental contexts, this research is interdisciplinary in nature. Hence the literature for this study pertains to a range of fields alongside documentary film theory. Literature in the fields of sociolinguistics, eco-psychology, environmental psychology, sustainability education, and social ecology underpins themes explored in the two films. While documentary film theory informs the processes of film construction, this research also relies on studies that examine interactions between people, culture and environment.

The filmmaking process builds upon and expands interpretation of cultural values through the inter-relationship between filmmakers, the film’s subjects and the viewers of the film. Dudley Andrew (1986) also points out that each of these operates within its own context. This can be seen as a three way dialectic process with a variety of possibilities in each sector of the dialogue. Of particular interest in this work is the inter-relationship of intercultural communication and participatory filmmaking. The participatory use of filmmaking to empower people to address environmental and cultural issues was initiated by projects exemplified by Sol Worth and John Adair with the Navajo people (1972). More recently, this participatory process has been well documented and promoted by filmmakers such as Shirley White (2003).
That care must be taken to ensure that meaningful intercultural communication is maintained with people who engage in the processes of a filmmaker, is also highlighted by Nick and Chris Lunch (2006). The difficulties of communicating across cultures is recognised by film theorists such as Kobena Mercer (1988), David MacDougall (1998 p75) and Hamid Naficy (2001 p86) who agree that there is no guarantee that audio-visual communication will cross cultural perspectives in the way that a filmmaker may intend.

However, my work supports Laura Marks’ (2000 pxiv) suggestion that film itself has the capacity to develop a new type of language that can engage the senses of people from many cultures through its vision and sound, especially if the themes and characters are clearly represented. Undeniably, films are open to interpretation but an intercultural dialogue can be supported through vision and sound that does more to cross cultural difference than the written word (Marks 2000 p6). Given the pressing concerns about the environment that intersect spatial and cultural boundaries, an approach that includes participants in constructing the film presents a positive possibility for effective intercultural communication.

Even so, when representing information that aims to communicate to an unknown audience, one cannot assume that individuals share the same values or motivations. The filmmaker must also recognise that global concepts need to be culturally defined. The work of Noam Chomsky (Herman and Chomsky 1988) in linking language, media and activism inspires my work but I question the application of linguistic theory to visual representation that suggest images have ‘innate universal language’ within them. Anne Marie Barry (1997 p136) also argues that power of the image is rarely linear and categorical, but rather derives from ‘experiential logic which is cultural, holistic and through association’.

The approach taken to intercultural and cross-cultural communication in film is referenced to sociolinguistic studies linked to the Sapir-Whorf
Hypothesis (Whorf 1956 p116). Benjamin Whorf and Edward Sapir extended the notion that communication is not universal, but culturally interdependent with the environment in which it exists. This hypothesis contends that language is relative according to the context in which it develops and that it determines, to a great extent, the way that people perceive the world. The thoughts that we construct are based upon the language that we speak and the words that we use (Chandler 2005). This is supported in the research conducted by Luisa Maffi et al (2004) in relation to language and environmental knowledge, particularly in Indigenous contexts. Hence, this filmmaking takes care not to assume that the words and images used will be interpreted in the same way across cultural contexts but seeks points of shared reference.

Indigenous perspectives are highly relevant in building a shared reference. The notion of ancestral links to place being a strong motivation to care for the environment is considered in both films. This is within Latvian perspectives in a diasporic context in Australia and with Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.\(^{11}\) That Indigenous filmmakers can represent current and reflective views about the bioregions in which people live is clear from the films produced through organisations such as the Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA).

Also the research of Johnny Barrarra, Bangana Wunungmurra, and Jennifer Deger (2006) confirms the capacity of people isolated from supporting infrastructure to produce meaningful films and radio that gives cultural values a voice. As Marcia Langton (1993) observed, Indigenous people are increasingly taking control in self representation. My work seeks to include Indigenous perspectives as these have influenced my perceptions of place through film and direct experiences.

While film theorists and sociolinguists inform efforts to communicate interculturally; eco-psychology and environmental psychology assist in extending discussions about the environment. Eco-psychologists David Abrams (1997), Laura Sewall (1999) and Theodore Roszak (2001) stress the importance of individual, sensual relationships of people and the natural
environment. This focus on personalised experience influences my work as it asks people to think about the depth of their relationship to the natural world. I draw extensively on work within environmental psychology that seeks to link human experience and action for the environment.

Attributed to environmental psychologist, Edward E Wilson (1993 p31-32), the biophilia hypothesis contends that in the past all humans inter-related closely with the natural environment and that this relationship persists ‘from generation to generation, atrophied and fitfully manifested in the artificial new environments into which technology has catapulted humanity’. Wilson argues that positive inter-relationship with natural environments is intrinsic to the human genetic make-up and hence, each human holds a memory of close affiliation with biodiverse ecologies. Therefore, it should be possible for people to re-tune this inherent attachment and connect to the biodiversity in an environment. This idea of a positive relationship to natural environments strongly supports the intent of my filmmaking and exegesis.

This work also seeks to respond to emerging environmental factors embedded in social structures and work in sustainability education and social ecology have been referenced informed by the urgency to address environmental issues. Socially, there has been a radical shift in Australian and international discourse by government and non-government organisations. Ecological research in Australia by Thomas et al (2004) predicted that ‘between 15 and 37% of species could be committed to extinction by 2050.’ The Red List (2006) confirmed a similar trend internationally. Awareness of the need to act for the environment has also been hastened by internationally recognised reviews in economics, such as that by Nicholas Stern (2006 p vi-ix). I argue ‘top down’ initiatives are essential to negotiate a change in paradigm to address global issues.

However, as Thomas Kuhn (1970) explained, paradigms can shift slowly and unpredictably (in science) and filtering changes into social systems takes even longer. This research suggests a shift in paradigm can be
hastened by integrating filmmaking in the process. The warnings about the danger of continuing with the consumption growth paradigm are not new. The environmental movement’s earliest proponents such as Aldo Leopold (1949) and Rachel Carsons (1962) called for an environmental ethic that would help sustain the natural world. They warned that the way human beings can impact on the natural environment, through greed and neglect is dangerous.

In 1974, an international group of multidisciplinary experts, known as the Club of Rome, published ‘Limits to Growth’ that warned of the dire consequences humanity faced by accepting that pollution, resource use and population could grow exponentially (Meadows, Meadows et al.). While this document, alongside Schumacher’s model for economics in ‘Small is Beautiful’ (1973), became popular reading and influenced environmental movements, it did not change the growth models of governments. Disastrous effects are now being felt as developing nations adopt the same models.

The socio-cultural adaptation of the notion of chaos theory, popularly known as the ‘butterfly effect’ (Lorenz 1972), is becoming a standard paradigm as more people realise that actions taken in one part of the world can have an unpredictable effect elsewhere. People are being asked through films such as An Inconvenient Truth (Guggenheim 2006) to consider whether their actions will be like the butterfly wings flapping in the Amazon and (predictably) affect the world their children inherit. This century, environmental protection is recognised as a global issue, threatening livelihoods in an unprecedented way. People in Australia begin to understand that actions we take in a local area have effects elsewhere.
Additionally, communicating about people in the environment on a social level relies on education. In Australia, both government and non-government groups prioritise educating for sustainability. All education departments in Australia have education for sustainability as one of their streams in science and/or studies of society and environment. However, in their research, Danielle Tilbury and Kate Henderson (2003) found that much of the interpretation of sustainability in the Australian context does not do enough to recognise other world-views and intercultural aspects. This is a notable finding, especially in the context of how Indigenous knowledge could be given greater respect and recognition in helping to solve environmental dilemmas (Turner 1997; Stewart-Harawira 2005).

In her research, Linda Ford (2005 p41) emphasised the importance of maintaining Indigenous narratives about landscapes to inform approaches for education for environmental sustainability. My film work considers multiple cultural and social factors that influence perceptions of place. It places film as a central place to extend education through discussion.

Placing this research in the field of social ecology helps to define the links between film theory, biophilia and actions for natural environments linked to bioregions. The term ‘bioregions’ helps to contextualise people in a natural region that can ‘meet the needs of the human and non-human residents within the area and within a reasonable distance’ (Morrow 2006 p236). Social ecology emphasises the importance of developing social structures that take into account the inter-relationship between people and nature (Bookchin 2004 p7). This work references practical applications of social ecology in the form of Permaculture as developed by Bill Mollison and David Holmgren (1978) and the emerging movement of Transition Towns defined by Rob Hopkins (Hopkins 2007). These are presented as motivating alternatives to urban dwellers seeking more sustainable options in the way they live.

Overall, the literature from the many areas I have considered relevant to this research, informs my filmmaking. I seek to bring forward ideas that confirm a belief in resilience to adapt to changing circumstances and recognise the close
relationship of people and natural places. The views I seek to depict are not utopian but value the capacity of human beings to understand and inter-relate with the natural environment in a sustainable way.

Methodology of filmmaking

Previously, I have produced films for festivals, education and community groups that were linked to my interests and work in linguistics, education and environment, rather than in film or art as a specialised arena of practice. This background influences the way I have approached filmmaking. My method is based on the belief that filmmaking is an interactive artistic process that can help build positive attitudes towards protecting natural environments.

Methods I have applied in the research process include conducting questionnaires and interviews; facilitating participatory filmmaking workshops; interacting with interviewees in the editing of the final films; observation and recording of events; researching archival material; presenting film work in exhibitions, festivals and seminars; and publishing articles to glean responses to my research as it progressed. I filmed interviews with thirty-six people, segments of which have been used in the two films. I interacted with interviewees extensively, screening the draft of the films before finalising the work. As a participant/observer, I recorded Latvian cultural events and filmed various activities relating to environmental issues in Darwin.

Filmmaking workshops were facilitated to explore how sustainability could be defined through a scripting and production process with conference participants, teachers and students in various locations. I held workshop sessions at three international conferences in Australia, Germany and India that had the principle theme of environmental sustainability. Thirty-five people from fourteen nationalities participated in these workshops. I also held similar workshops with forty teachers in Latvia. In Darwin I facilitated workshops with five student groups at Charles Darwin University (CDU) and the Transition Towns planning group. In total, 120 people participated in these workshops.
Applying quantitative research, I conducted a questionnaire based around depictions of natural environments that provided responses from 179 students at Charles Darwin University. This questionnaire was also translated into Latvian and 57 people from the Latvian community in Sydney and teachers in the Latgale region in Latvia responded to this version. A copy of this is provided alongside permission documents in Appendix 1.

The contents and exhibition of six Short Films on DVD2 are detailed in Appendix 2. These short films reflect the process of including questionnaire data in the films as well as conceptual exploration of the role of film in depicting environmental issues with groups outside those represented in the two main films. I have also completed most of the production and post-production myself, partly to enhance skills but also to maintain control of the content of the outcome. As neither film was tightly scripted at the outset, the editing process was where I interacted with the ‘actors’ I had interviewed and filmed at events, building the film in this way.

**Outline of the exegesis**

This exegesis extends on theories influencing my work and provides insights to the extensive research undertaken in making these films. ‘Figures’ support the written text as a visual narrative, not as art works. The merit of image making must be considered in the structure of the films. The qualitative and quantitative methods described in the methodology mirror the interactive nature of the research and filmmaking. These are explained more fully in the following chapters.

Chapter one provides an analysis of influences on my filmmaking by examining aspects of a number of documentary films. These films were produced from 1998-2008. After providing background to environmental film, I explore biophilia in intercultural contexts as ‘Experimental Ethnography’. This is followed by discussion of films that are made with intent to sway opinion as
‘Environmental Activist’ films. Both genres are considered for their style and content in relation to communicating environmental issues across cultures.

Chapter two explains my filmmaking as a research process that seeks to interconnect dialogue about two phenomena, biophilia and actions for environmental sustainability. How interviews, workshops and recorded events were combined with information from questionnaires is explained as part of the process of making two films. Integrated into this explanation is how the making of short films in DVD2 informed the research process.

Chapter three extends the discussion about affiliation with the natural environment as ‘biophilia’, linking this to the content of the first film. Love of a natural place is considered to be a socio-cultural construct defined by experiences in and attitudes to particular places. As a case study, I use personal experience alongside interviews conducted for the film and information from questionnaires to examine how biophilia manifests in people from a Latvian cultural background in Australia. This is followed by suggestions of implications of transferring a love of place to a place far from ancestral connections.

In chapter four the context of Darwin is set as the location of the second film. This places this film within actions that are taken for the environment on a global and local level. Filmmaking, as a process of motivating action for environmental issues, is shown as integral to environmental activist efforts in diverse cultural contexts. Following this description and discussion I explain how questionnaire research in Darwin informed the research for film.

The conclusion draws from the research findings to summarise the exegesis and reflect on the outcomes of making both films as a contribution to developing ethno-eco-dialogue. Suggestions are made for further work in this field of film and research.
Introduction notes

1 Throughout this writing I use the words ‘film, filmmaking and filmmaker’ to refer to video and DVD production using digitally recorded and edited material.

2 ‘Intercultural’ refers to meaningful and respectful exchanges between people of different cultures about shared concerns.

3 Engaging the heart, mind and hands are seen as essential components of environmental education strategies.

4 I use the term developed rather than ‘west’ or ‘first world’ in reference to technological and economic wealth.

5 Permaculture is a community-based process of defining ways to grow food and live self-sufficiently within a region.

6 The prefix Ethno-eco is used in Tourism in Ecuador and the term is being adopted in tourist ventures in other countries.

7 I have worked as an educator of English as a Second Language, Studies of Society and Environment and Film Studies in secondary and tertiary education.

8 In creating this depiction of the theoretical framework I thank Dirk Peek and Andrea Ash for suggestions.

9 Mimesis is defined in the Aristotelian sense of art imitating nature.

10 The term ‘cross-cultural’ centres on the differences of communication in cultures and how these impact on communicating.

11 Close to half the population of the Northern Territory is Indigenous and a large percentage of the land has Aboriginal Traditional Owners.

12 Reports such as The Red List of 2006 heightened awareness of the rapidly increasing rate of extinction of ‘non-human living things’ around the planet.

13 The Stern Review provided firm evidence that governments must make a ‘transition to a low-carbon economy’ to ensure that ‘societies can adapt to the consequences of unavoidable climate change’.

14 The United Nations initiative of the Decade of Education for Sustainable Development has stimulated international activity in the field of education.

15 A number of publications reflect the national focus on sustainability in education including Ministerial Council on Education, E., Training and Youth Affairs (1999). The Adelaide


18 In the initial stages of this PhD I considered seeking external funding to assist with the production but I thought that by keeping within the role of a PhD student I could change the construction of the films as I saw fit without considering the interests of eternal funding.
Chapter One

Environmental Films
The aim of the documentary medium, now, must be to present a picture of reality that will enable the community's citizens to form some positive beliefs they can use to invent a more satisfactory community reality (John Wolverton 1983 p21).

In this chapter I provide a context for environmental filmmaking in the twenty-first century. For the purposes of this research I consider environmental films under two categories that loosely define film genres within documentary traditions. These are ‘Experimental Ethnographic Film’ and ‘Environmental Activist Film’. Influences within these films discussed have informed my filmmaking as part of my doctoral research. The first film *Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were Here we Are)* might be classified as experimental ethnography as it explores the cultural aspects of biophilia. The second film *Sharing Vision* may be seen as an Environmental Activist film as it seeks to promote change in worldview and action for the local and global environment. A selection of films produced during 1998-2008 in Australia, France and the United States, are critically analysed for style, content and the ways they may communicate inter-culturally about human relationships with the living earth.

Discussion of these films shed light on how filmmaking can extend dialogue about the relationship of people to their natural environment and actions for sustainability. The theory of biophilia suggests that, universally, in their genetic make-up, people want to sustain natural environments for future generations, whatever their cultural background (Wilson 1993). If this is the case, it implies that once people in a community recognise this responsibility, they should willingly provide stewardship for non-human living things, drawing on links to other living things (Leopold 1949). However, this type of stewardship would require many people to reconsider how they relate to the natural world and the films discussed raise such questions.

Creating sustainable communities is a perceptual as well as a practical task, requiring a broad range of strategies including the production of documentary films that seek to communicate with audiences across diverse cultural perspectives about environmental issues. When filmmakers wish to extend dialogue about
environmental sustainability the subjective relationship between individuals and the natural environment needs to be considered. As John Wolverton (1983 p21) suggests, documentary filmmakers play an important role in portraying information about the world and helping to define how communities see themselves. The films discussed here encourage people to adopt beliefs about their region that help to ‘invent a more satisfactory community reality’. It must be noted that the way this reality is defined will also be influenced by the filmmaker’s views about what is positive, good and should be valued in an environment.

Within these environmental films, strategies are employed as part of what Graeme Turner (1988 p35) describes as the ‘grammar in the language of film’. This grammar includes technology, practices and styles that have an extensive social and political history described in filmmaking texts such as that by David Bordwell and Kristen Thompson (2004). Cross-cultural film theorists Ilisa Barbash and Lucien Taylor (1997 p15-33) suggest that documentary filmmakers have many choices, including expository, observational, impressionistic and reflexive styles, in their toolbox for intercultural communication. The use of one or more of these styles helps communicate the filmmaker’s ideas about the world in the films discussed below.¹

Shohat and Stam (1994 p33) identified changing processes in documentary and narrative filmmaking wherein new films strive for ‘participatory, dialogical anthropology through interactive filmmaking’. The resulting representation is one that offers a decentralised world-view that attempts to empower the participants in their identity. This practice has built on the work of Jean Rouch (Bregstein 1986) who recognised the importance of inclusion of the African people when he facilitated active participation in the making of his films. Participants planned their stories and used filmic methods to define reality. This process continues with Indigenous Australians creating films that redefine concepts of belonging to place and sustainability of place.

The films’ socio-cultural context will inevitably influence the reception of a film. The capacity of documentary films to create links between people, environments and
actions needs to be defined in terms of how film texts, as objects, are produced, distributed and appreciated (Law and Whittaker 1988). Various factors influence the capacity of film to communicate about issues, questioning the way things are believed to be. As Alan Rosenthal (1988 p44) suggests, when documentary filmmakers move beyond giving information about the world and make films that ask the viewer to reflect on beliefs, question attitudes and change behaviour, they must consider their practice in light of what has been done before in this field.

**Background to environmental films**

Prior to concerns about environmental issues taking centre stage, environmental films took the form of natural history, capturing life ‘in the wild’. Film recording linked to scientific research to show beautiful cinematography of exotic places in series such as the David Attenborough’s *Life on Earth* (1979). These explained how animals lived in ‘wild’ places bereft of people other than the researchers and the predominantly male narrator providing an exposition of animal and plant survival. These films continue to promote ecological concepts and remain popular with international audiences for the fascinating insights they provide about the non-human living world. However, as Gail Davis (1998 p16) has detailed, questions arise about the effectiveness of expository scientific documentaries in helping to conserve the environments they describe.

Increasingly, the high costs of producing natural history films underpinned by rationalist science paradigms are considered problematic by critics such as Tracy Graziano (2005) as they do not help to conserve the environments they represent. Neil Smith (1996) suggests that a further problem is that nature divorced from a human context can reassure viewers that these places are still intact, hence there is no need to change attitudes and behaviours by the (mostly) urban viewers. In addition, Charles McChesney (2009) questions the effects of framing images to exclude human elements such as power-lines or roads recognising that this conscious omission can reinforce complacency that ‘all is right’ in the natural environment, thereby ignoring the problems that surround the depiction of nature.
In response to criticisms such as these, David Attenborough initiated a reflexive film which foregrounds the relationship between the filmmaker, the film and the viewer in describing the issue represented. Titled *Gorillas Revisited* (2007), this film validates the role of his earlier natural history films. He argues that the episode *The Primates*, from the *Life on Earth* (1979) series, focussing on the gorillas in Rwanda, generated international support for environmental issues. Attenborough considered how his films positively influenced gorilla habitat conservation in Rwanda. Locally, the film raised awareness of the importance of habitat to a unique creature that needed protection within Rwanda. Also, the animals began to generate economic value as an attraction for adventure tourism. Overseas, this documentary informed the script for the popular film *Gorillas in the Mist* (Apted 1988) which, through the commitment of the main actress, Sigourney Weaver, inspired fund-raising for conservation activities in Rwanda.

While there are positive results from environmental films in the natural history genre, Philip Bagust (1999 p10) suggests it is also possible that the ‘virtualisation’ of nature as a disembodied concept adds to the distancing of people from interactions with the real place. Indeed, presenting nature through digital medium may degrade the baseline of what a biodiverse place really is. Peter Kahn Jr, Batya Friedman et al (2008) suggest that when filmmakers visit and shoot in a location, then edit beautiful music over images of exotic weeds as an effect, this does not improve understanding of complex bioregions. They argue that this type of representation may work against solving the problems within the region as people begin to accept that this is ‘normal’.

It is clear that the use of film to address environmental concerns is fraught with contradictions. More recently, with the demise of many species and the growing threats to the natural world, most natural history documentaries now include a coda, if not a central theme, about human relationship to the environments they depict. The meaning of what an environmental film is has shifted to include people and their actions in places. The notion of environment has moved outside the category of ‘natural history’ to have a social component, presenting more subjective voices, rather than trying to present nature as a set of inter-relating objects outside the human domain. This reflects the difficulty of containing films in a genre but also provides a
segue to discuss the important role ethnographic films have in forming dialogue about the human relationship to the natural environment.

Ethnographic films as defined by David Mac Dougall (1998 p10) are ‘films that seek to show features of one culture to another’. Cultural practices, in this anthropological tradition, usually include depictions of the environment that sustains a group. The representations may also seek, as Colliers (1986) suggest, to create a dialogue between the viewer and the images presented, providing some insight into the viewer’s situation through a process of comparison. Ethnographic films that provide scientific, supposedly objective representation of ‘other’ cultural practices through an exposition by someone outside the culture are also open to criticism. The main criticism lies in the charge that filmmakers may create an object of the people in the film by silencing the subjects of their film through the use of an authoritative external voice (MacDougall 1976). Through choices of framing people and events in a particular style, it is possible that such depictions merely confirm that this relationship with the environment is in ‘other’ places, placating the viewer that the ‘other’ can inter-relate closely to the land somewhere else in the world. Fatimah Rony (1996) suggests that ethnographic films representing other cultures in a purely expository way do little to engage empathy for the people represented. This form of representation does little to assist with people reflecting about their own relationship to the place in which they live.

The films described below move beyond this expository style of filmmaking and share interpretation of one culture with another. This is not as an ethnographic representation of the ‘other’ culture. I demonstrate that, in addition to negotiating the thin line between presenting objective data and subjective interpretation, a film for environmental sustainability must deal with the culture and the social power relations of the filmmaker, the subjects of the film and its audience.
**Experimental ethnographic films**

Experimental Ethnographic films are films wherein the filmmakers cannot ‘objectify the other’ as their identity is embedded in the cultural practices they seek to represent. It is a film genre that extends the depiction of people in places, giving greater voice to the people and working with issues of intercultural communication in creative ways. Catherine Russell (1999 pxvii) asserts that this form of filmmaking challenges the authenticity of ethnographic representation, playing with ‘language and form for historical ends’ where ‘the human condition is rethought as one of ongoing cultural encounter, translation and transition’.

Film theorist and experimental filmmaker, Trinh Minh Ha (1992 p103; p117-121) suggests that the effort to portray how other people live can never be an objective exercise. Filmmakers bring their own culture and technology to the act of filming, influencing the people and the characters they wish to portray. In turn, the subjects influence the approach of the filmmaker, so ‘objective’ representation is impossible. Hence, she argues that the subjective voice of the filmmaker should be made explicit when seeking to represent other cultural groups. The possibility that films encourage connectedness and respect for place as a desirable perspective encourages my work alongside that of filmmakers discussed below.

Jennifer Deger (2006 p36), in her doctoral research on Indigenous media, suggests it would be naïve to assume that subjective or objective representations will necessarily make the film any more than a ‘tool for exploration of world views’ However, Faye Ginsburg (1993), considers that film has the potential to both erode culture in place as well as support the redistribution of power as an activist tool with new technologies that are available (Ginsburg, Abu-Lughod et al. 2002). The films I consider here are examples of how various approaches have been used to link the viewer with the people in the environments these films depict.

The first film is in an observational style and deals with an urban community in Sydney. *Our Park* (1998) in Figure 2 depicts filmmaker Gillian Leahy’s involvement with a park area in inner Sydney. Starting with a scene on her own veranda looking
at the park at a distance, Gillian introduced her personal perspective on the park and the people who use it. This is similar to the introduction to *Heaven* (1990) by Indigenous filmmaker Tracy Moffatt where she explored an element of the Australian male beach culture from her window and then moved in closer to the subjects she was filming. Such an introduction gives the viewer insight into the filmmaker’s perspective on the situation at the outset of the film and helps to position the viewer in relation to the filmmaker. The film continues by depicting the stakeholders in the park as young and old and from many backgrounds. Leahy becomes involved with a community garden on disused land next to the park.

**Figure 2**

*Our Park* (Leahy 1998)
Scanned video cover

The collaborations and conflicts that make up this network of stakeholders are illustrated through events where the filmmaker tries to remain an outsider. The film presents people from diverse cultural backgrounds approaching parkland issues in different ways. The precarious role of the filmmaker in making experimental ethnographic films was brought to the fore when a member of the community garden group told Gillian to stop hiding behind the camera. This scene highlights the difficulty of being the observer in a situation where the filmmaker is involved. The film provides a positive insight into concern about a local park in a densely populated area. By showing how people negotiate with other stakeholders, Gillian Leahy has shown that people’s love of place can be variable and not without conflict in an urban Australian region.
Turning to international influences on my work, Agnes Varda’s *The Gleaners and I* (2003) was produced in France and reflects contemporary views of the environment in a traditionally agrarian economy. Varda (in Figure 3) extended the personalised documentary using a style that included exposition, impressionism, observation and reflexivity. In an exposition on gleaning or ‘to gather after the harvest’, she voiced a narrative linking iconic art representations of women who gleaned in the past (in Figure 4) to gleaners in the present. Through experiencing this translated version of Varda’s observations the viewer may be led to question modern relationships to the environment and stereotypes of people who scavenge on the edges of consumerism. The imagery of rural and urban contexts in France used also helped to cross-linguistic boundaries through a representation linking her personal experiences with exposition of the situation and extended relationships with interviewees.

Particularly, this film would communicate to viewers whose heritage is European and people from cultures with agricultural histories who may have moved as migrants or refugees into urban settings. Varda combined exposition of the modern day gleaner with impressions of roads, fields and city-scapes, captured through the lens of her small camera as she journeyed through urban and rural France. By positioning herself as an older gleaner of images, she provides an analogy of her life as a gleaning artist and filmmaker alongside her relationships with the people she interviewed as ‘la glaneuse’ (Carter 2002). Reflexively, she also plays with the camera technology and the filmmaking process to raise awareness of her perspective as the creator of the film.

The interviews with farmers, scavengers, lawyers and artists depict them as gleaners in their different social contexts. These interviews were conducted in an observational, cinema verité style wherein Varda used footage to show the people’s lives. By using this multiple style approach, her film raises an important issue about the capacity of film to communicate to different individuals. Varda’s personal perspective resonated with me as she reflected on the processes of aging but this may not engage a younger person. On the other hand, the impressionistic enactments of lawyers dressed in their regalia speaking about laws in fields of
wheat may capture the imagination because of its surreal quality. The film also
deals with an issue that crosses urban and rural lives so it communicates with
people who live in different ways in various regions of France. Varda’s film
shows how a skilful filmmaker can communicate in a variety of ways within one
film.

![Figure 3](image1.png)

**Figure 3**
Agnes Varda- Filmmaker
Digital Photograph

The last film discussed in the broad genre of experimental ethnography depicts
Indigenous people in Australia’s tropical Northern Territory. This area has generally
been represented in film as an area where the ‘other’ lives and has been used to
promote tourism to a place where an Indigenous worldview about love of place can
be shared. Given that a large percentage of land in the tropical north (outside the
urban areas) is inhabited by Aboriginal people, Indigenous perspectives should be
central in defining relationships to this area of the world.
The Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association (CAAMA) supported production, *Five Seasons* (2004) illustrates how films, driven by Indigenous epistemology, define people in a bioregion in a way that is positive but not utopian. The filmmaking process for *Five Seasons* included people in the film working with Indigenous filmmaker, Steven McGregor to determine how to represent their view of the world. The film has been acclaimed for its stunning cinematographic exposition of the changing seasons and the depiction of the daily life of the Numurindi people in their ancestral lands in southeast Arnhem Land. The audience is given an insight into life in the tropical savannahs, wetlands and floodplains of the Northern Territory through the eyes of Moses Numamurdirdi, a senior custodian who is depicted on the cover in Figure 5. The film reflects the filmmakers’ deep understanding of the cultural context they seek to depict (Asch 1992; 2000).

This film does not seek to salvage cultural constructs, though there are moments of reminiscence by older people who speak about life in the past in Yolngu and are subtitled in English. The language in the film shifts between English, Yolngu and a Kriol language used in the area indicating a shift in language and culture. In *Five Seasons*, the spiritual relationship to land is primarily defined through a scripted narration provided by professional actor Tom E Lewis who is an Indigenous man from a nearby area. Through this narration, the audience, who may know little of Aboriginal relationships to land, are given insights into other ways to perceive the environment as a place that responds to the seasons of the area in which they live. In considering the difficulties of representing beliefs, such as the spiritual relationship people have with land, the filmmaker must make choices in depiction and narration.

David MacDougall (1998) considered spiritual connection as something that cannot be shown audio-visually and can only be described. A viewer of the film may come closer to understanding the spiritual connection to land of Indigenous people but is unlikely to change their own beliefs unless they have some direct experience of connectedness to place. The film can fulfil a 'need for a pluralistic view of the natural environment and human-nature relatedness' that includes Indigenous people (Bird-David 1993 p121). However, one must be mindful that the representations can be
better understood through direct experience, mediated with Indigenous people in place.

![Figure 5](image.jpg)

**Figure 5**
*5 Seasons* DVD cover

The experimental ethnographic films discussed above draw attention to how people relate to natural environments in both urban and rural areas and how filmmakers have represented this relationship. Particular elements of these works have influenced my research and filmmaking. *Our Park* (Leahy 1998) showed that representing ordinary people relating to each other and a natural area can engage with broader issues of identity in and action for environment and I adopted such a viewpoint in constructing my films. *The Gleaners and I* (Varda 2003) used a diverse range of styles to explore an environmental topic and allowed the filmmaker’s opinion to be explicit. I have been inspired by the creative approach of this film. *Five Seasons* (McGregor and Maclean 2004) influenced my work with its capacity to depict the natural environment alongside the people within it in a way that avoided ‘othering’ the people. This implicit respect for viewpoints that connect to love of place I hope has been reflected in my films as well.

These experimental ethnographic films bring to light how people relate to natural environments in both urban and rural areas. It is possible to share insights with the filmmakers about how biophilia manifests across cultural groups through these films.
However, there is another aspect of environmental filmmaking that calls for action to protect the environment. This leads to discussion of environmental activist films.

**Environmental activist films**

While the experimental ethnographic films described above extend dialogue about the human relationship to the natural environment, they do not directly address the urgency to promote action for environmentally sustainable communities across diverse cultural perceptions. The films discussed below help to define the capacity of films to work for environmental actions. In defining links between biophilia and action, David Orr (1993 p416) suggests ‘We must love what we are prepared to fight for’. In the films discussed below the ‘we’ is defined differently as individuals come from diverse groups, but there is commonality in love for the natural environment that the people seek to protect.

The activist genre of documentary making is open to the criticism of being propaganda in its effort to change views of the world and some lessons can be gleaned from Soviet culture, where many films were produced with intent to promote a particular view of the world to support the ideology of the powers that be. Nick Fraser (2008), in considering the capacity of documentary films to change the world, suggested that ‘The commissars assumed that audiences could be made to leave cinemas not just enlightened but politically engaged’, but this did not always happen. Criticism of activist film as propaganda is a reminder to filmmakers who aim to produce films that support and promote environmental action, that this type of filmmaking is inevitably linked to political and personal values that may not be shared by others.

Nevertheless, in a time when action for the environment needs to move quickly, diverse styles of filmmaking must communicate clearly about issues. By examining films produced in Australia and the United States, I focus on the current context of environmental films that question worldviews in order to promote and support actions that may otherwise not have support by governments or community
members. They are films that echo belief in the capacity of groups of people to take positive actions for the environment.

The challenge to represent environmental action in a culturally inclusive way is well met in *Trespass*, directed by Indigenous filmmaker David Vadiveloo (2002). This film was produced as part of the CAAMA Nganampa Anwernekenhe (2009) series that aimed to ‘contribute to the preservation of Indigenous languages and cultures’. As language is a crucial aspect of cultural memory about the environment, this project recognised the importance of representing Yvonne Margarula (Figure 6) speaking quietly and confidently in the Gunjeihmi language of the Mirrar people in the area she had sought to protect. The film uses exposition with historical footage and maps alongside empathetic interviews with Jacqui Katona in English and Yvonne, sub-titled in English to depict the successful struggle to resist the Jabiluka uranium mine in Kakadu National Park.

![Figure 6](image_url)

**Figure 6**

Yvonne Margarula
Still from film *Trespass* 2004

![Figure 7](image_url)

**Figure 7**

Dirk Peek *Jabiluka action*
2009 Photograph

The film positions the Jabiluka resistance actions from the traditional owners’, viewpoint. Through their representative voices, a thank you is extended to the individuals and groups who committed to non-violent actions in Australia and overseas to resist further mines at Kakadu. The film attributes the win for land
rights to the strength of Yvonne’s commitment to protect her land as well as the support gained from diverse groups supporting the Mirrar people. This support, that drew thousands of people from many walks of life and various ages to the Jabiluka mine resistance camp in the late 1990s, contributed to the protection of Kakadu from extended uranium mining. A t-shirt from the action is depicted in Figure 7. The success of these actions may also be attributed in part to the exposition of the issue in David Bradbury’s film *Jabiluka* (1997) which was screened strategically in major cities to create support for the issue through Australian environmental networks.4

This example of film as part of a successful environmental action process is important to consider how films can work not only as a dialogic process but also in extending networks of people for action. These networks can organise events that use media representation to garner support for change. Independent filmmaking is a part of this network. No longer is film simply a process of dialogue with and about identity in the natural environment, but a factor in a process for generating changes in the people who view the media. This reflects a shift in film production that recognises different world-views and the power of networks of people to change attitudes and policies about environmental issues.

This leads to the discussion of a film that deals with a southern Australian action for the environment. *Wildness* (2003), director, Scott Millwood, explores the way landscapes of Tasmania were redefined through two Baltic European photographer’s eyes. The film suggests the photographic images by Peter Dombrovskis from Latvia5 and Olegas Truchanas from Lithuania were an important support for changing perception of the value of the natural environment in the wider Australian community. The film emphasises how each man sought links with a love of natural forces in his country of origin through photography.

Through this intercultural connection, their photography influenced perceptions amongst urban dwellers with European histories in Australia and greatly assisted in overturning legislation supporting the Franklin dam in southwest Tasmania in 1983.6 The depth of attachment these men conveyed through their work raises the
question of whether biophilia extends through aesthetic appreciation of an imagined place (Timms 2003). The film examines the influence that photographs of distant ecologies have had on people’s opinions, positing that their use in an environmental activist campaign greatly assisted Australians to identify with and care about a place other than their own backyard. While *Wildness* explores ethics and aesthetics of place, it also depicts the networks that have developed within the environment movement that gained support for a cause and won the battle against the building of the Franklin dam.

*Wildness* clearly exemplifies how a social, political and cultural shift can be supported by dissemination of visual materials. Australia is represented to the world through tourist photographs, such as Dombrovskis’ alluring images of the Franklin River, (as in Figure 8) but this film provides insights into how individuals, with enthusiasm to protect natural places, can take actions (Timms 2003). Scott Millwood was inspired by these photographers’ passion for a place and suggests that his film provides a focus for a wider community arguing that ‘if it is local, it is universal’ (Murdoch 2003). Indeed, this film supports the notion that actions driven by committed individuals can have a broad influence.

**Figure 8**
Peter Dombrovskis 1979 *Morning Mist Rock Island Bend Franklin River*  
Photo image
The last film to be analysed as an activist film was produced with the specific aim to inform and shock people into awareness about the impact of climate change. In Figure 9 the cover of An Inconvenient Truth (Guggenheim 2006) reflects the issues discussed. The film combines hard-hitting arguments, supported by graphs of data with convincing images of the effects of global warming. An empathetic interview with Al Gore, as a high profile American politician, focuses on his personal responses to the natural environment, particularly of growing up in rural America in the 1950s. The film’s initial scenes of a slowly flowing river with commentary by Gore gives insight about how he feels about the natural environment based on childhood experience, which are influential in later life. Because the audience learns more about the man making the presentation, these points made have greater resonance and also provide a respite from the disturbing scientific data within his lecture.

The film concludes with a series of ‘calls to action’ interspersed with the credits. While Gore’s arguments were convincing in their own right, these are effective as they directly address the targeted audience to ‘Urge everyone you know to see this film; Recycle; Use mass transit; Vote for leaders who pledge to solve this crisis; Reduce our dependence on foreign oil.’ While the film was primarily targeted at a United States audience, Al Gore’s persuasive presentation of a power-point lecture to four attentive audiences in America and China could be translated into many languages to explain the science and effects of climate change. Australia has a similar carbon footprint to that of the USA so this film is highly relevant to Australians. To reframe the presentation into an Australian context, he came to Australia and has trained up to 3000 people to present his slide show in their communities, adding their own story and an Australian context to the problems presented.
The Australian Conservation Foundation supported Gore’s Australian project and helped to produce a film that documented interpretations by Australian presenters of this slide show in various contexts. Mim Lowe’s *Telling the Truth* (2008) depicts how seven Australians interpreted and shared their personal commitment to raise awareness and bring about change. One of the presenters, Mark Watson, is a stand up comedian who takes his interpretation of the slide show to a comedy festival, showing that making people laugh is a good strategy when trying to communicate about a frightening issue.
Another presenter is an Indigenous woman, Jocelyn Uibo, who interprets the presentation for people in Ramingining in the Northern Territory. These presentations clearly emphasise the importance of intercultural communication and maintaining a positive perspective about environmental issues. The film presents reasons why these Australians want to protect the environment and promotes the notion that leadership on environmental issues resides in many individuals within various communities.

Each of these ‘environmental activist’ films have influenced my filmmaking in particular ways. *Trespass* (Vadiveloo 2002) showed that history and language of Indigenous relationships to a place can be used in film to communicate about issues of identity and action for environmental issues. This approach impacts on my filmmaking in trying to maintain awareness of the importance of language and culture in maintaining links to a natural place. *Wildness* (Millwood 2003) provided insights into the inter-relationship of images and activism for place by photographers from a Baltic background. This film highlighted the need to recognise that photographers identify with environments, suggesting that creation of high quality images is influenced by this. *An Inconvenient Truth* (Guggenheim 2006) and *Telling the Truth* (Lowe 2008) inform my work as they show that filmmaking is part of a process for environmental action that can be important in strategies for action.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have considered how filmmakers have represented the relationship of people to the natural environment in diverse ways to create a dialogue with viewers about different cultural contexts. It has been suggested that traditional forms of natural history and ethnographic films are precursors to films that address environmental issues across cultures. Experimental Ethnography and Environmental Activist films have been shown to incorporate effective strategies in communicating about biophilia, linking love of land to action for a place. The analysis of these films dealt with the social context and styles of production, issues of translation and how the filmmakers adopted different styles of production.
‘Experimental Ethnography’ films indicate there are many ways to explore the links between people and their environment wherein views about a place can be shared as a dialogue between the filmmaker, participants in making the film and the viewer. This type of filmmaking has the capacity to give a voice to individuals and groups from diverse cultural backgrounds as well as providing a platform for intercultural communication. Under the rubric of ‘Environmental Activist’, the idea that filmmakers can use their creative medium to extend dialogue about environmental actions is also supported. Topics such as uranium mining on Indigenous land, protecting natural environments that are threatened by dams as well as complex issues such as climate change can be dealt with in activist films in a way that raises awareness and encourages change in behaviour. Both types of film reflect interactions between people, environment, culture and the technology to create them.

The influence of film in defining perceptions of how we relate to our natural environment is an ongoing construction in the 21st Century. This influence operates both as a process of dialogue and a way to extend networks and strategies for change. The films discussed have informed my work particularly in the ways they represented a strong concern for the environment. The following chapter will explain how I have applied strategies represented in the films discussed to films I have made for this research.
Chapter one notes

1 Expository film styles are linked to the dissemination of information as ‘fact’, communicated through a visible or voice-over commentator who speaks directly to the viewer. Observational filmmakers avoid authoritative exposition by organising footage of events and interviews with characters in a way that shows life ‘on the fly’ as people live in their environments. Impressionistic documentaries avoid didactic argument by including aesthetic constructions that imply, rather than dictate, a particular view of reality. Reflexive filmmakers consciously foreground the relationship between the filmmaker, the film and the viewer of the film in describing the issue represented. Barbash, I. and L. Taylor (1997). Cross Cultural Filmmaking: a Handbook for Making Documentary and Ethnographic Films and Video. London, University of California Press.


3 The artwork was by 19th Century artists Jean Francois Millet and Jules Breton.

4 The Environment Centre NT worked with other Australian environmental groups to organise actions throughout the country that sought media attention for the cause. Actions were organised during university holidays.

5 Peter Dombrovskis’ influence is recognised with a permanent exhibition in the Cradle Mountain Lake St Clair tourist centre in Tasmania.

6 July 1, 1983, the High Court of Australia had ruled against the Tasmanian government's plan to dam the Franklin and Gordon Rivers in the state's south-west.
Chapter Two

Dialogue and Action in Filmmaking
Spontaneous, unrehearsed, but by no means merely accidental: A great documentary is like a block of marble, quarried from real life, shaped and sculpted by editing into a work of art, the consequence less of imagination than of shrewd choice, intelligent analysis, patient self effacing observation, great technical skill, and above all, an abiding knowledge of and respect for human beings (Robert Connolly 1997).

In this chapter I delve into research processes that combined to create the structure and content of the two main films. The overarching aim of research activities was to explore how film and filmmaking can be used to extend understanding of links between cultural factors and environmental sustainability. Alongside reviewing multi-disciplinary literature and analysing environmental films, the research method included distributing quantitative questionnaires, facilitating filmmaking workshops, recording local and international events and making short films. The editing process for both films is also considered after this review. Herein, the multiple layers of research as filmmaking practice are explored.

Above, Australian filmmaker, Bob Connolly (1997) suggests that documentary makers require ‘an abiding knowledge and respect for human beings’. To his observations I would also add ‘… and the environment on which they depend’. My filmmaking emphasises the importance of the inter-relationship of people with their environment. Connolly also suggests that filmmaking requires an interactive mix of ‘shrewd choice, intelligent analysis, patient self effacing observation and great technical skill’ (Connolly 1997). My efforts to apply such an interactive mix to synthesise and inter-relate events in places separated by time and space have resulted in the films submitted with this exegesis.

The two main films in DVD1 developed through a mix of researched ideas and engagement with environmental filmmaking processes. Here I describe and analyse processes involving many people who shared their time and perspectives as interviewees, questionnaire respondents and participants in workshops. I also consider events I recorded where people gathered to share commitment to issues related to environmental sustainability. The six short films in DVD2 (Appendix 2)
were produced during the process of exploring ‘ethno-eco-dialogue’. Some segments were used in the main two films.

Importantly, both main films must be considered equally in the effort to represent facets of environmental issues using the audio-visual medium. The first main film is highly relevant in reflecting on the history and culture of people’s relationship to place. This case study of people who share my Latvian background follows activities using two languages as a basis for intercultural communication. The second main film is underpinned by the importance of the individual and mutable relationship to natural places that people have. It aims to promote thinking about responsibility to natural environments. Both films were created to reference the interplay of local and global influences on thinking about the environment. The process in making both films is explained in this chapter. This is followed by extended discussion related to themes and other aspects of research in chapters four and five.

**Film 1: Representing relationship to place**

Diversity of relationship to ‘place’ as a natural environment is the theme of the first film, *Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are)*. This film is the result of research into biophilia and cultural communication. It integrates natural environments in Latvia and Australia with Latvian music; digetic and exegetic sound; historic photographs; interviews with Latvians representing different ages and experiences; filmic interpretation of questionnaire responses; and a personal narrative. These elements were combined to create a filmic impression of what it means for 42 individuals with Latvian backgrounds to be connected to a natural environment. Herein some background will be provided to the decisions that led to representing biophilia in a Latvian context. This is followed by an explanation of how the film was conceived and developed as an intersection of different perspectives. The theoretical discussion and implications of the research for this film is extended in chapter four.

I chose to create this film as a bilingual cultural artefact after considering other options. I had planned in my initial proposal to interview people from many cultures in Darwin to focus on love of place and compare this with the Latvian perspectives. However as I raised questions with others about identity in place through the
questionnaire I conducted with students at CDU (Appendix 1), the responses were highly diverse and did not provide a focus on any one cultural perspective. They indicated that affinity with place was highly variable. I considered that interviewing a broad range of university students would give a superficial overview of relationships to place so I focused entirely on the Latvian context, interviewing people from a Latvian background. Also, in reading through the diverse responses by students, my own affinity to the tropical savannahs in which I live (in fact my response to the Australian landscape generally) came under question. This was coupled with experiences I had in conducting research activities in Europe for a conference and workshops related to the second film. There I considered how my own culture, language and history impacted on the affiliation I felt with natural environments in Australia. Seeking to explore this further, my Latvian linguistic and cultural heritage underpinned the case study for this film.

Decisions in creating the first film were further informed in the making of a short film set in Darwin. Short Film 1: Lameroo Revisited (2006) in DVD2 (Appendix 2) explores how experiences in a natural place as a young person impact on attitudes in later life. As I had previously collated footage, this film provided an opportunity to reflect on identity and place in a short project. The making of this film raised memories of social experiences, reminding me of the connectedness to nature I developed by living close to a rocky and salty environment for many months. In the short film I sought to evoke a sense of the place by including interviews I had conducted at the beach with people who had lived at Lameroo in the 1970s. By integrating interviews with cinematography of colourful rocks and natural vegetation, as well as ABC archive footage, I completed this short film. It was screened at the Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival in 2006 and responses from viewers informed my approach to combining people and place in the main film.

As in Lameroo Revisited the representation of natural environments was central to the first main film. The visual depiction of natural scenes in Latvia and Australia was used to create a sensual impression of places discussed in the film. I interpreted Horton’s (2003 p72) suggestion that the landscape is a ‘character’ in the film, and collected images and film sequences of natural scenes in Latvia and Australia to
include. Natural places, as a stationary location in a photograph or as a movement through space by car were linked to the interview themes. These were often juxtaposed over the voices of interviewees in the editing process seeking to depict the natural environment as an overarching visual character in this film.

Lara Doolette, an artist and my daughter, in figure 11, shared the journey to Latvia acting as principal cinematographer for this aspect of the film. As she does not speak Latvian, I had to translate on her behalf during interactions with Latvian people in workshops and interviews. The interactions we had at the time highlighted intergenerational issues of culture and linguistic understandings that became a major element in this film. In the process, language was an issue to be considered not only in the theoretical context of exploring biophilia but also on a practical level through the translation of interviews and in the questionnaire.

The questionnaire that 175 students at CDU had completed was translated into Latvian and responses were collated. In the questionnaire I asked for written descriptions of a series of video images of natural environments as depicted in Short Film 2: *Words for Place* (2005) in DVD2 (Appendix 2). As responses to the Latvian forest scene were analysed, I noted that over half the respondents used the term ‘dabīgs, dabīga’ (natural). Also, over a third of people used words such as ‘pazīstams’ (familiar), zaļa (green), ‘mājīga, mīlīgs’ (homely, loving) to describe what they saw. Similar terms appeared in a number of interviews, from Latvian migrants to Australia and first generation Latvian-Australians alike. This suggests that for many people the tropes of the Latvian landscape remains strong in connectedness to place. The results of this questionnaire are audio-visually interpreted in Short Film 3: *Mājīga Daba* (2007) in DVD2 (Appendix 2) and segments from this appear in Film 1. By contrast, words used by Latvians from Australia to describe the Australian landscape did not include these terms, thereby suggesting that this landscape is not seen as ‘homely’.
Figure 11
Birut Zemits Lara Doolette in Latvian Peat Forest 2006

Figure 12
Birut Zemits Mājīga Daba 2006 Still from Short Film 2
Seeking further interconnections with the interviewees’ words, video, sound and images of the environments I linked discussion of love of place through spatial and generational categories. While the film represents one cultural group, the theme is relevant to people who have moved away from their ancestral lands to take up residence elsewhere. This film was made with the aim to communicate across cultural and generational perspectives so it was important to include male and female opinions from different age groups to reflect the diversity of connections to natural landscapes. To avoid representing Latvian people as foreign ‘others’, I included my personal response as a Latvian Australian alongside interviews that showed a shift of how people relate to a natural environment over time and exposure to place. While the film’s focus remains on the Latvian context, using multiple voices helped to illustrate, as Mark Auge (1995 p34) suggests, that ‘old categories of space have been undermined’ and there are now so many ‘signifying universes’ in relation to how people perceive the place in which they live.

To explore affinity with place within one cultural group I conducted interviews in Latvian and English with people from a Latvian background. The first interviews were with fifteen people in the Latgale region in Latvia in June 2005. Elements from four of these interviews were used in the main film to provide examples of people whose ancestry was still located in the place they lived under the sub-title ‘Latvians in Latvia’. During the course of the following year I filmed 27 interviews with people of Latvian heritage. These people included my family members, people attending the 3X3 Latvian Intergenerational Cultural Festival held at Glengarry in January 2006 and Latvian people in Darwin. Segments from these interviews that highlighted relationship to place were essential to this film.

Throughout the first film, I referred to how art, dance and song sit alongside language to influence love of place in a cultural context. A number of the interviewees are artists for whom landscapes are part of their representational work. Also, while the scope of this project does not include a folkloric study of music (Strmiska 2005), the songs and music are essential factors in the continuity of Latvian cultural attitudes to place. The songs selected for this film are
traditional Latvian songs performed in current contexts. These songs are not peripheral to the interviews and are highlighted as an essential aspect of language linked to affinity to a place. The still image taken from the film below mirrors the contradictions I felt at the intercultural festival, singing traditional Latvian songs that celebrated the white nights of winter in Latvia around a fire in the heat of the Australian summer. This raises questions about the capacity of cultural values to reflect biophilia in another location.

**Figure 13**

Birut Zemits *Aussie fire Latvian birch* 2008 Still image from film

The non-English speaking participants in Latvia to whom I sent a copy of the films said that they could read the text in the italicised font so this provided an effective way to communicate bi-lingually. Screening the draft of the film to those who were interviewed and appeared in the film, extended the dialectic process of interpretation. In discussing the film, participants contributed new views about love of a particular or general natural environment. Within my
family, extended discussions took place following the screening of the film about whether or not it was important to feel connected to the Australian environment. My aunt and her family talked about the Latvian language and noted a disjunction linked to words about Australia. The inclusion of participants in the construction of the film’s contents was important to highlight and heighten concern for the environment.

Even working with languages I understood well (English and Latvian), questions arose about how to represent cross-cultural attitudes to places. Which language should dominate or should I make two different language versions? Should I dub over Latvian voices with English or leave the voices as they were, relying on the capacity of the audience to read the text? I decided to use the translated text from both languages but in different fonts and positions on the screen. The use of written language in the film considers the work of Trinh Minh Ha in *Surname Viet Given Name Nam* (1985). After making this film she noted the difficulty of translating ideas expressed verbally in Vietnamese to legible translated text in a film for an English audience (Minh-Ha 1992 p141).

Alongside this visual element, my Latvian language, sufficient for extensive verbal communication and translation from Latvian to English, is not highly literate. Vaira Zemits, my mother and a central character in the film, assisted in translating the English interviews and narration into the Latvian language for sub-titling purposes. This activity of translation extended understandings about the nuances within the language and how this influences the way people refer to the places they describe.

**Film 2: Integrating workshops and events**

The second film, *Vision for Place* has Darwin city as a location and set out to explore the nexus between affinity with place and environmental action. The research for this film is based on the premise that taking actions for a sustainable environment is a necessary thing for people from any cultural background to do. To research the role
Films have in creating visions and actions for environmental issues I involved groups of people in environmental filmmaking workshops, and recorded events organised to focus on environmental issues. These interactions are a central part of the participatory processes that led to the second film and are explored below.

As suggested in the previous chapter, a film produced from a situation where environmental issues drive the production, can move beyond the context in which it was initially created. The aim of researching the second film was not to support a particular environmental activity, as had Peter Vaughan supported old growth forests against logging in producing The Last Valley (2005). Focus on harbour issues was given but the main aim was to explore how filmmaking can be used alongside environmental activism to extend dialogue and promote positive, culturally considered, action. Depicting ordinary people working together for sustainability in a location is a recognised strategy to normalise such behaviour. A Million Acres a Year (Rijavec and Harrison 2002) presented people having a positive response to overcoming the legacy of environmental mismanagement in southern Western Australia.

Within this second film I sought to explore ways to ‘normalise’ environmental actions with reference to the impact of external influences. Film clips created during participant filmmaking workshops were combined with recordings of environmental events, interviews, acted segments and narration to emphasise the common concerns that local people share with people and issues elsewhere. Underpinning theory and elements from the questionnaire that informed the film are further discussed in chapter five.

**Workshops**

The workshop activity I facilitated as part of developing the second film sought to explore how people could engage with filmmaking to define and promote environmental sustainability. Given that advertising, as community service announcements, is a familiar way to promote issues, promotional clips were the film form used as a focus for the workshops. Although Anne Marie Barry (1997 p261) criticises advertising as being ‘amorally adept at substituting consumerism and product choice for meaningful social action’, the process I used suggests that the
appropriation of the tools of advertising can help to define meaningful social action. This process was based on the idea that strategies to develop sustainability need to encourage people to stand outside accepted forms of consumer behaviour and involve them in constructing other options.

The scripting and production of a film reflected a strategy for defining sustainable actions. This process needed concise and collaborative thinking that crossed cultural boundaries that the participants could see an end product of the filmmaking exercise. This led to further discussion and development of networks. The workshops supported Nick Lunch’s (2006 p15) observation that participants recognise the process of discussion and ‘planning is valuable in itself as views are stated, analysed and developed into storyboards’. Understanding how to communicate a message clearly in audio-visual language extends the strategies people can use to communicate about issues empowering them in defining their cause. The following description of workshops exemplify the diverse role participation may take in environmental filmmaking.

Each workshop consisted of three to five people scripting and filming a clip that would last thirty seconds to promote sustainable actions for the environment. Participants had a short training session in planning a storyboard and using the camera and workshops lasted approximately two hours. I edited the clips after each workshop from the storyboards groups had developed. As individuals within groups worked together to decide on sounds, words and images to combine in a construction, dialogue extended into an action. Following the workshop, the clips were distributed to the participants for comment and approval to use in the research process as defined in the consent form (Appendix 3). This was done primarily by direct contact, e-mail communication and placing the clips on a temporary blog site.

International conferences bring together people who share common interests. In the three conferences where these workshops were held, the common interest was in discussing actions for sustainability. I held twelve workshops between 2004 and 2009 at three international conferences; an environmental education program with Latvian teachers in Latvia; students at CDU; and Darwin residents. These
workshops were held in Adelaide (Australia), Vechta (Germany), Rezekne, Balvi and Daugavpils (Latvia), Chennai (India) and Darwin.

The 2004 biennial national Australian Association for Environmental Education (AAEE) Conference in Adelaide brought together people from Australia, Guatemala and Canada who shared an interest in environmental education. Twelve delegates, including Jenny Franklin and Nancy McGirr, who use photography for social action with children living from the dumps in Guatemala (1996), collaborated in the creative process. Through role-plays in the streets of Adelaide and recordings inside the conference venue, three groups defined strategies for energy use, land management and imaging the environment as precious. The participants’ reflected about the usefulness of scripting and filming to construct a vision.

During the conference, the Guatemalan delegates noted that, while access to computers with the capacity to edit was increasing, this was outside the capacity of their program at that time. This concern about limited access to the tools of construction was also voiced at workshop events in Latvia and this reflects disparity of access to film production, so criticised in Marxist interpretations of media power (Stewart and Kowaltzke 1990 p55). Since that time, most new computers include film editing capacity and recording tools such as cameras and mobile phones are more wide-spread so access to tools of film production are becoming more available to people who did not have access to such items in the past. At that time, I edited the clips produced and used these as examples for later workshops. I used the clip 17 Trees per Car per Year in the second film as this illustrated how a group could creatively respond to this task.

Another conference workshop was held at Vechta University in Germany in 2005. Delegates from Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, Finland, USA, Canada, Australia, Germany and Hungary exemplified how participatory filmmaking can work in a cross-linguistic context. The language of communication moved from English to German, Latvian and Lithuanian and sometimes Russian, but the audiovisual team worked together as a cohesive production unit. As the language of the conference was English, this was the language of the clips as well. One group prioritised the issue of noise pollution in the home environment as an issue while another group
chose to encourage effective recycling of waste using the model available in the university’s cafeteria. The participants were tertiary educators who afterwards reflected positively about the potential of filmmaking methods to explore environmental issues in their teaching practice.

Similarly, during a workshop I held at The Third International Conference on Environment, Cultural, Economic and Social Sustainability at Chennai in January 2007, participants from India, Australia, USA, Malaysia and the United Kingdom identified common problems related to water wastage and air pollution in their countries. After the workshop, participants discussed the value of the filmmaking process, especially in terms of working together as a group to define and clarify solutions across national perspectives. They felt that the process was valuable as it brought various viewpoints together and gave each member of the group a role to take in promoting a solution. Two Indian students who participated commented that they could use their mobile phones to practice the skills learned and this supports the notion that access to production and distribution in media is being extended (May and Hearn 2005). What’s more, Candia Bruce, a relationship consultant from Australia, noted that the group work encouraged problem solving with a visible outcome, the film; that became a record of the event in a place. I used a clip that one group created on the streets near Madras University in my second film to emphasise that air pollution is a global concern.

These conference workshops provided valuable forums for intercultural engagement using filmmaking with a variety of people dedicated to working for more sustainable environments. I also facilitated video production workshops with teachers and students in Latvia and Australia. In June 2005, as part of a Teacher and Environment training program linked to Daugavpils University, I ran workshops with teachers in Eastern Latvia. The schools in which the teachers work are in areas of high unemployment and are culturally diverse.
While Latvian is the national language, this is a border area where Russian, Polish, Lithuanian, Ukrainian and Latvian are the main languages spoken in the home. The teachers developed short scripts and produced clips relating to issues in the local area. Some controversial pollution issues were identified, such as a factory that was polluting the Rezekne River, but participants considered it was more important to promote pride and vision about their location so people would care more about protecting their environment. Teachers also expressed the desire to create clips to focus their students on local environmental issues in a positive way, rather than relying on information from the capital city Riga or nearby Russia.

On returning to Darwin, I edited the clips into Short Film 4: *Vide un Video* (2005) in DVD2 (Appendix 2). By copying this film for classroom use onto VHS video and sending copies for local distribution to the teachers who participated, this workshop process provided a forum for the teachers to share their vision for the environment in the region. Comments by teachers indicated this activity had built confidence in their capacity to produce audio-visual materials about local issues and ideas about sharing technical resources were presented within the groups.
In Darwin, within my role as a lecturer at CDU, I used a similar process with a number of student groups to reflect on local issues. For example, in 2006, I worked with a migrant class consisting of students from Sudan, Indonesia, Vietnam, Greece, Cambodia, India and Liberia studying advanced English and making an environmental advertisement was used to extend communication skills. During the planning and discussion, concern was expressed about environmental problems in countries students had left behind and the groups negotiated a common concern. Students commented that problems in Australia seemed insignificant compared to their home countries and chose to represent waste management and water conservation as an international issue.

Also, students who were training as teachers at CDU found creative ways to engage a younger audience with environmental issues and this clip is included in film 2. Figure 15 depicts a scene that is included in the second film. The clip the student teachers developed was comical as it depicted a tin can being thrown by Serina Annis-Brown that knocks Sevasti Alakotis to the ground. Rachel rushes to the scene and, rather than helping the unconscious woman, picks up the tin can and rushes to tell Serina she shouldn’t litter. Figure 15 shows Rachel Martin suggesting people pick up their rubbish. This group also represents the multicultural backgrounds of the students at CDU and of the broader Darwin population.

All the examples above were creative exercises exploring the capacity of the filmmaking process to represent and consider issues across cultures. By participating in the script-writing and filming of clips, people from diverse backgrounds explored concepts linked to sustainable environments, taking on the role of the image-maker, sharing views of reality through a film construction. These activities support the use of film as a process within dialectic hermeneutics in that a phenomenon of concern is interpreted to create a film text that can be used to extend further dialogue about an issue. The process also supports the capacity of people to work together as actors in a creative process. However, while the clips produced were creative and interesting, these workshops did not have a focussed intent beyond the exercise of extending discussion by the participants.
The final three workshops were conducted in Darwin in July 2009 with groups that had an intended use for the clips after they were made. The clips produced had a purpose in action, which was to gain support for the activities of the groups represented. This notion is highlighted in the main film by referencing the multiple ways that video clips can be shared with technology such as mobile phones and laptop computers and presents strong support for the role environmental films have in communicating about issues.

The initial workshop with intent was with a group of Indigenous students studying natural resource management. This group wanted to create a film clip that they could use to gain support from the Northern Territory government so they could better manage a cultural heritage site. The Larrakia Minbeni ranger group scripted and filmed a clip that explained issues that threatened the site in the Darwin region and stressed the importance of their responsibility to look after it. They planned to use this clip as part of a presentation to the Department of Natural Resource Management seeking recognition and support for their work at this site.

The second workshop was at CDU where the Talloires Network student group wanted to promote their activities to other students and the broader Darwin community. The Talloires Network is an international network of tertiary student groups that aim to make universities more engaged with sustainability issues in the

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**Figure 15**

Birut Zemits

*Pick up your Rubbish*

2008 Still from Film
communities in which institutions exist. During two afternoon meetings, two clips were scripted and filmed. These were placed on the CDU website for the group by Anjea Travers who was also involved in creating the clips. 7

The final workshop in this extensive research process was held as a closing activity of a two-day meeting to plan how Darwin could become a Transition Town (TT). Strategies to create Transition Towns as places that aim to be resilient to economic and environmental change are well documented and supported internationally (Hopkins 2007). Films are used as a way to engage people with issues that support the development of Transition Towns. The filmmaking workshop was organised in consultation with the group organisers and was considered a way of synthesising the extensive sharing of information and bring people together in a practical activity. Two film clips were created that would be added to the Transition Town network of resources. One group deferred their filming till they had considered the content more thoroughly and I linked one clip created with that of the Talloires Network to highlight positive steps to create a community garden in the second film.

The situations described above reflect how films can be planned and made by people who are not primarily filmmakers but may wish to communicate locally and globally about environmental issues. During and after each workshop there were discussions that extended communication across cultural and social viewpoints. They are the result of a broader series of activities that are inter-linked as people seek solutions to problems. As a facilitator, I shared a process that sits alongside public events calling for sustainable environments.

Recorded events

Within Darwin, as in other places in Australia, public events are organised where concern is expressed about environmental issues. The level of participation in many of these events indicates that diverse individuals are prepared to act to conserve the environment for many reasons. Described below are elements from recordings of four environmental activities in which I participated and recorded events,
presentations and group activities that inform the research for the second film. These provide examples about how actions for the environment can develop and highlight the people involved. These are not described chronologically as they occurred but sequentially as they are depicted in the second film. In the main film, events described are linked to the places of concern during a bus journey from central Darwin near the harbour to Charles Darwin University.

The first event depicted in the film is related to a series of activities that aim to protect Darwin harbour from development that may be harmful to the natural environment. A series of events started with my participation in an outdoor activist workshop held Strider’s property at the Solar Village in Humpty Doo near Darwin in September 2008. This attracted dedicated environmental and social activists from Darwin, interstate and overseas who met to share skills to prepare for an oil free future and plan strategies for organising environmental actions. Many of the strategies discussed included how to gain media coverage of a cause. An action in front of Parliament House was organised for the following week to gain public attention for the cause to ‘Save Darwin Harbour’ from polluting industry. I recorded this action alongside a public meeting where two hundred community members participated in extended discussion about the issue.

The bus journey then takes the focus to the next event organised as an educational experience. At Bullocky Point, beside Mindil Beach, Indigenous interests are highlighted with the Minbeni Rangers providing an educational experience for a group of medical students. The introduction to walk and talk by Lorraine Williams shows the passion with which this group of women maintain their culture, working to protect their natural resources in the vicinity of Darwin.

The third stop in the bus journey depicts a celebration at East Point near central Darwin, when a development plan for a popular beach coastal area was overturned. The change of policy by the government was largely attributed to public pressure. The importance of mangroves to the people of Darwin is highlighted in this segment through an interview that is further discussed in chapter five.
The bus-ride then takes the viewer to an event at the water gardens in Rapid Creek on October 24 2009. The urgency to respond to climate change is clearly explained by Karen Cieri of Top End Transition and Michael Cauce from Darwin Climate Action group. This sequence is included to highlight the need for a local response to a global issue.

The next events deal with the need to build resilience in the community in response to food production. Fifteen Darwin residents came together to learn the skills of Permaculture design from an expert in the field, Rosemary Morrow (2006). The concept of and need for Permaculture design was promoted before, during and after this event by the Foodcare group screening films in Nightcliff at the Groove restaurant. These showed successful Permaculture strategies and the problems faced by diminishing oil availability. The course participants developed plans for a community garden at CDU, which, as a tertiary institution, holds a key position in education and research for sustainability. The presentations by students in the course were filmed and edited into a half hour document to summarise their plans for the community garden and as a record for future reference. This event linked me into a connection with the Transition Towns workshop where a short clip was made.

The final event represented was held at Charles Darwin University in July 2008. Through my work in environmental education I co-convened the national biennial conference for the Australian Association for Environmental Education with Kate Smith. This conference attracted over 250 participants and art, intercultural communication and virtual conferencing featured in the program alongside opportunities to share national and international strategies about educating for sustainable environments. Participants included youth, Indigenous people, an Indian delegation, local artists (Figure 17) and delegates who joined in from Vienna, Canada and New Zealand. Zephyr le Green filmed and photographed elements of the event and this representation was shared with executive members of AAEE to define future strategies and activities in the association.

For this conference Bill Wade and I initiated a concurrent group art exhibition titled ‘Topophilia’. This is a term used by Yi-Fu Tuan (1974) to define perceptions of natural places. Delegates could view art-works in the CDU gallery as well as
participate in a ‘Second Life’ gallery experience of the same artwork (Figure 16). This virtual world of avatars as created animated characters in digital environments was considered as an alternative, carbon footprint light option to participating in face-to-face conferences. This initiative worked alongside two other ‘virtual’ options of presenting and participating in the conference. This was seen as an essential trial of communication possibilities for future events.

Figure 16
Birut Zemits
*Topophilia in Second Life* 2008
Digital image

Figure 17
Zephyr Le Green
*Weavers’ hands* 2008 Digital photograph

Another activity that encouraged people to be creative during the conference was an outdoor fibre craft workshop with Indigenous weaver, Anne Dhathu and fibre artist, Aly de Groot. The video recording of this activity is used in the second film alongside an interview with Aly speaking over images of conference activities to illustrate how art can assist in extending dialogue about environment through cultural
interaction. This segment is used to suggest that art and its processes can raise awareness of place and can also be used as part of a change process alongside film. Aly also provides a link in the events by being a central character in the bus-ride with her son, Zion.

A delegation of 50 Indian students, on a study tour in Australia, attended one day of the conference and many indicated a keen interest in the art activity spending time weaving and talking in this space. This provided a link with my experience in India where I was the outsider filming an art festival that maintained the traditional Kolum art form in an urban setting as depicted in Short Film 5 Kolum Ephemera (2007) in DVD2 (Appendix 2). This clip references similar dilemmas across cultures when older art forms that reflect a close link to the environment are subsumed by modern life.

All these events indicate how interconnections are made between the dialogue of sustainability and actions promoting sustainability and how it crosses social and cultural interests. They are events that extend networks of people and have an extended representation in my film. One commonality between these events is my participation as an organiser, participant and/or filmmaker. Other individuals also participated in more than one event, and through editing I sought to emphasise the interconnections in actions.

On Editing
In the editing process, the filmmaker’s vision selects which recorded events to include in a film and which to leave out. Likewise, there is an ongoing choice about how to creatively interpret events by linking vision and sounds. The filmic representations in both main films are a result of centring on the themes of biophilia and action for sustainability. Here I discuss how elements of research were combined in the film editing and how this involved determining ways to apply technical processes to inform the content of the films.
The image in Figure 18 is used to highlight how I kept a focus on the themes of my work with a diagram of the two elements of researching Ethno-Eco-Dialogue above my desk. Alongside this I had an old calendar depicting the change of seasons in each month in Latvia. This I turned quite regularly to keep a focus on the differences in the environment between where I lived and where my ancestral roots were. On the right hand side of the calendar I kept a poster of paintings depicting the concept of ‘The Meeting Place’ from the different Indigenous countries of the Northern Territory to centre on this important concept in communicating about people in places. On the desk are DV tapes that I recorded on a Sony FX1 HD camera for this research alongside the computer on which I type this exegesis and complete much of the editing for the films.

**Figure 18**

Birut Zemits *The filmmaker’s workspace* 2009 Digital Photograph

I started the ongoing editing process using the Adobe Premiere in a Windows computer environment with which I was familiar in 2005. However, using Final Cut Pro as an Apple Macintosh editing program provided a better option to creating high quality films as the School of Creative Arts and Humanities at CDU supports this
system option. Learning to use this system provided many new opportunities in creative editing. However, as there was not a dedicated editing suite until late 2008 I had to work around student use of laboratories. Providing myself with a lap-top computer gave me the capacity to edit the films and freedom to work at my home, when I was involved in running workshops, travelling or in my studio space.

One of the principle challenges in constructing the film was how to include the questionnaire information in a way that would communicate about the central issues defined therein (see Appendix 1). When considering how people describe visual footage of vegetation representative of bioregions in Latvia and Australia I had planned to use all the responses in differing sizes but the text was too dense for a filmic representation. I tried to include all the information with font moving across the screen but the words became difficult to represent when they appeared only once or twice in the responses as in Figure 19 from editing in the Adobe Premiere program.

The main point of using the questionnaire was to highlight that people identify with different landscapes in particular ways according to their cultural heritage. Hence I chose to focus on the difference of close identification using the Latvian responses rather than trying to illustrate the broad range from the university student responses in the first film. I depicted primary responses using a softened graphic font in Livetype to text over the images. I chose this style of text to give an ethereal quality to the words (as in Figure 12). These short clips link to what is said in interviews in this film when an interviewee speaks of closeness to the Latvian landscape. Conversely, when distance and alienation to Australian landscape is mentioned, the opinions depicted also reflect the Latvian questionnaire responses.

Moreover, this film relied on interviews in two languages alongside representation of natural environments to build a dialogue about culture and relationship to place. With a focus on the phenomenon of biophilia, I cut interviews down to what Gaston Bachelard (1958 p4) refers to as the ‘germ of the essential’ in many of the opinions people stated in both Latvian and English. I avoided repetition unless it was for emphasis, aiming to represent multiple views across generations. Through sub-titling of the interviews my skills in this area developed and provided insights into issues of
translation of ideas about abstract phenomena. Black and white inter-titles such as ‘Those who Came to Australia under Ten Years Old’, ‘Born in Australia’ and ‘Grandchildren of Latvian Migrants’ linked segments of the film.

Also in the first film I sought to use a reflexive and empathetic style hoping to avoid increasing a sense of alienation from the phenomena linked to biophilia I sought to portray by relying on objective and rational argument in my films. Hence I interpreted interviews/dialogues for this effect by including minimal narration highlighting my personal response to the phenomenon.

Figure 19
Birut Zemits Mangastill 2006 Digital image

During the editing process for this first film I was forced to recognise that there are elements in my filmmaking ‘that are not dependent on my decisions and that affect my surroundings in a way that I do not choose’ (Merleau-Ponty 1962 p440). One of the unforeseen circumstances that influenced the final version of this film was that the external hard drive where the original film files were stored crashed and the files could not be recovered. This limited the options for final post-production that had
been planned for the sound and images after a critique session with Penelope McDonald from the Northern Territory Film Office in April 2009. Even so, unforeseen positive opportunities to respond to situations were the main experience throughout the research.

Editing the second film required a different approach to the first film as I sought links between filmed events and workshops reflecting people’s opinions with Darwin as a central location. I had editing workshop clips as an ongoing process from 2004 and these were in various formats that I had to include in the High Definition program I used to edit the final work. The complexity of formats and quality of footage was resolved by including these within the narrative of the film. I adjusted sizes and orientations to fit in with the mobile technologies used by characters in the film to view these clips in a way that sought to depict individuals that influenced by local and global events through media formats.

I also wanted this film to be upbeat and ‘modern’ to communicate the currency of the ideas depicted. I sought to do this by including special effects such as ‘solarizing’, to create a poster-like quality to people in environmental events (as in Figure 15). Similarly, I included a number of sound effects to highlight tensions the stakeholders felt about the issues depicted in the film. The sound effects used in the clips were negotiated with the workshop participants where possible and these were integrated into the continuity of sound features of the film.

While interviews are an intrinsic part of forming the concepts of the film this was not the primary focus of constructing this second film. I also sought to include a sense of urgency for acting towards building a more sustainable community in a way that was inclusive and capable of communicating across cultures. How decisions in content for this film were informed by research is discussed in chapter five.
Conclusion

Reflecting on how the concepts defined by this research were explored in a practical way has provided insights into the process of making these films. Interactions with people helped to explore and define concepts, providing checks to procedures and assumptions I may have made about biophilia and actions for the environment. My efforts to combine elements of quantitative and qualitative research were coloured with my subjective interpretation of information to inform the contents of the two films.

Quantitative information from questionnaires challenged the capacity of my filmmaking to straddle creativity and data analysis. However the qualitative research provided the richest information. Participatory filmmaking workshops provided hopeful perspectives about the capacity of filmmaking to promote environmental sustainability amongst diverse groups of people. In the recording of interviews I gleaned extensive insights into the relationship people have with the natural environment in which they reside. Also, by recording the many events described in this chapter, my understanding of making filmic texts was extended.

I have reflected in my work how documentary makers can use a variety of tools to show how people and the natural environment inter-relate. My voice, as an independent filmmaker, is inevitably part of the narrative, either explicitly to create empathy through personalised communication, by using another’s voice to provide scripted exposition. My voice also is heard through the editing selection of views represented in interviews by others. The processes of making both films indicate extensive interactions with people in places. These interactions informed the contents of the films and the editing process.
Chapter two notes

1 I used the information from the CDU questionnaire to inform the second film and this use is explained in chapter five.
2 Historical and current footage was collated in 2004 for a Northern Territory Heritage project under a grant to depict alternative cultural memories of a place undergoing rapid development. Lameroo Beach was my initial experience of Darwin in the 1970s.
3 Gavin O’Brien, Dzintra Briedis and Lara Doolette contributed photographs of natural places in Latvia to be included in the film.
4 Workshop title was ‘Enviro-Language and Action Across Cultures Using Multi-Media Production’ at Creating Ethical Communities Now; Footprints Pathways and Possibilities AAEE conference Adelaide in October 14-17 2004.
5 Workshop titled ‘Media making for sustainability’ at Holistic Education for Sustainable Development for the Journal of Teacher Education and Training Vechta Germany 16-18 May 2005. The workshop was mentioned in the conference summary as a highlight of events.
6 The workshop title was ‘Filmmaking for Environmental Sustainability’ International Conference for Economic, Environmental, Social and Cultural Sustainability, Chennai Jan2007
7 This can be retrieved from http://www.cdu.edu.au/communityandaccess/communityengagement/talloires/Lakeside.html
8 This course was facilitated by Rosemary Morrow. Organised by members of Foodcare NT, the course moved around locations defining the bioregion of Darwin.
9 Kate Smith is a senior teacher at Casuarina Secondary School. The conference was titled ‘Environmental Education up the Track; Hot Topics for our Community’. It was the AAEE biannual National Conference and was held in Darwin 9-12 July 2008
10 The art exhibition was titled ‘Topophilia’ as in the earlier stages of this research I drew on Tuan’s work but turned to biophilia as a theory that supported environmental action. Sarah Pirrie curated art-work by Darwin Indigenous and non-Indigenous painters, print-makers, photographers and sculptors. With assistance from Jokay who is based in Melbourne and runs an education island called Jokaydia in Second-Life, many art-works were placed in the Second Life exhibition.
11 This poster is the result of a project in 1995 when the Northern Territory government new parliament House was built. These images are still seen on the walls of the building in 2009.
12 Livetype is a titling graphics program linked to Final Cut Pro that I used to create these interpretations.
Chapter Three

Biophilia as Affinity with Place
Space is imagined into being - that is, that the biological, geological, material world around us is discursively imagined, understood and produced, and that even our bodily perception and experience of it does not occur outside of culture and history (Ruth Barcan and Ian Buchanan 1999 p9).

This chapter examines the conceptual framework and development of the first film, *Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam* (There we were, Here we Are). Cultural and linguistic factors that influence relationship to and dialogue about identity in natural environments are especially considered as influences on biophilia. The chapter begins by reviewing literature on biophilia alongside the impact of migration. This is followed with an examination of my cultural context being of Latvian descent as the underpinning theme of the film. There is a focus on how affiliations are individual and adaptive over time. In tracing the development of this film, my analysis draws upon Latvian people’s life stories, interviews and information from questionnaires. The latter part of the chapter extends ideas about affiliation to a particular bioregion, the tropical savannahs of the Northern Territory and how my response to this place impacts on the contents of the film.

Many natural environments are subsumed in urban landscapes, populated by people, like myself, with ontology linked to other places, described in other languages. Often, the new person in a place must translate what they see, hear, and feel through historic and cultural filters before they can develop a love for that place. Socio-cultural experiences and mythological symbols link people to real or, as Barcan and Buchanan (1999 p9) suggest, ‘imagined,’ spaces. These symbolic and sensual experiences heavily influence, if not predetermine, perceptions and responses to a physical environment. The challenge to represent this form of interaction with place is addressed in film one.

In this film I wanted to uncover aspects of an emotional phenomenon, drawing on how ‘love of land’ resonates for people. Avoiding the tendency to polarise debates on variability such as Indigenous versus diaspora perspectives, or country versus city, I have aimed to give a more nuanced flexible and mutable reading of biophilia. A personal narrative sits within this research to define experience of biophilia, first as a person with Latvian background in Australia.
and then as an adult in Darwin. Family history has been a catalyst in the making of this film. ²

This may be considered an accented film, as the main language used is Latvian. Hamid Naficy (2001 p78) defines an accented film as ‘communicating about a topic of interest mainly within the group represented’ but alongside its capacity to define world-views outside mainstream media. I do hope my work communicates to Latvian people who may view it. However, through the inclusion of multiple viewpoints that show change in cultural values, and the use of English translation, this film has been made to communicate both within and outside Latvian culture about the way people perceive their natural environments.

**Biophilia**

Edward Wilson (1993) suggests that the notion of biophilia helps to explain how people are innately linked to other living things. This link is not only as representational, symbolic concepts, but also through sensual, emotional responses influenced by ancestry with other life forms. But can this commonality in human genes reinvigorate knowledge of inter-relationship with the natural environment, whatever the dislocation from heritage? When people are displaced from the places where their genetic history developed, they must draw on their cultural knowledge of environments of the past to adapt to the new place. Unfortunately this has also meant that people adapt the new place to replicate the one left behind with little consideration for the biodiversity of that place. In proposing biophilia as an intrinsic genetic inter-relationship between people and environment, Wilson (1993 p38) argues that there is a need for an ‘anthropocentric ethic based on hereditary needs’.

Environmental psychologists also recognise that ‘biophobia’, or fear of natural things such as frogs, can influence how people interact with the natural world (Holmes 1993; Kellert and Wilson 1993). Implications of this love or fear of place are critical to consider when people, distant from their ancestral places, try to tune into the natural environment in which they live. The question I raise in
this case study as; ‘How is biophilia manifested in Latvians in Latvia and Latvian refugees and their descendents in Australia?’ raises broader questions about history, identity and relationship to a natural environment that must recognise the implications of cultural and spatial displacement on biophilia.

My personal experiences of biophilia, discussed in the latter part of this chapter, support the idea that Paul Rodaway (1994 p55) has supported. This is that extended positive exposure to a natural place builds a closer response and a greater sense of belonging. However, I cannot assume other people’s responses are similar to my own as a number of studies of various people’s perception of landscape, habitability and aesthetics have found responses ‘highly variable’ (Heerwagen and Orians 1993; Williams, Cary et al. 1998; Daniel 2001; Natori and Chenoweth 2008; Ode, Fry et al. 2009). This emotional response may equally be affected by negative experiences, such as leech attacks, grass spikes and mosquitoes. Such experiences contradict the exotic imagined place and drive people into air-conditioned, bugless, controlled environments.

In recognising an increasing movement from one place to another, Gaston Bachelard (1958) asked; ‘How do we take root with all the dialectics of life in a corner of the world?’ This question is still highly relevant in the context of the 21st century where the ‘corners’ of the world are linked through communications and people who are much less ‘rooted’ to the traditions and knowledge of landscapes they relied on in the past (Atran 2001; Maffi 2001). It is also a world where local experiences of an environment are influenced by global events (Angier 1991; Short 1991) and communicated through audio-visual media (Pilger 2002; Bagust 2004). At a time when Australian society has moved beyond questioning the value of industrialisation and entered a period when environmental issues are at the forefront of concern, a ‘sense of place’ is a vital source of both individual and cultural identity, a point of departure from which we orient ourselves in the world.
Peter Read (2000) and Bob Hodge (1999) have considered parallels and contradictions between the Anglo-Saxon person’s relationship to place with Indigenous knowledge and perceived biophilia in an Australian natural context. Their work recognises that there is a history of biophilia to other places on the planet by the people who brought English, ploughs and penitentiaries to this country. Read also asks where this relocation of spatial identity sits in relation to Indigenous knowledge of environments and suggests these inform alternative ways of looking at natural environments. I extend this exploration through a focus on how the Latvian people’s perception of environments is different to the English experience, especially considering language as an integral component of this.

Val Plumwood (2002) summarised one part of the difficulty of transfer of biophilia in Australia succinctly, describing how colonisers held on to the vision of the ‘new country as inferior to, or as an extension of, the old’ to be ‘re-made in the image of the old’. She suggests it was not possible to see intrinsic value in or love of the ‘independent presence’ of the new place. Besides, she argues that ‘appropriation’ of Indigenous knowledge to develop a ‘sense of belonging’ without the recognition of ‘sovereignty’ of this cultural perspective would be unethical (Plumwood 2002 p14-18). Such dilemmas are apparent for non-Indigenous people when seeking links to biophilia.

While Simon Schama (1996 p13) laments the loss of the traditional ways of living with close connections to the land, Arjun Appadurai speaks of the post-national, the postcolonial, even the ‘post-electronic’ world and of diasporas, globalisation, de-territorialisation, and trans-nationalism (Handler 2002). These influences meld with traditional cultural narratives and modern ontology in the 21st century as key elements of our world-view. However, there is also the local, the everyday built and natural world people inhabit and relate to on a personal level for survival. Even though the tropes linked to cultures and languages vary, people share the landscape as a human created or naturally formed environment in the rural or urban locale. Allowing for these variations, it is clear that inherited landscape myths and memories share two common characteristics. These are ‘their surprising endurance through the centuries and their power to shape institutions that we still live with’ (Schama 1996
Identity is moulded through the words and feelings represented in poetry, song, art or film but what of the identity of living in an area that is outside the zone of mainstream myths, even in the short term history of Europeans in Australia?

In seeking ways to represent of the love of land, one cannot ignore that we are subject to the archetypal patterns that are embedded in symbols of the land. Language, art and music link to national symbols such as the Australian coat of Arms. Experiencing the transformation of cultural traditions, there can be no simple return to or recovery of the ancestral past which is not re-experienced through the categories of the present (Hall 1988 p30). This applies to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Memories and experiences become intermingled in the present circumstance. Anthropological (Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995), geographical (Seddon 1997), philosophical (Hourdequin and Wong 2005) and social environment studies (Jagtenberg and MacKie 1997) share interest in defining human relationship to surroundings, but phenomena such as hybridity of cultural values, globalisation, and displacement of traditional identity complicate any singular view. This is shown in the diversity of opinions voiced in the first film.

When describing, seeing and responding to a new environment, many psychological and social aspects come into play that cannot be separated from history and culture. Non-Indigenous people in Australia seek to belong in an adopted land while maintaining cultural practices from other places. Many Indigenous people have also experienced displacement from traditional places, to seek affinity with new places. For many, songs and stories, created in other natural environments are perpetuated in language and narratives about a place, maintaining an imagined relationship to another part of the world. The inter-relationship of biophilia and displacement, language and natural environments is further considered in the context of Latvian people and themes of the film.
There we were: places left behind

The research showed that influences of culture embedded in language and history combine with individual experiences so sweeping generalisations cannot be made about how a cultural group responds to a natural environment. When people leave the lands of their heritage, they must readjust to a new place and this varies from person to person. Also, this response is transformed as children of migrants become part of the place in which they were born while maintaining some links with the places their parents or grandparents left behind.

Various experiences, influenced by images and stories, build a new relationship to place over time. In 1952, the plight of Displaced Persons (DPs) was represented in a way that romanticises the links to European regions. The Australian government supported docudrama, Mike and Stefani uses a young couple from the Ukraine to depict the plight of ‘Those who have been torn up by the roots and scattered; the displaced; the new race of eight million people trying to make themselves understood in all the languages of Europe.’ (Williams 1952). Russian, German and Ukrainian languages are used in segments of the film to illustrate the variety in the languages people can use. The film starts with an accented voice speaking English over a scene with a couple running in the European mountains claiming, ‘We were happy like children and all of nature seemed to enjoy life with us’. While this was a strong image of anthropomorphic links to a bioregion at that time, cultures and the people within them have changed considerably.

A number of films have been made in Australia that deal with the migrant experience since that time, notably the retrospective project Film Australia's Immigration by Paul Byrnes and Penelope Mc Donald (2004). Also, the series Tales from a Suitcase: Stories from the Migrant Experience 1946-1952’ (Sepulveda 2004) provided extensive interviewed documentation of individuals reflecting about their personal immigration response to Australian culture, landscape and politics. My work is not exploring displacement but connection of individual biophilia to place.
Analysing the cross-cultural response to the environment wherein non-Indigenous people tried to restructure the landscape to duplicate the imagined homeland helps to explain some of the current dilemmas of identity in place. Ross Gibson’s film *Camera Natura* (1986) emphasised the dissonance with the Australian landscape colonists felt as well as how landscape is represented in the present. Such representations of perception of place help to identify relationship to a place across cultures, by initial colonisers and by migrants.

Other films have traced the ways perception of a place can be influenced by cultural and historical shifts. Don Featherstone and David Woodgate’s *The Beach* (2000) analyses artistic representations of iconic Australian beach scenes over time. Presenting a migrant’s view of displacement, Jonas Mekas reflects about his memories of nature in Lithuania compared to life in New York in the film *Reminiscences of a Journey to Lithuania* (1972). My first film draws seeks to extend on work by others to identity in place has shifted within one set of people in Australia, the Latvians.

As the appearance of Baltic people is not so different from that of the British colonists, post war ‘Displaced Persons’ (DPs) adopted the styles and mannerisms needed to fit in visually. There are some strong similarities in the vegetation, topography and historical landscapes of Latvia, Lithuania and Britain so, when English stories were told in the Australian educational institutions, migrants could identify with the birch, oak, pine tree or forest (Stanton 2007). They also planted gardens that reflected the plants that were familiar in Europe. This tendency to transfer useful and familiar plants from Europe to Australia has been well described by George Seddon (1997) where the transposition of cultural attitudes to land materialise in planting European trees, enjoying European aesthetics of the nature experience.

However, Latvians, as a people with an extensive history of being colonised by Germany and Russia, are not colonisers but a culture that values art and song. Cultural maintenance of language, song and dance are important to Latvians within (Kursite 1996) and outside (Ruperts 2004) Latvia and these cultural
practices are based in the environment in which they were created. On migration to Australia, the Baltic diaspora generally settled in the older capital cities in the south where ‘culture and language’ has been perpetuated from the 1950s. While this culture has been maintained in the living forms of song, theatre and art, influences of the everyday modern world and results of assimilation have changed perceptions. However initial responses remain influential.

The quotes below reflect different responses to the Australian landscape by Latvian DPs after World War Two. While some feel affection for Australian ‘nature in its wild state’, others feel overwhelmed and consider it ‘remote and forbidding’. Many found it difficult to relate to what held no cultural significance in their lives.

We had teachers from all over the world (in my school in Latvia) and one was from Australia. He told us about the time he had spent droving with campfires, talk, philosophies and Aborigines. It was an introduction to the loneliness of the outback, the hardship and the heat …

(In Australia) I went out in to the landscape and saw all these wonderful things: rocks and faces and spirits. And there was such power and vitality in the bushfires! I did some paintings and tried to show them (Reinis Zusters in Thompson 1993 p74).

Is the artist’s response positive because he had arrived with an expectation based on narratives from his school days? It is possible that interest in Indigenous epistemology combined with his focus on visual depiction influenced Zusters’ understanding of the biodiverse landscape of Australia (Figure 20). This supports the need to understand the ancestral connection to a place in some way to appreciate it. Does Helena Walsh’s response below more typify a response to an unknown landscape by people involuntarily displaced from their home?

No books or maps can prepare a traveller for the vastness of the Australian continent. I was used to living amongst crowds of people in cities, so the treeless plains surprised and overwhelmed me. The land had a distant, secretive look, remote and forbidding.

Only an occasional homestead; peaceful, yet isolated, graced the barren countryside. The grass was spiky and dry and gave the impression that the fields could barely provide fodder for the cattle and sheep chewing it. Empty pastures with solitary gums stretched in all directions (Walsh 1996 p180).
One could equally argue that the response where Helena Walsh (1996 p180) compares the scene confronting her to what was familiar in her homeland is predictable for a refugee pushed to a foreign environment from an urban setting. The new land confused perception, questioning what is known and understood. When refugees experienced the journey to DP camps in Australia, they spoke little English and vocabulary in their own languages could not describe what they saw (Walsh 1996). Ideas of summer landscapes linked to the leafy green of European images. The image in Figure 21 was a focus for discussions about first impressions with people I interviewed for the first film. The landscape Helena Walsh viewed on the way from the large cities to rural Australian camps from train windows was ‘modified nature’; farms that had ‘failed’ but this fact was unknown to the newcomers. Walsh’s response becomes familiar in the interviews conducted in the film and the image is part of an initial sequence.

**Figure 20**

*Reinis Zusters painting at Duntroon 1952*

Scanned B&W photograph from book

**Figure 21**

*Ona Veteikis 1950*

*Trees Like Skeletons*

B&W photograph (actual size)
Writers such as Bonyhady and Griffiths (2002) have explored the postcolonial perspective and search for identity in the Anglo-Saxon heritage of Australia through personal reflections. The Baltic population shared some similar environmental history with Anglo-Saxon people, but different culture and language have influenced response to the land. Apart from arriving as refugees; as visitors not knowing when they might return to their homeland, they identified with national histories that had little to do with Australia. As mirrored in the interview with Anita Apele in film one, dissonance with the Australian landscape continues for many Latvians years after first negative impressions.

Sociolinguistic research suggests that people who remain in an area for a long time have a language that will describe their perception and relationship to that place. Human sustenance is reliant on the environment in which we live, so it follows that cultural knowledge is paramount to surviving in that environment (Majnep and Pawley 2004). Luisa Maffi’s (2001; 2004) research about the interdependence of biological and cultural diversity as reflected has identified close links between language and biodiversity loss. When people are distanced from their ancestral lands, or their ancestral lands are taken over by other people or other ways of living through modernisation, people often lose their capacity to describe and inter-relate with what is in the region to which they moved.

Understandably, displaced people frequently reflect emotional longing for their homeland, the environments they were forced to leave behind. Many reflect on how they felt with the natural features in Australia, dissonant from the fertile plains of Latvia. This response by my grandmother, Elvira Zemits (centre in Figure 22), influenced the way I saw the Australian landscape as a child. I reflect on this in a narrative style below. The images on the following pages are small photographs that help to illustrate the text and are included alongside other black and white images to highlight the historical context of film one.
Reflections on Childhood

My grandmother, Elvira, was close to me as I grew up in outer Sydney in Cabramatta. Sometimes I’d meet her after school in the hot and noisy plastic raincoat factory where she worked. My granny’s husband was ‘removed’ from his rural property by the Stalinist regime in 1941 and he ‘disappeared’, as many people did at that time. When it became clear that she could be sent to work in Siberia, she fled Latvia with her three children in a horse and cart. Deciding to leave was painful for all the family, but the frightening stories of life in Siberia left her no choice. With her three children she moved through Germany’s DP camps, working in orphanages, and was accepted as a migrant to Australia.
Perhaps because of the way she arrived in this country or because of the difference of the land and the people in Australia, she never came to terms with having to leave the ancestral land she loved. My grandmother’s sense of loss passed from her to me as I threaded her needles as a young girl. As she talked about the animals and rye crops she had once managed, my eyes would roam to her bedroom walls. I looked at the patterns on the old weavings, lovingly carried from Latvia and photographs of European landscapes. I imagined an exotic place where the seasons were more intense, the soil more fertile, and people sang songs I knew well.

The first songs I learnt to sing were about a place shared with wolves, squirrels and oak trees, not red-back spiders, wallabies or eucalypts. There was no home language to discuss the new ecologies that we lived in and this influenced my response to the surrounding environment. Crossing into Australian culture when I started school, I learned to sing English songs. I learnt about the English countryside and the ‘pioneers’ in outback Australia who fought against this wild country. I learned names of iconic plants such as ‘wattle’ and ‘banksia’, but knew little about the biodiversity of native plants that lay just a little way from the back garden. I had experienced neither the European forests nor lived in the Australian ‘bush’ but I did love the tree in the back garden that bothered my grandmother for the leaves it shed.

For people of English speaking heritage the songs that help define a culture in various places on the planet are often, if not directly of England, then through a cultural lens. New words such as ‘kookaburra’ and ‘wattle’ are adopted from the people who used these words to symbolise a part of the everyday, lived experience in a region where these natural things exist. These adopted words have been used to generate new myths in the English language (Seddon 1997). They are further adopted into other languages, such as Latvian, with transformations to suit grammar and pronunciation distanced from the original language group that used these words for a place. In the film, Dagnija Greste discusses the confusion she felt as a child when seeking a word to describe Australian bushland where she lived.

While Judaeo-Christian attitudes to land continue today in agricultural practices in both Latvia and Lithuania, there remains a strong ‘pagan’ tradition in both countries which supports notions of earth gods and spirits (Gimbutas 1994). Donna Reid and Starhawk’s (2003) film about Lithuanian archaeologist Marija Gimbutas highlighted the importance of songs linked to ritual in Baltic cultural
traditions in its introduction. Songs record the duality in nature, as does the language where the sun (saule) is female and the moon is male (mēnessis). It is a language with diminutives that are often added to natural features to indicate fondness. So saule becomes saulīte, a lovely sun, with connotations of being warm, feminine and friendly. Records of an earth mother (Žemyne in Lithuanian or Zemes māte in Latvian), confirm the sanctity of forests which German missionaries were not allowed to enter\textsuperscript{14} (recorded in 12-15th Century texts) and zoomorphic motifs are recurrent in Latvian and Lithuanian folklore & myth as is the shamanistic practice to talk to animals and plants a common feature (Antanaitis 1997 p157-161). In the current day the relationship to animals, rocks and trees is apparent in the folkloric activities that are maintained in cultural practices such as hugging the ancient oak trees Daina Kalns (Mountain of Songs) at Sigulda. This is a setting for the first part of the film. The image below was captured from filming after a visit to this place. I felt a spiritual affinity with the trees at Sigulda and I wondered if this feeling was shared by my daughters and granddaughter.

Figure 24
Lara Doolette \textit{Three generations and an oak on the Hill of Songs} 2005
Still from Film One
Latvian songs or dainas consistently refer to animals and trees in a personified way indicating close identification, nearness to the anima or spirit of the natural feature (Strmiska 2005 p43). The stories, music, songs and dances the indentured migrants bought with them held distinctive worldviews expressed in the oldest Indo-European languages. Beliefs were grounded in environments, values and experiences in the Baltic area of Europe. Whatever analysis may be applied to similarities and differences between cultural views, Latvian cultural tropes reflect an affectionate attitude to natural features, whether real or imagined, in stories and songs.

Information from the questionnaire and interviews completed and depicted in the first film suggest that initial perceptions of place have changed over time, but that many Latvians, young and older, maintain some form of biophilia towards their ancestral lands. Children of refugees have grown in the new country and participated in the Australian education system where environmental values have been built in the current contexts. There are multiple influences, different experiences, various responses to a landscape which have shifted any stereotypical notions of identity of diasporas in place. Children of refugees have learned new codes to see the natural environment. Ideas about diaspora and migration have shifted, as have ideas about history and memory, landscape and nationalism. This supports the view that people have little attachment to any one place and can transfer biophilia from one place to another over time. It also reflects the possibility that a link with a place can grow through experience of and exposure to differing views of land. The following section considers this shift within the context of my experiences in Darwin.

**Here we are: seeing savannah**

Alongside the diasporas’ experience as a shift in language and culture in place, there is the experience of a landscape whose essence is very distant from European epistemology. Even more than the temperate conditions of southern Australia, non-Indigenous people in North Australia have had to find a resonance with a bioregion that is a contrast to the places where white people evolved. The
wet-dry savannahs/ tropical woodlands of the Northern Territory\(^\text{18}\) is a place where, people, climate, language and environment challenge the perceptions of place linked to south-east Australia or Europe.

Those of us, in many parts of the world, who have a ‘multi-locale ethnography’, who have moved from place to place, (Clifford 1992 p107), need time to adjust to the immediate natural world as a newcomer to a bioregion. Climate, landscape, flora, fauna and relationship to people in places influence perceptions of regions. As anthropologist, Deborah Rose reflects about visiting the Mak Mak Marranumunggu people’s traditional land near Darwin.

I became fascinated by the people who loved this country that, to me, seemed to be decidedly unlovable swamp. I could see the beauty, but it took time to begin to empathise with the Indigenous people’s love for their hot, humid, crocodile-infested swamp (Rose in Rose, D’Amico et al. 2003 pix).

While she could not initially see value in the ‘unlovable swamp’, her empathy for the land near the Finniss River was mediated through relationship to people and place over time (Rose, D’Amico et al. 2003).

As discussed earlier in this chapter, various influences will determine whether a person develops a deep or passing affiliation with place. My experiences of the tropical north of Australia have been influenced by extended contact with Indigenous people who feel strong biophilia for this place. This works alongside political and cultural values that value Indigenous perspectives. Since the 1970s, Indigenous perspectives where the land and vegetation are a personal and communal definition of identity have been given greater recognition in Australia. The notions of ‘wilderness’ as well as the urban and rural paradigms brought from other countries are contradicted by Indigenous knowledge systems that call for deeper responses to the places we occupy (Langton 1996; Rose, D'Amico et al. 2003). This paradigm of relationship to land raises questions for non-Indigenous people throughout Australia.

Marcia Langton identifies the deep understanding of biodiversity and the inter-relationship between plants, humans and animals that Indigenous people have
and questions the capacity of non-Indigenous people to understand this (Langton and Rhea 2005). In addition, Michael Christie (1997) suggests that Indigenous knowledge offers guidance to principles for an ecologically sustainable future if Indigenous people lead the process. In the Northern Territory the importance of cross-cultural communication is emphasised in discussions of Indigenous perspectives.

Even so, vision of a place can shift through exposure. Eco-psychologist, Laura Sewall (1999 p68), in analysing how affinity to place develops through an immersion of the senses upon ‘seeing’ savannas clearly describes the grasses as ‘Peach’, ‘rose’ and ‘burgundy’ to convey a strong image of her experience. The English language metaphors she had to use seem contradictory to the tropical savannah that she described. Apart from the issues of language, it stands to reason that people find another way of ‘seeing’ the natural environment or try to transform it to fit the tropes of traditional views. This transition may be generational and or take only a little time. I reflect on my experience of seeing savannah in the first film and consider this below. Childhood experiences, such as I described earlier, are important but so too are the relationships in place that develop over time. I extend the personal narrative to include my adult life below. The images on page 83 illustrate the contrasting environments that are described.

**As an adult**

Located in Darwin I have often reflected on my identity in this land and my relationship to the savannahs, tropical woodlands and mangrove forests near my home. I started to value the local environment when living close to natural forces for many months on Lameroo beach in the 1970s. Years later, I do recognise and feel part of the ongoing history of this place. My fair skin has browned in response to the constant sunlight and this reminds me I am intrinsically linked to roots elsewhere, in countries so visually and climatically ‘other’ to this wet/dry tropical environment.

I have had little contact with the rural agricultural practices of my forefathers and mothers and have only a superficial knowledge of the European environment, but I have felt very close to Latvian landscape when I visited the land of my ancestors.

Although my knowledge of local plants of the savannah, mangrove and tropical woodland is limited, I know that this land can be kind and loving, feeding and nurturing the people who have lived here for thousands of years. In the clay soils
of the savannah/tropical woodlands edible plants such as billy goat plums (terminalia ferdinandiana) and cheese fruit (morinda citrifolia) grow naturally. Aboriginal friends have shared their knowledge about some of these things I can eat as I walk through the reserve near my home.

The generosity of Indigenous friends and acquaintances in sharing their perception of this land has influenced the way I see this place, but this has not shifted the ‘resonance’ I feel with European images and experience of place. This perception of environments developed at my grandmother’s side, learnt within my mother’s language stays strong.

**Figure 25**
Lara Doolette *Light on green in Europe* 2005 Photograph

![Figure 25](image)

**Figure 26**
Birut Zemits *Speargrass node* 2007 Photograph

![Figure 26](image)
English, as my third language, or Latvian and Lithuanian as my other languages, did not resonate for me with the savannah/tropical woodland near my home. This contrasted with my use of the Latvian language when I spoke with people in Latvia during outdoor film workshops and interviews in Latgale in 2005. As Arnold Berleant (1997 p107) quoted in his musings on appreciation of an environment; ‘There are men whose words are as natural sounds of their places, As the cackle of toucans in the place of toucans’. Speaking Latvian in Latvia sounded ‘right’ in the environment for me.

The dilemma of identifying sense of closeness to place must also address the problems of immersion for those who are not exposed to the natural environment in their daily setting. To suggest that immersion over time is the only way to feel ‘belonging’ in a place also implies that if we are immersed in cities we will become part of that place (Felonneau 2004). For many who live in Australian cities, being close to nature as an environment reflecting biodiversity as it was before colonisation, may be difficult to experience. As a traveller through a rainforest, native bushland, mangrove or savannah, one may be immersed in that space. However, the degraded environments of urban spaces are lived with by millions of people on a daily basis.

In less populated urban settings, such as Darwin, some spaces have been left for plants native to the bioregion, but these are under frequent pressures for ‘development’. A slow shifting towards appreciation of the savannah, primarily driven by Indigenous voices, academic studies, films and tourism, has occurred while mistakes of ‘development’ and other threats are duplicated in the region.

In the Northern Territory, local traditional Indigenous viewpoints are recognised as current, vibrant and alive. From the perspective of the visitor to the region this is a focus for an experience, but what perspectives do longer term residents, both Indigenous and newcomer, bring to this area of Australia? How can people learn from Indigenous knowledge about sustainable ways to relate to the natural areas? Somewhere in this mix of diaspora, settler, traveller and indigene, there are links
when looking for ways to promote a sustainable environment in the north of Australia dominated by savannah/tropical woodland. Indigenous knowledge is gaining respect in ecology research (Majnep and Pawley 2004; Johnson and Muton 2007), ethnobotany (Yunupingu, Yunupingu-Marika et al. 1995) and education (University of South Australia 1993; Crough, Fogg et al. 2007).

However, there is a danger if understanding of bioregions is not extended into the broader population, Indigenous knowledge, just as traditional and appropriate farming knowledge, may be lost in the cultural shift of modernisation. As the transition to ‘modernity’ changes the way people live and people who previously interacted with the local environment move away from the places where their language linked to the land, perceptions and environmental knowledge of places change (Harmon 2001; Brunn 2007). Students completing tertiary study at Charles Darwin University must consider how knowledge about place is contested by other ways of seeing in their coursework but how can this bioregion be made more sustainable if people do not see this as a place with meaning to them on a personal level?

In the questionnaire conducted for this research, the word ‘homely’ or ‘loving’ does not arise in terms used to describe this landscape by non-Indigenous students, many of whom have lived in the Darwin for over five years. Neither did many name the savannah/tropical woodland when presented with images, reverting to ‘bush’ to describe the landscape and vegetation that surrounds this Darwin. While many are drawn to study in Darwin from elsewhere, there is little ‘seeing’ the savannah. Representing this dilemma in a film form may extend understanding of biophilia.

The idea that film can help to reflect about people’s relationship to their surroundings was supported when I screened *Tur Mēs Bijām, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are)* in its final draft stages to people from a range of cultural backgrounds. Japanese, Pilipino, Turkish and German viewers responded with extended discussion about their own links to the environment. This is the kind of response I hope for in the film’s reception. It cannot be predicted how
people may react to the film but I hope that it adds to raising awareness of the importance of relationship to place across cultures.

Life in the developed world are often dominated by movement from place to place, job to job, with little reference to natural, biodiverse landscapes or any sacredness within the places inhabited. Such deep connection is considered to be important (Habermas 1989; Fraser 1992; Gonzalez 2001) but what can be done to also connect people to protect a bioregion? Grant Mischler (2001 p79) suggests that by creating a community in a ‘third space’, values may be adapted or transposed, managed to reverse loss of knowledge. In this ‘working together’ a dialogue develops, a shared biophilia, and caring for land. How films may build this collaboration between people and place is explored in the next chapter.

Conclusion
In this chapter, individual and group responses to natural environments were considered with a case study of Latvian biophilia. This reflects my life experience and was supported by examples of literature about the affinity people can feel to an environment distant from their ancestral roots. Biophilia is presented as mutable and changing, often through transformative experiences, to link to the locale in which people find themselves. The challenge remains to identify ways to represent diversity in biophilia while connecting individuals that need to work towards a sustainable bioregion, working, where possible, with Indigenous perspectives to come to better understanding.

Biophilia may be genetic, but relationship to place is also a cultural construct. How various ecologies are valued, is influenced by people who have direct experiences of them. I have sought to develop a dialogue with the reader about complex aspects of biophilia in a multidimensional cultural and social context in Australia. I explored socio-cultural aspects through reflections on myself among Latvians and I have asked what elements influence that unexplainable feeling that happens to connect us to a place where there is little connection with the folklore, language and imaginary of their ancestors? I have come to no conclusions about this as the variables in identity and experience reflect a globalising relationship to place. Even so, I hope that by exploring these issues I
have explained clearly the underlying questions that motivated the construction of the first film.

Chapter three notes

1 ‘Sensual’ refers to sensory experiences that include vision, hearing, smell and bodily sensations.

2 I chose to focus on the Latvian rather than the Lithuanian side of my family as Latvian is my stronger linguistic and cultural experience.


4 The Australian coat of Arms has a kangaroo and an emu holding a shield.

5 The term non-Indigenous is not used as a negative term but highlights the fact that Australia has an Indigenous history that permeates the relationship to the landscape.

6 Displaced Persons’ (DPs) was the title given people from the Baltic states as ‘refugees’ was not used for political reasons. Australia and the Soviet Union were allies in World War Two.

7 Mike and Stefani was made to help explain why Australian people should accept the non-English speaking newcomers.

8 I refer to the generations of Australians who have held hegemony under an English speaking power-base in this vast and diverse land since 1788.

9 With the Soviet Russian domination for 50 years, intense transmigration policies meant that 50% of residents in Latvia were non-Latvian speakers when Latvia regained independence in 1991.

10 The Latvian diaspora in Sydney, for example, have maintained their community but fewer young people know how to speak Latvian as their parents and grandparents assimilate into an English speaking culture. This is an issue for the older migrants.


12 Latvia and Lithuania allied with Germany against Britain in WW1 and had sided with Germany in resistance to the Soviet Union in WW2. When WW2 finished the Baltic countries of Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia were handed over to the Soviet Union as the ‘Baltic States’.
13 Judaeo-Christian attitudes have been linked to misuse of land as actions linked to the belief that humanity is at the apex of the biological ladder, closest to God, so has the right to do as it wishes.

14 Latvian language and culture were maintained under German domination from 16th to 19th Century. Barons from Germany ‘owned’ the land and Latvians were the workers attached to the land. My great grandfather was ‘given’ his land in recognition of service to a German baron.

15 Within Latvia traditions such as the solstice festival were forbidden under the Soviet regime. The Baltic diasporas have kept some of these activities alive.

16 Being a primarily agrarian economy, Latvia had not experienced the same level of distancing from nature that the industrial revolution caused in Britain in the 18th Century.

17 Epistemology defines the beliefs and knowledge we have about the world.

18 75% of the NT is classified Savannas/Tropical Woodland in the Linnaean system of naming vegetation. It has a rich ecosystem but is not generally identified as a place with as high levels of biodiversity as a rainforest may have.

19 In 2009, Northern Perspectives is a common unit that is compulsory study for all students at CDU. It assesses understanding of Indigenous perspectives.
Chapter Four

Inter-relating the Local and Global
Dispersion, destruction and deconstruction are not the goals to be achieved but what needs to be overcome. It's more important to check what are the new institutions, procedures and concepts able to collect and to reconnect the social (Bruno Latour 2005 p11).

This chapter focuses on the philosophy and development of the second main film, *Sharing Vision*. Located in Darwin, the capital city of the Northern Territory as a case study, the theoretical framework for this chapter is grounded in the issue of environmental sustainability as a cross-cultural phenomenon. It focuses on the importance of networks of people acting for environmental issues. In tracking the development of this film, links are identified between film and the intersection of local and global strategies for environmental actions.

This chapter extends on description of workshops and recorded events as processes in filmmaking in chapter three, to analyse how research into global and local elements influence the content of the second film. Firstly, the inter-relationship of environmental films and actions on a global level is explored, identifying how this applies to film. Secondly, the way questionnaire research conducted locally is integrated into the content of the film is explained, providing insights into what motivates people to act for the environment. This section also explains how interviewees highlight motivational factors in environmental activism.

Underpinning this chapter is the hypothesis that film has an essential role to play in defining the ‘new institutions, procedures and concepts’ that Bruno Latour suggests above are needed to ‘collect and reconnect the social’ (2005 p11). Actor Network Theory (ANT) is applied to analysing environmental actions as a means of defining interconnections between ‘actors’ as objects or ‘things’ in the physical world such as people, trees, cameras and computers, and ‘actants’ as processes, events and influences connecting ‘actors’ (Latour 2005 p25). Actors are defined in the context of the local Darwin situation wherein people communicate about environmental issues. However, solutions to problems need to interconnect people to act in spatial contexts to which they have little affinity. Global environmental activist traditions offer some insights into how these ‘actants’ can be generated.
Another advocate of ANT, John Law (1988 p179), suggests that ‘representation is an end product of technologies for simplifying, discriminating and inter-relating objects’. I have applied this process of representation in exploring the phenomena of actions for sustainability, extending this process in making the film. The inter-relationship between my work in a local context and environmental activism as a global issue is supported through this discussion. Notwithstanding, the historical and cultural contexts need to be considered when attempting to communicate about environmental sustainability audio-visually. Any efforts for communication must be underpinned by a synthesis of concepts that may resonate with diverse cultural groups interacting physically, mentally and emotionally in a bioregion. This relies on highlighting interpersonal relationships located in place.

In this chapter, the socio-cultural context for the case study of Darwin as the location for my second film is extended, confirming that a place cannot be separated from its geography and history. I begin by exploring the interconnections between the people and the social structures of the Darwin region as these inform the content of film two. This is followed by analysis of how cultural and regional affinities reported by respondents to the questionnaire have impacted on elements I have included in this film. Analysis of the questionnaire information (introduced in chapter two) is extended as it pertains to how people with affinity to diverse locations consider conservation of the environment. This is followed by a focus on global environmental movements as they influence the types of actions people in local areas may undertake. The networks and inter-relationships between people and events as a cross-cultural exchange are further explored in the discussion of these influences as they relate to the second film.

**Global communications**

‘Sustainability’ has become a catch cry in reaction to rapidly accelerating deterioration of the environment for developing and developed countries alike. Many international, national and regional vision statements have extended values like that put forward in the preamble to Agenda 21 from the Rio Summit.
Humanity stands at a defining moment in history. We are confronted with a perpetuation of disparities between and within nations, a worsening of poverty, hunger, ill health and illiteracy, and the continuing deterioration of the ecosystems on which we depend for our well-being. However, integration of environment and development concerns and greater attention to them will lead to the fulfilment of basic needs, improved living standards for all, better protected and managed ecosystems and a safer, more prosperous future.

No nation can achieve this on its own; but together we can - in a global partnership for sustainable development (UNEP 1992).

This statement provided a focus for research in the initial stages as it highlights how social and environmental factors are interdependent in creating more sustainable thinking. Although ecosystems have deteriorated further since this was written, there is greater awareness that sustainability is a global issue. Alongside the consumer economy, the traditionally close relationship with the bioregion has been disrupted in many parts of the world as people in urban areas rely on global connections for the food they eat, the clothes they wear and the way they move from one place to another. As urban populations outnumber people living in rural areas, more people are distanced from their ancestral lands. Responding to environmental issues is a global concern that must consider the way people feel about a place as explored in the first film.

As Homi Bhabha (1994) defines, the ‘hybrid’ individual is a common feature of the modern world, having little connection to a particular place and adopting a mix of cultural views to support living in the situation they find themselves. While this has brought some positive effects in breaking down prejudices and insular values, it has also created individuals who are disconnected from the places they inhabit. New strategies are needed to reconnect the social to the environmental for people distanced from ancestral biophilia and this is an important influence in the making of the second film.

Arjun Appadurai discusses these changing connections as cultural and political issues. He suggests that landscapes have become imaginary in people’s minds as they shift from place to place. This is because people maintain their histories in stories and languages of their past lives but also because technologies have provided ways to communicate and move at high speeds ‘across previously impermeable borders’ (Appadurai 1990 p55). This communication extends to media where images
and reports can be instantly sent around the world, creating what Appadurai terms ‘technoscapes’ and ‘mediascapes’. For example, a person from Kenya may study in Darwin but have little interaction with the local environment as she or he accesses news from Africa through cable television or the internet, eats food from around the world bought from a supermarket and has an extensive social life talking to friends and relatives back home through Skype.\(^1\) The natural environment in or near where they live has little relevance.

But the most influential of these changing connections are ‘ideoscapes’. Ideologies and counter-ideologies influence cultural perspectives around the world, as notions of consumerism expand. These notions are promoted by business interests and governments (Appadurai 1990). Audio-visual media is an intrinsic part of representing ways of seeing the world and promoting consumption of items produced to people who may have managed well without those items. While these aspects of ‘living globally’ may appear negative in terms of people focussing on consumption and not developing affinity with their immediate natural environment, other aspects of this ‘imagined’ landscape can be used for positive ends. While ideologies of consumer economies have been communicated globally through new technologies, the new forms of communication can also assist in questioning the values that have been embedded in unsustainable worldviews. How can this be done?

Anthony Weston (1985 p33) considers that the focus on intrinsic values as a key to saving environments has been detrimental and argues that the focus on land ethics has not helped resolve environmental conflicts. This can be illustrated by successful environmental actions that have been driven by the inter-relationship between the environment, individuals and politics outside the argument of intrinsic value. These have involved social elements with some focus on love of place, but primarily these actions are motivated by people who recognise their survival depends on a natural environment. Herein links between these global movements and ideas presented in *Sharing Vision* are explained.

First, ‘Environmental Justice’ grassroots movements focus on the inequities of using areas where poor people live for locating polluting industries or locating housing on polluted land. The strong role of women in driving these actions is linked to concern
about the welfare of their families (Bullard 1993 p.26). This form of activism was popularly represented in the film *Erin Brokovich* (Soderbergh 2000) which re-enacted a poor single mother confronting industry and winning a battle against pollution in her town. Although Robert Gottlieb (1993 p.234) criticises this type of movement for being narrow in its localised action, of being NIMBY (not in my backyard), without ‘a long-term vision’, this is a powerful motivation for environmental actions. This is reflected in comments by Grusha Lehman, a dedicated environmentalist in Darwin, discussing social responsibility as a formative childhood experience in the film.

**Figure 27**

Women in peaceful protest during Chipko action (1979) Digital image

Ecological Resistance Movements have been formed primarily to protect livelihoods. For example, in the Uttarkhand Himalayan region of India, the Chipko movement has grown since the 1970s. Women, who faced the daily reality of gathering wood further afield when unsustainable logging occurred in nearby forests, reinvigorated the spiritual symbolism of trees in the Hindu religion to gain support for their cause. This motivated many similar actions throughout India (Haynes 2002 p.229) and inspired peaceful environmental actions for forest protection in other parts of the world (Brown 2002). Deepa Hanraj’s (1983) film, *Ukandola: An Account of Chipko* has been shown around India, helping to inspire similar commitment to maintaining a sustainable living in the environment. Issues of sustainable living are central to issues of food security that the Permaculture group in Darwin represents in the first film.
The third group is not so much an environmental movement as the recognition of rights of people who have lived and used an area for an extended time. The Land Rights movement seeks ‘ownership’ in the decision-making processes for those areas that have provided livelihood to a particular group. Land rights has been instrumental in gaining support for Indigenous issues in many countries and considered in reference to Indigenous perspectives in the second film in the views voiced by Lorraine Williams.

Environmental sustainability has a history of actions in communities across various cultures that influence current practices. As overarching definitions suggest, everyone on the planet is a stakeholder in defining how to ‘meet the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs’ (Bruntland Commission 1987). Films can undeniably be a supportive aspect of these actions either by reflecting the process of the action or presenting an alternative. While an altruistic or spiritual ethic about human relationship to the environment may be a factor, environmental actions seem rarely driven by such ideals, but by people responding to visible threats that threaten health and livelihoods.

However, today many threats to sustainability are not visible and therefore communicating these issues through film has been a problem. To engage the viewer requires creative thinking about how to develop ways for the mind, heart and hands to work for the environment. In environmental activist films, graphic illustrations and metaphor dominate efforts to communicate the issues clearly. An example of this use of metaphor is in An Inconvenient Truth where Al Gore explains the difficulty of responding to climate change. (Guggenheim 2006). Animation is used to show a frog that jumps out of hot water when it contacts it suddenly, but remains in slowly heating water where it cooks and dies. Complex future-oriented concepts require some simplification and the use of metaphoric illustrations that are visually and emotively engaging helps to engage in cross-cultural dialogue.
In recent years this challenge to extend discussions about more sustainable practices has been taken up using an international networking process, adapted to new technologies through communications on the inter-net. For example, organisations such as Community Based Social Marketing (established in 2006) contribute strategies for more sustainable behaviours from all around the world through a website (McKenzie Mohr 2006). Strategies may aim for incremental behavioural change (McKenzie Mohr 2007), changes in legislation driven by facts (Wong 2008) or provide insights into transformative experiences (Roberts 2004). Video clips and clear graphs sit alongside written ideas and evidence in discussion boards about what works to change specific environmental behaviours such as idling cars while waiting. Although much of this communication is in English and requires translation, such graphic illustrations are open to global use to be interpreted cross-culturally.

For example, a video clip uploaded to You-tube to promote David Hopkins book ‘The Transition Handbook: From Oil Dependency to Local Resilience’ (2007) shows the author speaking in a car-park with images of gardens that previously supplied food to the community superimposed over sections of his narration. These images support the idea that people survived in a sustainable way before oil dependency. Other global networks of environmentalists have used film to connect around the world with the issues that affect local and global populations. One World TV provides a site where a collection of short films can help define the social and environmental issues people face around the world. Videos that members have uploaded since 2002 indicate that social and environmental issues are inextricably linked (2004).

Similarly Avaaz.org, with origins in Asia, recognises the power of communication that video on the inter-net can achieve. They use staged performance or ‘on the fly’ recordings of events to pressure dialogue about environmental issues. Recognising the need to communicate cross-culturally, Avaaz also offers services for people in non-English speaking communities with sub-sections on its website in eight languages (2009). These ways of distributing audio-visual material for social and environmental sustainability highlight the notion that concepts can be translated and communicated across cultures. Film is an essential part of this stream of communication.
While film events such as the ‘Environmental Film Festival in the Nation’s Capital’ in the United States (2009), ‘Wild Spaces’ in Australia or the ‘Earth Vision Global Environmental Film Festival’ in Tokyo attract contributors from around the world, there are other forums where environmental films can be exhibited and discussed. The capacity of short films to communicate to a broad audience through the internet is becoming an important aspect of film sharing on a global and local level.

**Darwin: protecting the local environment**

Locally for this author, Darwin is an unusual multicultural place on the northern edge of Australia, closer to Indonesia than to any other city in Australia. While it is small for a capital city, it has a history wherein many cultures have influenced the way people define a relationship to the natural environment within and around the city. In 2009, greater Darwin had a population of over 100,000 people and was growing rapidly. With little industry, Darwin people rely on tourism, government, education, mining and military activities as principle income sources. Indigenous perspectives are influential as over 40% of the people of the Northern Territory are of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006).

Government bodies hold power in making political decisions and defining economic policies, but many individuals and groups seek to influence how Darwin could become a more sustainable city. The passionate commitment by Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to change social attitudes and improve conservation of the natural environment in the region is explored here and in the film *Sharing Vision*. Here the context of Darwin and its inhabitants is extended.

Indigenous perspectives are central to defining a sustainable future for Darwin. As the proportion of Indigenous representation in the Territory government is higher than any other area in Australia, this has an impact on the decision-making processes for this area alongside the demography of the Northern Territory. In spite of the colonial impacts on links to the land, traditional owners, Larrakia people, have maintained strong connections with the natural environment. This connection continues to be supported through organisations such as the Larrakia Nation (Wells 2002). The Larrakia are an example of Indigenous people who are...
integral in defining natural resource management throughout the Northern Territory because of rights to the land through ancestral affiliation. This film does not aim to explore this relationship but seeks to represent Indigenous perspectives about Darwin as an essential part of the network of people and ideas that work to define environmental sustainability for Darwin.

Even so, the tension between Indigenous knowledge and non-Indigenous biophilia reflects a post-colonial dilemma that cannot be resolved with any film. As Marcia Langton confirms, issues of sovereignty and intellectual property hinder the positive sharing of bioregional Indigenous information (1996; 2005; 2006). Films, such as produced through CAAMA, may provide a way to bridge the different understandings and the participation of Indigenous people in creating media is also likely to help to extend understanding about responsibility for environment. While issues of sovereignty are not resolved (and Germaine Greer (2003) argues that positive action is unlikely till they are), Indigenous perspectives must be included in any attempts to define a sustainable place.

Darwin also has an extensive history of Chinese and other Asian influences and over seventy nationalities are currently represented within the greater Darwin area. Asian influences are strong as people from Indonesia, China and the Philippines settled in the area before and after the white Australia policy was introduced. Chinese people made up eighty percent of the population of Darwin in the late 1800s. Chinese people were integral to the community; farming vegetables and fruits for the township’s inhabitants (Powell 2009). This tradition continues with people from Cambodia, Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines being the principle farming communities that provide produce to the local markets and send food to southern cities today. The food growing practices of Asian people inform the way food is grown in Darwin and Community garden groups depicted in the film rely on knowledge of how to grow Asian fruits and vegetables.

Apart from the multi-cultural nature of Darwin, transience emerges as a major factor to consider when promoting the idea that Darwin could be a sustainable city. It has the highest turnover of population in any Australian capital (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2006). While this turnover helps to create a cosmopolitan outlook, thereby
avoiding some parochial attitudes that may develop in small populations, it presents an issue for commitment to a sustainable environment in this area. The Not In My Back Yard (NIMBY) factor may be irrelevant to people if they are resident for only a short time (Meyer 2001 p149). If a person is not connected to a place, what happens to it may be of little concern. The film seeks to find ways to link relationship to other places with actions on a local level, particularly through an interview with Annie Sloman (represented in Figure 28 wearing sunglasses) who works with community development programs in Indonesia and by including workshop clips that reference locations outside of Darwin.

Also, with an influx of people from larger urban centres, many bring with them a base-line view of acceptable degradation in an environment. The fact that Darwin Harbour is under threat by development may not be apparent to people who have grown up near Kwinana, an industrial estate near Perth, or a busy urban centre like Manila in the Philippines. A segment of a presentation by Rick Murray at the Darwin Harbour action meeting in included in the film to highlight this dilemma.

In considering strategies that might be usefully combined with filmmaking to involve residents in working for a sustainable future, I refer to the questionnaire I conducted with a range of students at CDU (in Appendix 1). This questionnaire was introduced and discussed in chapter two relating to description of environments and affiliation to place. The position of the respondents as university student implies that this group will become part of the more powerful sections of society, whether in Darwin or elsewhere in Australia or overseas. So, the student responses are considered influential in the future to address environmental issues. Results of the latter questions of the questionnaire are detailed with graphs and selected responses in Appendix 3 and analysed for their impact on actions for local conservation elsewhere (Zemits 2006a). Here, the analysis highlights the broad demography and attitudes to the natural environment of a diverse group of people in Darwin informing the making of the second film in a number of ways that are described below.

This discussion draws on demographic information and responses to question 2.2 ‘Is there any natural area that you have visited or know of that you would feel impelled to act to help conserve if it was under threat?’ and ‘If yes, which place would it be?’
The process of simplifying and synthesising questionnaire results provided unpredicted insights into connections with place and influences on people acting for the environment. For theoretical conservation concerns, it is positive that two-thirds of all respondents, whether male or female, identifying as Indigenous, Australian or with a different ethnicity, stated there was an area which they would be impelled to conserve if it was under threat. This indicates that there is a general willingness to act for conservation inter-culturally and I approached the filmmaking with a more positive outlook because of these results.

Figure 28
Still transition image from film Sharing Vision

However, the effect of the transient nature of the Darwin population is apparent in that the current place of residence was considered as a priority for conservation by only 16% of the respondents. The question arises whether this indicates that people don’t consider the natural areas in the direct vicinity to be of value or residual memories of place hinder close affiliation to where they are now. This is important in considering how to encourage people to become involved with sustainability issues. For many people, while empathetic to a natural environment, the actual capacity to
conserve natural places is largely theoretical on a physical level as they live in urban settings. The last question provided information about why people in Darwin may be motivated to act for the environment and responses were central to inform this film. ‘Why would you want to conserve this area?’ Responses were synthesised into seven categories that are depicted in the chart in Figure 29. More information regarding questionnaire research is provided in appendix three.

The ‘ecosystem’ response type was prevalent. Respondents gave general terms about natural places such as ‘harbour’ and biota such as ‘forests’ or ‘unique’ animals. That people responded to the question in this way suggests that people relate to conservation in broad terms. This analysis suggested that I should include an environmental issue that is generic. The ‘Save Darwin Harbour’ issue presented itself as a way to focus on a broad concept. The events depicted in the second film illustrate how people can engage with promoting a clean waterway. Threats to ocean, river and plant are broad concepts that can be transferred across bioregions so would be relevant in other contexts.

Nearly a quarter of reasons to conserve were for ‘aesthetic’ reasons, using words such as ‘beautiful’ and ‘pretty’. This informs the need to present beautiful images in a way that tries to evoke empathy a place to be protected as discussed in chapter two in relation to images and activism in *Wildness* (Millwood 2003). The second film does include natural areas in and near Darwin that may resonate aesthetically with a viewer. To increase a relationship with this landscape I overlaid images on speakers who had positive response to the savannahs. In the urban representation of natural beauty, harbour scenes and mangroves provided the aesthetic focus.

‘Heritage’ related comments such as ‘concern for my children’s grandchildren’ highlight the intergenerational implications of neglecting environmental issues. This aspect of is central to the second film, defined with a scripted dialogue and employed actors to depict mothers and children travelling from central Darwin to Charles Darwin University on a bus. Within this journey, questions about how people in Darwin can respond to global and local environmental issues are addressed.
There were also responses that suggested ‘memories’ were related to childhood experiences as a motivation to conserve a place. This form of response is epitomised in the film where Christina Baker recalls her experiences as a child, seeking shellfish in the mangroves at the ‘Save East Point’ event. She also commented ‘Darwin people say no to development’ and promoted a vision of place wherein environmental and cultural values are not subsumed for development ‘that copies cities down south’ in the interview. Her comments highlight that one person may be influenced by a number of these factors in supporting conservation.

**Figure 29**
Chart of responses to ‘Why would you want to conserve this area?’

In the questionnaire responses, ‘anti-development’ comments also highlighted distrust of government policies to protect the environment and the problem of greed. The questions of appropriate development are included in the film where excerpts from ‘Save Darwin Harbour’ speaker presentations by Rick Murray and Graeme Sawyer became voices on a radio playing during the bus-ride and a scripted question for one child to ask, ‘Mum, what does it mean to be sustainable?’

‘Spiritual’ connections to places came primarily from respondents who identified as Indigenous. Particularly of note was a comment by a local Indigenous person who
wrote, ‘It is my ancestors’ country and mine: connecting spiritual, cultural, dreaming connections to country. I have my area to protect and look after.’ This comment was notable not only for its clarity of expression, but also for the commitment that it depicts to environmental issues through a spiritual connection. The strength of this response confirmed the importance of highlighting Indigenous leadership in environmental sustainability discussions within the film.

Finally, the low percentage of ‘Recreational’ responses was surprising considering the popularity of outdoor activities such as camping and fishing in the region. In the film recreation is depicted in a bush walk held at the activist workshop at the Solar Village. While these categories and the responses within them are based on one group of people in a particular place at a particular time, I suggest that these student motivations to conserve nature would be similar to people in the broader population. By including all these elements, the research conducted at CDU supports the film.

The questionnaire research process provided a direction to interlinking actions and the local natural environment, but as I filmed events I noticed particular individuals passionately committed to battle developments that threaten what remains of natural environments in the Darwin region. I conducted interviews with eight of these people, asking them what drove their activism. I wanted to explore how their love of the natural environment connected with their environmental actions. However responses to my questions indicated that people were driven by motives apart from affinity to place. Social responsibility, relationship within the group and a drive to provide a sustainable livelihood were considered as reasons for environmental actions alongside the intrinsic appreciation of particular ecosystems. Segments from these interviews are included to show what motivates activists to protect the environment.

For example, Leigh Spicer, who actively participated in three of the events I filmed, was involved in promoting food security for Darwin through Foodcare, Darwin Permaculture and the CDU Community Gardens. These groups are concerned with positive actions to improve options for a sustainable future in providing food to Darwin people. Her commitment to these causes is depicted in this film. Also, visiting Permaculture expert, Rosemary Morrow, supports Leigh’s comments in her
interview. She provides a positive approach to how individuals and groups can have real impact in conserving the environment by doing various things, such as ‘bringing birds and plants to gardens’ (2006).  

As the Environment Centre (Northern Territory) provides a place where people work on environmental issues and is central to linking networks of people who respond to issues, I interviewed Di Koser, the convener in her home environment. She presents reasons of social justice and relationships in considering her commitment to environmental issues and illustrates how environmental actions can be very positive. Strider, a founding member of the centre also provides insights into environmental ethics during a bush walk in the film.

The analysis of the questionnaire and the interview responses has shown that people in Darwin reflect multiple viewpoints and interests when considering motivations to protect the environment. This analysis informs the film alongside the recordings of workshops and events in chapter three. Within this mix of research about film and environmental sustainability, various stakeholders were identified and a project completed during this research illustrates how stakeholders can be formally included as participants in a filmmaking project.

Kakadu, as a World Heritage listed area, represents a major attraction on which the Darwin economy relies. The interaction between ecology and economy is complicated as depicted in Short Film 6: *Kakadu Waste Management Strategy* (2006), in DVD1 (Appendix 2). Multiple stakeholders were identified and interviewed to define how waste managed within what is promoted as a ‘pristine’ environment. Some suggested solutions were considered to come at a greater cost to the environment than the current practices. While the burning of plastics in an open pit beside the Yellow Waters tourist centre seemed an antithesis to what the place represents, the options of carting this waste to a dump were not seen as economical by the resort management.

The making of this short film used a participatory process as a tool to bring stakeholders together to solve an environmental problem. This film was produced with the view of sharing these perspectives with stakeholders to help define a
strategy to deal with the issue. The film was part of a series of events that involved a number of stakeholders seeking a solution to an environmental issue. People whose livelihoods depend on the activities within Kakadu had to find a solution to an environmental problem but also needed to resolve economic implications of possibilities. The environmental impact of carting the waste could also be calculated as higher than burning it. The film was effective to some degree in that the central waste disposal centre at the mining town in Kakadu (Jabiru) was restructured.

This is similar to other situations where people seek ways to take action for their vision of what an environmentally sustainable future should be. The process needed to identify who the stakeholders were and develop consensus for the best possible solution to deal with the issue. A film was created to represent the issue through multiple viewpoints. This was combined with the filmmaker’s creative process in consultation with the people who commissioned the project. Environmental issues in Darwin require a similar interaction between stakeholders and other ‘actors’, linking to processes and events to define a vision for a sustainable future. In the second film I sought to apply a more active approach to stakeholder interactions that showed links with external influences on environmental actions rather than depicting stakeholder interests in one issue. While Darwin is a unique location, the process of identifying particular issues about sustainability of this location can be applied to other places that attract people from all over the world.

Conclusion

The local and global responses to environmental sustainability analysed in this chapter, highlight interplay among a variety of economic, social, cultural and environmental factors that cannot be simplified with any one solution in any one country or region. While access to information about alternative ways of doing things abounds, this needs translation and interpretation into a particular context to communicate effectively. Communication that seeks to support environmental action must find ways out of the pit humanity has dug itself. It needs to be positive to avoid the immobilising impact that fear can have. Global issues have been shown to affect people locally. In this case study of Darwin where many ethnicities and cultural
views cross paths, Indigenous perspectives are presented as essential in the process of defining a sustainable future.

This chapter has shown that the division between local and global actions for sustainability are in constant flux but interconnected by networks of people in diverse environments. Film media forms have been described as part of a process that extends actor networks for sharing solutions to environmental issues, both as cinematic screenings and as films through the internet. To define people in environments and reconnect the social structures needed for change, the focus must be on various aspects of local and global practices of environmental action for sustainability. Film can be used to inter-relate issues by extending the dialogue from one location to another.
Chapter four notes

1 Skype is an internet communication system where people can speak and see the person they are talking to.

2 Communications about Transition Towns are active through a website providing strategies and ideas as well as video clips http://www.greenbooks.co.uk/ (Accessed July 2009).

3 The Australian federal government has the capacity to impose policies as can be seen in the Indigenous Intervention in 2008 when Aboriginal communities were managed by federal forces after minimal consultation with people.

4 Larrakia land was ‘settled’ in the mid 19th century impacting on the language and culture of Larrakia people. ‘Stolen Generation’ policies impacted heavily on many Larrakia families.


6 Aboriginal people were not counted in this census.

7 I also organised recordings of a number of national experts who gave public presentations on topics such as climate change as key-note speakers at the 2008 AAEE conference.

8 The people involved in sustainability issues through the Environment Centre have been a key factor in working to define and resolve issues for over twenty-five years.

9 The project was commissioned through a grant from The Kakadu Waste Management Group.
Conclusion
I want my children to understand the world, but not just because the world is fascinating and the human mind is curious. I want them to understand it so that they will be positioned to make it a better place. Knowledge is not the same as morality, but we need to understand if we are to avoid past mistakes and move in productive directions (Howard Gardner 1999 p180-181).

As highlighted in the introduction to this work, there are events in the world that support filmmaking for environmental sustainability. How film can help to develop a better understanding of moving in ‘productive directions’, considering cultural and social influences has been explored through an analytic and reflective process. This process has been applied in constructing the films and underlined through this exegesis. I have sought to answer many questions, not only about the phenomena being researched, but also about the processes undertaken in filmmaking. This extensive research has corroborated the initial claim that filmmaking has an important role to play in communicating about environmental issues, particularly when it seeks to include multiple viewpoints and a positive approach to possibilities.

Within this work, I have sought to explore how love of place, as biophilia, is considered across cultural and spatial contexts and how it is represented in film. The theory that many people feel connections to places that would stimulate actions if those places were threatened has been held up through interviews and questionnaires analysed. However, by looking at strategies for environmental sustainability in chapter four, it is also clear that this love of place must encourage ways to maintain a sustainable livelihood to environmental action. These links between love of place and environmental action can be extended with dialogue. Films, it has been argued, have become an essential part of extending this discourse about developing better understanding about environmental sustainability across cultures.

In the two main films, the notion of biophilia as an intrinsic connection to place has been explored. In the first film, the over-riding narrative avoids didacticism and the expert voice, drawing on an impressionistic and reflexive filmmaking style to explore biophilia. This ‘affinity to place’ is presented as ancestral and personal relationships within the Latvian cultural context. On the other hand, the second film
explores the aspect of biophilia that is part of social networks where people act for protecting the environment in Darwin. I suggest that both films submitted are effective means of building greater understanding of environmental sustainability on a personal and social level. The research process of making short films has supported the understanding of biophilia as a phenomenon and informed the filmmaking.

Mirrored in the exegesis are aspects of research that have influenced the contents of the films. The introduction emphasised the urgency for film to support sustainability concepts and explained the inter-disciplinary approach to research undertaken in this work. The theoretical framework introduced the underpinning argument that film can work both as dialectic hermeneutics and as part of an actor network. Through the filmmaking, networks of people have contributed to, what I hope is, a meaningful dialogue to further explore the phenomena of biophilia and actions for the environment. Through this exegesis I have provided extensive evidence that these theories can be used to reflect on methods of filmmaking practice.

Nevertheless, whatever my filmmaking intent, my filmmaking is informed by work done by others. The first chapter of this exegesis examined examples of how Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Australian and international documentary films have depicted love of place and actions for regions as ‘experimental ethnography’ and ‘environmental activist’ films. The argument that films cross cultural views more effectively by including participants in the filmmaking process was supported by clear examples of strategies used in these groundbreaking films. The styles and concepts that informed these works were considered as strong influences in my filmmaking practice.

The following chapter provided details of my work as a visual arts studio practice in film. Short films that highlighted the progress of my research were woven into explaining the filmmaking process. Events in making both main films that extended dialogue and helped to build actor networks were highlighted. The two films are presented as working together to explore attitudes to places and raise issues about relationships to the natural environment. How research can be integrated into visual depiction was considered in decisions made in editing. Through this discussion of
this research practice, filmmaking was shown to be both a process of building discussion and supporting positive action.

A personal, historical context for the notion of biophilia as the main theme of the first film was highlighted in chapter three. Focussing on the role of mutable perceptions of the natural environment as cultural phenomena, the importance of linguistic and social influences were considered within the context of intergenerational change as a Latvian case study. By considering social and cultural influences on myself as an Australian-Latvian, now living in Darwin, an example of shifting relationship to place was given. I suggested that Indigenous perspectives through relationships to place should continue to be highlighted as an important factor in developing understanding of biophilia.

Chapter four explored the nexus between local and global actions for environmental sustainability. Environmental actions were considered as part of a process that relied, not only on intrinsic value placed on an area, but also as a motivation to protect livelihoods. Films were shown to play an important part in developing dialogue that seeks solutions across cultural views. Through reference to a case study of Darwin as a location where people take actions for the environment, questions about affinity to place and actions were considered. It was argued that films must focus on local and global environmental actions to generate ideas that can influence and reconnect the social structures needed for change.

Inevitably, the capacity of film to encourage actions for sustainability is difficult to measure. Film is part of a broader social-cultural context that influences how environmental concerns are perceived. By presenting this research both as a way of building dialogue and as a means of extending networks to respond to issues of environmental sustainability, I have supported the initial claim made in the introduction to the exegesis. This claim was that the processes and product of film helps to define new paradigms and communicate across cultures about their relationship with the non-human living world. Throughout the process of my work I sought to move beyond those practices that fail to suggest a way forward.
Future work in this field of filmmaking should continue to explore how to link mind, heart and hands of local and global audiences for environmental sustainability. Given the intercultural nature of this work in Australia, filmmakers need to consider what motivates people to respond to a place in a way that will conserve its natural values. Indigenous perspectives are key to inform intrinsic and practical value of biodiversity in the Australian landscape. Films that explore the inter-relationship between the way diverse groups of people feel about and an environment should be supported at this underpins dialogue that can develop. They may draw on strategies used for creating experimental ethnography as well as environmental activist styles of films.

As discussed in this exegesis, film can be used to explore the relationship people have with environmental issues around the world. The traditional structures of the production and distribution of film that may have inhibited sharing of ideas for environmental actions have been superseded by more accessible options through the inter-net and digital film technology. Due to greater access to the tools of production, it is also possible for filmmakers to involve a greater range of people in the defining of film content. The participatory processes of film should be extended to explore environmental issues, engaging a range of people across cultures.

Given this capacity to engage participants, films can assist research into sustainability in a positive way. Participatory processes lend themselves to negotiating a view of the world that can be shared through new media delivery formats. While the films and exegesis are part of the PhD research project, they are also created as objects for other events, viewed by another audience. The recorded and constructed events will move beyond the time and locations represented to be interpreted by unknown viewers. With this in mind, I hope that my filmmaking communicates about biophilia across cultural viewpoints, encouraging reciprocal relationships to the living world as ‘ethno-eco-dialogue’.
Bibliography


**Filmography**


  Australia, Film Australia: 53 mins.


*Mike and Stefani.* (1952). Williams, R. M. Australia, Film Australia: 57 mins.

*A Million Acres a Year.* (2002). Rijavec, F. and N. Harrison Australia, Film Australia: 52 mins.


Appendix One

Documents used in Questionnaires and Interviews

The documents in this appendix are included to support the gathering of quantitative and qualitative information for this research. They were used in questionnaires and interviews.

The English questionnaire (pages 2 and 3) was used with students at Charles Darwin University in Darwin. The Latvian version (pages 4 and 5) was used with Latvian respondents in Latvia and Sydney.

The Plain Language Statement (page 6) was given to all participants in the research.

The Group Production Consent Form (page 7) and a similar interviewee form was signed and collected from people involved in making clips and being interviewed for the films.
Identifying Sense of Place using Visual stimulus

As part of PhD (Visual Arts) project by Birut Zemits


*This exercise is a non-assessable part of class work. You have a choice whether to submit the completed questionnaire after its completion.*

Age
18-27  28-37  38-47  48-57  58+

Male  Female

Ethnic background  Please identify which cultural group you most strongly identify with. Eg Anglo-Australian,
_________________________

Place where you have spent the longest period in your life (please circle one or more)
Large City  Small city  Suburban  Rural

Other __________________________

Length of time living in the North of Australia _____________

ACTIVITY
You will view a series of images portraying different areas in the North of Australia and elsewhere. Please respond to each series of video images, focusing on how you respond to the places they represent. Use four words for each series of images. Some describing words are given below.  PLEASE USE YOUR OWN DESCRIPTIONS AS WELL.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>形容词</th>
<th>home-like</th>
<th>interesting</th>
<th>terrifying</th>
<th>strange</th>
<th>untouched</th>
<th>creepy</th>
<th>familiar</th>
<th>safe</th>
<th>noisy</th>
<th>natural</th>
<th>unnatural</th>
<th>isolated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Practice Series
Type of area (use your own term or formal name) ___________________

Descriptors ___________________________________________________________
Series 1-
Type of area (use your own term or formal name) ___________________
Descriptors ________________________________

Series 2-
Type of area (use your own term or formal name) ___________________
Descriptors ________________________________

Series 3-
Type of area (use your own term or formal name) ___________________
Descriptors ________________________________

Series 4-
Type of area (use your own term or formal name) ___________________
Descriptors ________________________________

2 Short answers
2.1 In a short paragraph, describe the environment you mostly call ‘home’.
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________
   _____________________________________________________________

2.2 Is there any natural area that you have visited or know of that you would feel impelled to act to help conserve if it was under threat?
   Yes       No

If yes: Which area? ________________________________
Why? _____________________________________________
Questionnaire- Latvian Version

APTAUJAS LAPA

Vietas izjūtas identificēšana lietojot vizuālus stimulus

Kā daļa no Birutas Zemītu PhD (vizuālās humanitārās zinātņās) projekta “Ethno-eco-video”. (Lūdzu uzturamai nākotnei: dažādu kultūru viedokļi.)

Variet izvēlēties, vai iesniegt izpildīto aptaujas lapu, vai nē. Es būtu pateicīga, ja šī lapa tiktu iesniegta, jo tas ļoti palīdzēs maniem pētījumiem. (Biruta)

1. Vecums (lūdzu apvilkt apli)
   18 – 27     28 – 37
   38 – 47     48 – 57
   58+

2. Vīrietis/ Sieviete

3. Etniskā piederiba. Ar kādu grupu visvairāk solidarizējas; piem: Anglo-Austrāliešu, Latviete/is, Krieviete/is, __________________________________________________________

4. Vide, kuŗā visilgāk bijusi jūsu mājvieta. (Lūdu apvilkt ar apli vienu vai vairākas)
   Lielpilsēta Mazpilsēta Priekšpilsēta Lauki Citur____________________

5. Residences ilgums Latvija __________ gadi __________ mēneši

AKTIVITĀTE


mājsējts     svešs     šaušalīgs     pazīstams
interesants  neskārts  drošs      trokšņains
drausmīgs    dabīgs    nedabīgs    izolēts

Prakses sērija

Vietas tips (lietojiet formālo nosaukumu vai savu raksturojumu) __________________________

Raksturojumi ____________________________________________

1. sērija
Vietas tips (lietojiet formālo nosaukumu vai savu raksturojumu) __________________________
Raksturojumi

2. sērija
Vietas tips (lietojiet formālo nosaukumu vai savu raksturojumu) ____________

Raksturojumi

3. sērija
Vietas tips (lietojiet formālo nosaukumu vai savu raksturojumu) ____________

Raksturojumi

4. sērija
Vietas tips (lietojiet formālo nosaukumu vai savu raksturojumu) ____________

Raksturojumi

Īsas atbildes

Īsā paragrāfa aprakstiet dabisko vidi ar kuru jūs visvairāk solidarizējaties (i.e., kura jums liekas būt vistuvākā).

Vai ir kāds dabas apgabals ko esat apmeklējuši, jeb kas jums zināms, ko us vēlētos katrā ziņā pasargāt, ja tas būtu apdraudēts?

Jā  Nē

“Jā” gadījumā, kuŗš apgabals (Latvija vai cita valstī)? _______________________
Kādēļ? _______________________

Ja vēlaties, lūdzu iesniedziet šo aptaujas lapu un parakstieties uz atsevišķās lapas.
Informācija savākta šai aptaujā nekādā gadījumā jūs neidentificēs.

Biruta Zemīts.

PLAIN LANGUAGE STATEMENT
## PROJECT: Ethno-eco dialogue: **Filmmaking for sustainability**

### CHIEF INVESTIGATOR:
Birut Zemits

### PURPOSE OF THE STUDY:
The purpose of this research is to make an informative and well produced film exploring different people’s ideas about the natural environment in which they live and the actions that can be taken by individuals to protect and conserve their natural environment, particularly the biodiversity within it.

The way production of audio-visual media may be used to promote environmental action across cultures is also explored in this research project.

### BENEFITS OF THE STUDY:
This research will help to understand how people think about their local environment and how video production processes can be used to explore issues.

### WHAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF YOU?
This study is in three parts. You may be asked to participate in only one or all three aspects.
1. Survey/written questionnaire will be based on responses to images of natural environments in Northern Australia and other places. **And/or**
2. Video or audio-taped interview about an environmental issue.
3. Group video production wherein you define the sense of place as a group in a video production.

### DISCOMFORTS/ RISKS:
There are **no** specific risks associated with this study.

### CONFIDENTIALITY
The three aspects will entail three levels of confidentiality.
1. There will be full confidentiality of your survey response. Data will be collated without identifying names.
2. You will be asked if you would consider being interviewed on video camera about your responses. You will be invited to view this video segment and will have the choice about whether to continue involvement before post-production.
3. If you are in the group production you will be able to view and choose to have your part included before final editing. For the interviews and group productions, your name will be listed in the production credits. You may decline to have your name listed if you wish.

### YOUR PARTICIPATION
I would be grateful if you did participate in this study but you are free to refuse to participate. Steps will be taken to protect your anonymity as per CDU research ethics requirements and in accord with the statements above.

### RESULTS OF THE STUDY
If you wish to see the videotape at a later date, arrangements will be made for you to do so. A paper based on the findings will be published in an Environmental and Education journal and the video will be produced for non-profit distribution to interested groups.

### PERSONS TO CONTACT
If you have any questions about the project, please contact the researcher,
Birut Zemits on ph: 08 89466995 or e-mail: birut.zemits@cdu.edu.au
Group Production Consent Form

I, ................................................................. of
........................................................................................................................................................................

Reliable contact e-mail or phone ________________________________

Hereby consent to participate in a video production exercise for the study undertaken by Birut Zemits of Charles Darwin University and I understand that the purpose of the research is to make an informative and well produced video which explores different people’s ideas about the natural environment in which they live and the actions that can be taken by individuals to protect and conserve natural eco-systems.

I acknowledge that:

- the aims, methods, and anticipated benefits, and possible risks of the study, have been explained to me by Birut Zemits in her Plain Language Statement.
- I voluntarily and freely give my consent to my participation in this production.
- I understand that results will be used for research purposes and may be reported in academic journals.
- I am free to withdraw my consent at any time during the group exercise and before the final edit stage. In this case my participation in the research study will immediately cease and any information or audio-visual material obtained from me will not be used. Birut will delete these sections from the video or audio tape or any computer file.
- If the footage/sound recording from the group production is chosen for the final documentary film, I am aware that Brut Zemits will contact me to view the “rough cut”. At this stage I will still be able to determine whether I agree to be represented publicly in this way.
- Once the final video edit is completed and the documentary produced I may not revoke permission to use the footage/audio-recording of my interview.
- If the footage where I am represented or I assisted in producing is used in the final production, my name will appear in the credits depicting the role I took in the production.
- The documentary may be used for educational purposes and may be entered in film festivals but will not be used for profit.

Signature: .................................................................

Date: .................................................................
Appendix Two

Contents of Short Films in DVD2

1 Lameroo Revisited 2006
Duration- 8 minutes
Edited from a Northern Territory Government Heritage project to archive footage and interviews about Lameroo Beach in the 1970s.
Screened at Nightcliff Seabreeze Festival October 2006

2 Words for Place 2005
Duration- 3 minutes
Short Film presented to Latvians and Charles Darwin University students (2005-2006) to seek responses to the questionnaire (Appendix 2).

3 Mājīga daba (Homely Nature) 2007
Duration- 1 minute
Edited in Final Cut Pro and Livetype.
Language: Latvian text, English (Birut Zemits) & Latvian (Andris Bergs) voice-over.
Art exhibitions:- Topophilia July 2008 as part of national conference for AAEE; Work in Progress April 2008

4 Vide un Video (Environment and Video) 2005
Duration- 7 minutes
Promotional clips developed with teachers in Latgale, Latvia during workshops.

5 Kolum Ephemera 2007
Duration- 3 minutes
Produced to show the links between traditional art and environmental action.
Screened at Fistful of Films 2007
Award- Judges Commendation for Visual Storytelling

6 Kakadu Waste Management Strategy 2006
Duration- 12 minutes
This was produced in a process of stakeholder engagement, to define a solution for waste management in a World Heritage area.
Appendix 3

Analysis of data from part 2 of questionnaire

This extended discussion of research from the questionnaire supports the references to the context of Darwin in chapter four.
The transient nature of residence in Darwin is reflected in the group of 175 students where about half of the students who responded to the questionnaire had lived in Darwin for under five years. The initial question sought to find out whether people thought they would conserve an area.

**Figure 1: Student responses to the question, ‘Would you be impelled to act to conserve any natural environment if it was threatened?’**

Over two thirds of the respondents claimed that they would be impelled to take action to conserve a place under threat. The most notable difference in making a positive response to taking action was in the age of the respondents. Also ethnic identity does not appear relevant in determining whether people would be prepared to act or not.
If the respondents acknowledged their willingness to act for conservation, they were asked which area they would feel impelled to act to conserve (Fig 5). These responses covered a broad range of places but there were discernable trends. Of the 114 “yes” responses only a few were unsure of which place they would act to conserve. 24% named a general ecosystem such as beach, rainforest, mangrove, forest or coast.

There were an equal number of responses (nineteen each) identifying other places in Australia and places overseas. Responses indicating a willingness to conserve other areas in Australia were distributed across all states fairly equally with little duplication of sites. Sites named included Ningaloo Reef, Eyre Peninsula, Strezleki Ranges and Daintree. The people who named places overseas included the Solomon beaches, forests in the Philippines, Lombok, mountains of Burrundi, Tanzania, Okinawa, and the New Zealand coastline. These responses primarily matched the ethnic identity of the respondents. The highest proportion (44 people) listed a place in the Northern Territory with seven identifying Litchfield Park and ten naming Kakadu National Park. Within this group, only seven people identified parks and reserves within the Darwin region.
This initial question was linked to a request for reasons why people would be impelled to conserve that particular area. The open question provided a range of responses that were placed into categories. The most prevalent response linked to conserving the ecology within a particular place. Reasons for conservation included that it is ‘unique’, ‘special’, ‘is full of wildlife and/or rare plants that need protecting’, has particular animals such as ‘whales’ or ‘turtles’ or particular elements such as ‘forests’ or ‘geysers’ and the general term ‘biodiversity’. Within the aesthetic category most people used the word ‘beautiful’ or ‘pretty’ as well as ‘natural’ to explain why they valued the area. Comments that emphasised ‘anti-development’ included support of ‘resistance to tourist ventures’; ‘opposition to real estate in outer suburban areas’; and ‘complicity of governments in selling land to development’.

Figure 3: Responses to ‘Why would you want to conserve this area?’

A minority of respondents focussed on the recreational uses of the area for ongoing activities such as swimming and camping. Memory comments referred to the place being ‘close to home’ or an area where ‘camping holidays were spent in childhood’. A number of heritage related comments included ‘concern for my children’s grandchildren’; ‘future generations’ and a ‘link to the past’. Some complete statements are quoted to illustrate these comments.

‘It is my home. You wouldn't let your home fall down around you, would you?’
‘Even though I am a white Australian I feel a strong connection to this place where I grew up.’

‘When I was in high school we were planting trees every year in this place with not many trees. It was fun and very nice that we could help our environment a little bit.’

Nearly all the people who made comments about spiritual connectedness identified as Indigenous Australians. A notable comment by an Indigenous person that related to the area of Darwin was: ‘It is my ancestors’ country and mine: connecting spiritual, cultural, dreaming connections to country. I have my area to protect and look after.’
Tur Mēs Bijam, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are) & Sharing Vision

Two Films by Birut Zemits
These films aim to extend discussion about environmental and social issues. They were made to reflect connections between cultural identity in place and actions for environmental sustainability.

Film 1 - Tur Mēs Bijam, Te Mēs Esam (There we Were, Here we Are) 24 minutes
This bilingual study explores connection to natural places. Set in Latvia and Australia it shows how ‘love of place’ can vary within a family and within a cultural group The filmmaker asks the viewer to consider their own affinity with the place in which they live.

Film 2 - Sharing Vision 24.5 minutes
What does environmental sustainability mean for people in a small city in the north of Australia? A bus ride, from the centre of Darwin to the local university campus, is used to link events that were held to raise awareness about environmental issues during 2008-9. This film promotes the notion that local actions are closely linked to global issues and that individuals have choices in ways to care for the place where they live.

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Of the Earth Productions

These documentary films were completed as part of a PhD research project in the School of Creative Arts and Humanities at Charles Darwin University in the Northern Territory of Australia. The exegesis linked to these films is titled ‘Ethno-Eco Dialogue: Filmmaking for environmental sustainability’.

Thanks to all the people who helped make this project possible.