

## **DISCOURSING IN SEPIA AND GREEN**

### history and heritage in Australia's national parks

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#### **Part I: History**

a place is a space with a past

National Parks in NSW and WA have local origins. They are not derived from America. Rather, they are derived from the language of commons and parks - of communal places. The early national parks were urban recreation places, and their uses reflect the values of middle class ruling élites in Sydney and Perth. There was no room for native practises because they formed the 'other' to the local culture of *terra nullius*. Science was introduced into national parks by von Müeller's 'floral commons' concept around the turn of the century, while americanist managerial elements began entering the discourse after WWII. The wilderness idea developed during the mid-1970s within these approaches, and has informed the destruction of human cultural sites in national parks since then. The 'gentry' concept of the park, the deferential nature of colonial science, americanist managerialism and wilderness advocates have consistently located national parks firmly within the culture of *terra nullius*. The recent trend to conserve human cultural sites as 'hospecentric' curios within national parks represents a re-assertion of gentryness and americanism in national park agencies.

Post-Mabo, the concept of native title questions wilderness, americanism and curiosities as concepts, as well as the 'objectivity' of science, and demands recognition of another cultural past. It points to a space that has yet to be named..

#### **Part II: Heritage**

a rhetoric to shape a discourse

Carter's spatial history tells us that the Australian landscape is the continental space written in English. National park history is a telling of how some of this space was made into places called national parks: how they were invented as objects of desire and how that desire was articulated through the naming process, thus transforming nature into culture, there into here, other into ours. Native title as a spatial discourse is attempting to redefine these places with an alternative past embodied within alternative namings. An alternative future is suggested in which the national park is a meeting house rather than the cathedral. The heritage significance of national parks thus would lie in their representation as a shared place rather than an exclusive space, a representation derived from a telling of the repressed communal past of national parks. It is a civic and republican vision that has more in common with the motives of the first national park makers than with the commercialised and deferential language of national parks in late twentieth century Australia.

Bruce Baskerville,

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(hospecentric: 'visitor-centred', from Latin hospes = visitor)