

Position doubtful: mapping landscapes and memories, by Kim Mahood, Scribe, Melbourne, 2016, 336 pp., AUD\$29.99 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 925321 68 5

'In the gap between two ways of seeing, the risk is that you see nothing clearly.' (p. 216)

In *Position Doubtful* Kim Mahood, a Canberra-based visual artist and teacher, describes how since 2004 she has travelled each year to spend time in Mulan, a Walmajarri community in Western Australia, close to the Mongrel Downs station where she spent her childhood, and which has since been returned to the traditional owners. An intensely personal memoir, she describes how she grew up between two cultures. Her interest lies in exploring 'what happens when the unconscious mind experiences a fundamental displacement ... when the body feels an almost cellular affinity to a place that has been constructed by a different cultural imagination' (p. 296). The result is a book that is fascinating on many levels, but is particularly valuable for the insights it brings to themes relevant to those working in archives and memory institutions – issues such as identity, memory, the meaning and interpretation of records (maps in particular), the importance of place, and cross-cultural relations.

The title of the book comes from a note made on an aeronautical map her father was using when surveying the Tanami Desert in 1962. It refers to a prominent landmark, a sandstone hill labelled 'Position Doubtful' on the map. Mahood uses it as a metaphor to describe how non-Indigenous Australians relate to country, noting that although 'the advent of satellite technology has given us the tools to find and map geographic locations with great accuracy, it seems to me that our position in relation to the remote parts of the country is more doubtful than it has ever been' (p. 6). Thus, as the subtitle 'mapping landscapes and memories' suggests, the book is an attempt to chart the landscape, both literally and figuratively. In the process the book explores the ongoing relationships between settlers and Indigenous Australians – a place where she appears, at least to the reader, simultaneously an insider and an outsider.

Throughout her visits Mahood has collaborated with the local Indigenous communities to create hand-painted maps and to record their stories, interweaving traditional places with the traces and history of settler involvement through missions, cattle stations and mines. In an attempt to reveal common ground, the maps reflect not just the knowledge and the ways of representing country of the local Aboriginal communities, but also the interests of archaeologists, scientists, land managers and many others who visit the area. The maps represent overlapping knowledge systems, overlaying geography, culture and history. More than that, they record – as does the book itself – the complex web of stories each group brings, and they document the dynamic nature of those knowledge systems. In doing so, they do not just become records in themselves, but provide the context within which they, and related documents, can be interpreted.

The ease with which the complexities of the creation and interpretation of such documents can be misunderstood is illustrated by one incident which occurred when visiting journalists arrive to report on the mapping project. Trying to take photos of one of the maps, they ask Mahood to move away so that 'the photographer can get a picture with no whitefellas in it to disturb the integrity of the image' (p.190), raising the ire of her Walmajarri collaborators in doing so. Apparently not everyone understands the potential for collaboration between cultures.


Jeanette Bastian stressed that: 'For archivists, finding the synergy between archives and landscape begins with context and relationships, about the *places* in which the archival records were generated and about *locating* the records in space, time and authorship'.¹ At one level, *Position Doubtful* provides a detailed case study into those very issues, dealing as it does with the nature of records, the circumstances of their creation, the potential for competing but intersecting narratives, and above all the importance of place. In doing so, it also emphasises the dynamic nature of records and their ability to support increasingly nuanced interpretations.

I came to this book as a non-Indigenous person interested in its themes and the ways in which archives and other memory institutions could best work with and support Indigenous communities. Mahood strikes exactly the right tone. Self-analysis is central to the book. She is respectful, and grounds her work in the reality that although much of what is described does not belong to just one culture, the dominant white culture has much to learn from Indigenous knowledge and perspectives.

Position Doubtful is essential reading for those, such as archivists, who wish to engage with Indigenous communities without repeating the mistakes of the past, and who recognise and wish to come to terms with the cultural and ethical complexities that that entails.

Endnote

1. Jeanette Bastion, 'Records, Memory and Space: Locating Archives in the Landscape', *Public History Review*, vol. 21, 2014, pp. 45–69, available at <<https://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/journals/index.php/phrj/article/view/3822/4604>>, accessed 10 August 2017, emphasis in original.

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Managing digital cultural objects: analysis, discovery and retrieval, edited by A. Foster and P. Rafferty, Facet Publishing, London, 2016, xix + 227 pp., GBP£54.95 (paperback), ISBN 978 1 856049 41 2

As the title suggests, this edited book investigates analysis, discovery and retrieval, specifically focusing on digital non-textual objects, for example still and moving images, and music. The editors, Allen Foster and Pauline Rafferty, both from Aberystwyth University, state their purpose is to 'inspire prospective students to develop creative and innovative research projects at Master's and PhD levels' (p. XVII), and with this book they provide some theoretical underpinning for this purpose. There is a wide selection of topics to support the goal to inspire innovative research, with the authors representing a range of fields including digital humanities, digital preservation, computer science, archives and libraries, all based in either the UK, the Americas or Europe.

The book has three parts. Part 1 provides an accessible introduction to the analysis of digital cultural objects, and supporting context for some of the issues involved in analysing non-textual objects. Editor Pauline Rafferty sets the scene with Chapter 1, beginning with a brief review of literature about managing digital cultural objects from different disciplines including archives, media and communications, and computer science. Rafferty combines a gentle introduction to the literature, case studies to illustrate the issues, and exploration of challenges to satisfy the book's goal to supply future pathways to develop new areas of study. In Chapter 2 Higgins examines the importance of data modelling and its uses. Weller provides inspiration for future research projects in Chapter 3 by illustrating the various challenges of using social media data, emphasising that initiatives to use them for historical research are in the very early stages.