
A Park and a Rock

Maddie Leach

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Abstract

Since 2008 Maddie Leach has been an artist in residence in Cork, Beaver Island, Tasmania, New Plymouth, Mandurah, and Vancouver. These opportunities have been directly linked to invitations to develop new place-responsive projects in which she has explored historical narratives, community, and memory through processes of reproduction, reiteration, temporality, and dispersal. Leach has a long-standing interest in public practices, site specificity and, more recently, the vested interests of cultural commissioners to reflect and affirm a positive sense of place back to its citizens. This text was written as a reflection on two different experiences of ‘residency’ and the artworks that were subsequently produced. The first, *Evening Echo* (2011-ongoing) centres around an annual cycle of illuminated lights in a small park in Cork’s old Jewish neighbourhood; *28th October 2834* (2015) focuses on the way in which an encounter with a memorial rock and a missing plaque revealed suppressed tensions in small town Western Australia. Both projects have composed an ‘alternate politic’ to official histories, magnifying and revealing their gaps.

Keywords: public art, memorial, place, local government, community, artist in residence

A Park

I am remembering now the conversations about Cork and the placing of names in the funny folded fabric of the streets and bridges of that city. How they called it 'Jewtown' for the love of the familiar hidden in it. How they called it 'Passover Bridge' for the naming of their own strange humours. How lately they called it 'Shalom Park' in anticipation of the gasworks being beautified through some grim technical specification—this park being a public remaindering of a little space and a little time, left over after business is all finished and done. So many places emptied out across old Mitteleuropa. But how has it happened in this other place again, on the western edge of Europe, on these wistful north eastern Atlantic shores? How has it happened so late after history has broken in half? How has it happened again that a few remaining people are going or gone already?¹

Re-reading these words from Mick Wilson always reminds me of things that are hard to convey to a new audience when I talk about *Evening Echo*. Mick speaks about gentle gestures, meaning on the edge of visibility and moments on the verge of evaporation. It is also hard to conjure the idiosyncrasies of Cork, and the small sense of occasion that has arisen around this project, if you haven't stood at twilight in the modest, triangular-shaped Shalom Park. It is almost always close to Christmas and sunset is around 4.30pm. It is often raining. Email flyers and a printed announcement in the *Evening Echo* newspaper have told you that today is 1 Tevet, or 2 Tevet, and the year is five thousand, seven hundred and seventy-something. The instructed address for assembly at Shalom Park is 'Gas Works Road and Albert Road' in which the words Shalom and Gas Works form a dark, uneasy textual partnership.

Figure 1. Shalom Park, Cork, 2012. Photo: Darragh Crane.



Park Warden Pat O’Sullivan and the locals who walk their dogs in the park are always there first. After a while there is an eclectic crowd gathered from the art community, the city council, people who live in the crouch of row houses adjacent to the park, and the tiny constituency who now form Cork’s remaining Jewish community. Fred Rosehill (head of the Cork Hebrew Congregation) is easy to spot with his walking stick and long wool coat, as is the Lord Mayor bedecked in the golden ‘Chain of Office’.

Figure 2. Shalom Park, Cork, 2015. Photo: Clare Keogh.



Nine lamps form a perimeter adjacent to the path that circles the park. For 364 days a year, eight of these lamps illuminate each night as lux levels drop and Cork’s network of street lights ignite. However, one light in the park does not. To the observant eye the lamp that does not fire is also taller than its eight companions. However, on *this day*, at ten minutes before sunset (or when ‘there are three stars in the sky’²) the tall lamp ignites. Solitarily it glows green, then slowly brightens to clear white as daylight in the park fades. After a while, one or two or three of the other lamps fire at random—it depends on their sensors. When all lamps are alight, they burn together for 30 minutes. People walk about, stop and talk, sit on the park benches, take photographs and start to leave. Then the tall lamp, the lamp that came on first, suddenly extinguishes. People aren’t watching at that point and the moment is missed by most. This is the process that will occur for the eighth time in December this year.

Each year a poster is circulated listing 50 years of future dates for the *Evening Echo* lighting until 2061.³ It also presents a curious text about the moon and the misalignment of the civil calendar and Hebrew calendar, operating as an obscure attempt to account for the chasm of difference between dates such as 2018 and 5779.

EVENING ECHO
 SHALOM PARK
 51°53' N / 8°27' W
 CORK, IRELAND



The problem is that the civil calendar used by most of the world has abandoned any correlation between the moon cycles and the month, arbitrarily setting the length of months to 28, 30 or 31 days. The Jewish calendar, however, coordinates three astronomical phenomena: the rotation of the Earth about its axis (a day); the revolution of the moon about the Earth (a month); and the revolution of the Earth about the sun (a year). Also, a Jewish 'day' is of no fixed length, and there is no clock in the Jewish scheme.

Therefore, the last night of Hanukkah is observed at nightfall on 1 Tevet or sometimes 2 Tevet.

2011	Tuesday 27 December	4.30 pm
2012	Saturday 15 December	4.24 pm
2013	Wednesday 4 December	4.26 pm
2014	Tuesday 23 December	4.27 pm
2015	Sunday 13 December	4.24 pm
2016	Saturday 31 December	4.34 pm
2017	Tuesday 19 December	4.25 pm
2018	Sunday 9 December	4.24 pm
2019	Sunday 29 December	4.31 pm
2020	Thursday 17 December	4.25 pm
2021	Sunday 5 December	4.26 pm
2022	Sunday 25 December	4.29 pm
2023	Thursday 14 December	4.24 pm
2024	(go to 2025)	
2025	Wednesday 1 January	4.34 pm
2025	Sunday 21 December	4.26 pm
2026	Friday 11 December	4.24 pm
2027	Friday 31 December	4.34 pm
2028	Tuesday 19 December	4.26 pm
2029	Saturday 8 December	4.25 pm
2030	Friday 27 December	4.30 pm
2031	Tuesday 16 December	4.25 pm
2032	Saturday 4 December	4.26 pm
2033	Friday 23 December	4.28 pm
2034	Wednesday 13 December	4.24 pm
2035	(go to 2036)	
2036	Tuesday 1 January	4.35 pm
2036	Saturday 20 December	4.26 pm
2037	Wednesday 9 December	4.25 pm
2038	Tuesday 28 December	4.31 pm
2039	Sunday 18 December	4.25 pm
2040	Thursday 6 December	4.26 pm
2041	Tuesday 24 December	4.29 pm
2042	Sunday 14 December	4.25 pm
2043	(go to 2044)	
2044	Saturday 2 January	4.36 pm
2044	Wednesday 21 December	4.27 pm
2045	Sunday 10 December	4.25 pm
2046	Sunday 30 December	4.33 pm
2047	Thursday 19 December	4.26 pm
2048	Sunday 6 December	4.26 pm
2049	Sunday 26 December	4.30 pm
2050	Friday 16 December	4.25 pm
2051	Tuesday 5 December	4.26 pm
2052	Sunday 22 December	4.28 pm
2053	Friday 12 December	4.25 pm
2054	(go to 2055)	
2055	Friday 1 January	4.36 pm
2055	Tuesday 21 December	4.27 pm
2056	Saturday 9 December	4.25 pm
2057	Friday 28 December	4.32 pm
2058	Tuesday 17 December	4.26 pm
2059	Saturday 6 December	4.26 pm
2060	Friday 24 December	4.29 pm
2061	Wednesday 14 December	4.25 pm

Page 182. Figure 3. *Evening Echo* poster, National Sculpture Factory & Maddie Leach. Circulated locally each year since 2011.

The form of the work, unfolding fleetingly in the park, references the nine-branched candelabra of Hanukkah and its central Shamash. It occurs in a place affixed with the name *Shalom* but of little significance to a radically diminished Jewish community, more fundamentally connected to their graveyard on the city edge and the precarious upkeep of the tiny South Terrace synagogue. At its peak in the mid-twentieth century the Jewish community in Cork numbered close to 500 members. It experienced a steady decline in the following years as young people left the economic conditions of Ireland for work and education and did not return, and as older members retired and moved to Israel or warmer climates. If this is the ‘emptying out’ that Mick Wilson notes above, it is also something other communities in Cork have undoubtedly experienced as cycles of economic ‘opportunities’ in the city have risen and fallen. *Evening Echo* also intentionally inhabits the space of the everyday, of memory and imagination that is variously at work within a phone call to City Hall from a passer-by reporting one of the lamps in the park isn’t working; in Fred’s recollection that once a Jewish community of 450 lived in the terraces around the park; in the family names inscribed on small brass plaques in the ladies’ balcony of the old Synagogue; in the *Evening Echo* newspaper’s headlines reporting the removal of Bord Gais gas storage tanks from the park site and suspicion of contaminated soil; in Minister of Energy Michael Smith’s buoyant opening speech on 28 April 1989 on the future of ‘this beautiful park; and the gas lights that showed ‘Cork was really coming up in the world’; in the ceremonial lighting of a gas single lamp; in more recent memories of the park as a dim and derelict place for exchange of drugs and alcohol.

Evening Echo was not a direct public art commission from the city, the National Sculpture Factory or the Hebrew community. Rather, it was initiated by me as a response to an absence I intuited, and then actively observed, for the two months I lived in an apartment across the road from the synagogue, and as I walked past Shalom Park each day on my way to the Sculpture Factory. On the ride in from Cork Airport my taxi driver had referred to the neighbourhood as ‘Jew town’. I then encountered other occasional references, such as Cork once having a Jewish mayor named Gerald Goldberg and a foot bridge over the River Lee that was colloquially known as ‘The Passover’. Until I contacted Fred Rosehill (head of the Cork Hebrew Congregation) I never saw any signs of life at the synagogue. The memories of others around me, of the park and its surrounds, were discovered and uncovered gradually over time. Fred found a VHS tape that tracked the day the park was first dedicated as Shalom Park. As I sat and watched it, I suddenly witnessed my own proposition (the lighting of a lamp in the park) happening 22 years earlier, enacted in the rain for an assembled crowd who erupt in a small cheer as the flame ignites.

Figure 4. VHS video still,
Shalom Park, 28 April 1989.
Courtesy of Fred Rosehill.



Evening Echo was a project that developed over three years between 2008 and 2011 and the short residency programme I initially undertook with the National Sculpture Factory has become a sustained relationship with people and place. Cork City Council and I have a Promissory Agreement that contains an attempt to bind us into a relationship for the long-term future through a clause stating: *All parties acknowledge that it is the artist's intention for Evening Echo to exist in perpetuity.* In some ways the document is there as a form of guardianship, a conceptual attempt on my part to safe-guard against the process of forgetting that many public art works are immediately susceptible to—one that *Evening Echo* attempts to resist but is perhaps especially vulnerable to given its literal 'lightness' of presence.

My time in Cork also coincided directly with the financial collapse in Ireland and its effects have formed an interesting companion to the life of *Evening Echo*.

The Elysian apartment building that sits opposite Shalom Park was described by *The Irish Times* in 2009 as 'the Mary Celeste of the recession'. Local rumour had it that only one floor of the tower was inhabited (by the owner's daughter) and that the building's developers turned the lights on in some apartments to sustain a sense of daily life and deflect any sense of abandonment. For a while there was a running joke between me and Cork City Council Parks Department that they never had to say they were spending money on an artwork, only that they were buying some new lights for the park.

A Rock

In early 2014, as part of the *Spaced 2: future recall* project, I lived in for two months in Mandurah, a small 'city' one hour south of Perth in Western Australia. Its slogan is '*a city excited about its future!*' and much of the associated City of Mandurah literature brightly reports facts on the exponential growth the city and the Peel

Region are experiencing. I'd heard it described as Western Australia's Gold Coast and a core part of the state's 'fly in fly out' culture for what are benignly called 'resource projects' in mineral and ore extraction.⁴ As is my habit, I explored my future residency home through Google image searches and Google Earth and started tweeting pictures I found before I even arrived. I was a little apprehensive about developing an artwork for a place that appeared to service a beach resort lifestyle, but my practice is one based around a process of propositions and problem-solving and Mandurah would be no different in that respect.

Figure 5. Mandurah, 2014.
Image credit: Maddie Leach



Marco Marcon, Director of the Spaced project, said sending artists to communities in Western Australia was like making 'an arranged marriage.'⁵ I liked his honesty and I think of that terse phrase quite often. Undoubtedly, Mandurah has become imprinted in my mind and I clearly, fondly, recall familiar details, smells, people, and trajectories through the place. It's a community with commendable aspirations to position itself as an art centre in the West Australian context, to be another destination town—a place for, and filled with, *creative events* to promote a carefully constructed commitment to reconciliation and inclusiveness. However, I became increasingly uncomfortable with what I perceived to be my host's expectations of the project I was tasked to develop.

Figure 6-7. Mandurah, 2014.
Photo: Maddie Leach.



With much of the historic township gone, and a constant swathe of Venetian-styled canal developments and new housing on the market, there were only occasional glimpses of a community in the process of actively constructing its memories and assembling its official history. As I lived a daily life in the town, I began to form a conceptual arrangement between a set of material and immaterial presences. These included Mandurah’s prominent and well-kept war memorial park; large rocks in public spaces used to mark town sites or civic milestones; the contrasting figures of ‘founding pioneer’ Thomas Peel and aboriginal leader Yaburgurt Winjan, and their grave sites placed diagonally opposite each other at Christ’s Church. What also became clear was a palpable sense of divide between City of Mandurah and the neighbouring rural township of Pinjarra in the Shire of Murray. In particular, there was evidence of a fraught but muted debate surrounding a memorial site for the Pinjarra Massacre of 28 October 1834. Referred to as a ‘battle’ by Shire officials and a ‘massacre’ by the local Nyungar community, it’s been a site of persistent tension evidenced in and around visibility and nomenclature – the most noticeable being references (or lack thereof) on local maps and signage at the site. Nyungar elder Uncle Harry Nannup matter-of-factly described it to me as ‘they put a plaque up our mob probably rip it off, we put a plaque up and white fellas rip it off’.⁶ Thomas Peel himself was one of the men directly involved the brutal encounter between colonial forces and Binjareb Nyungar that has informed a dubious narrative within State and national history and popular understandings of peaceful British settlement in Western Australia. Yaburgurt Winjan is described as being a young child at the time and as a survivor of the massacre. In 2015 a memorial statue to commemorate 100 years since his death was being developed by City of Mandurah.

Figure 8. Mandurah, 2014.
Photo: Maddie Leach.

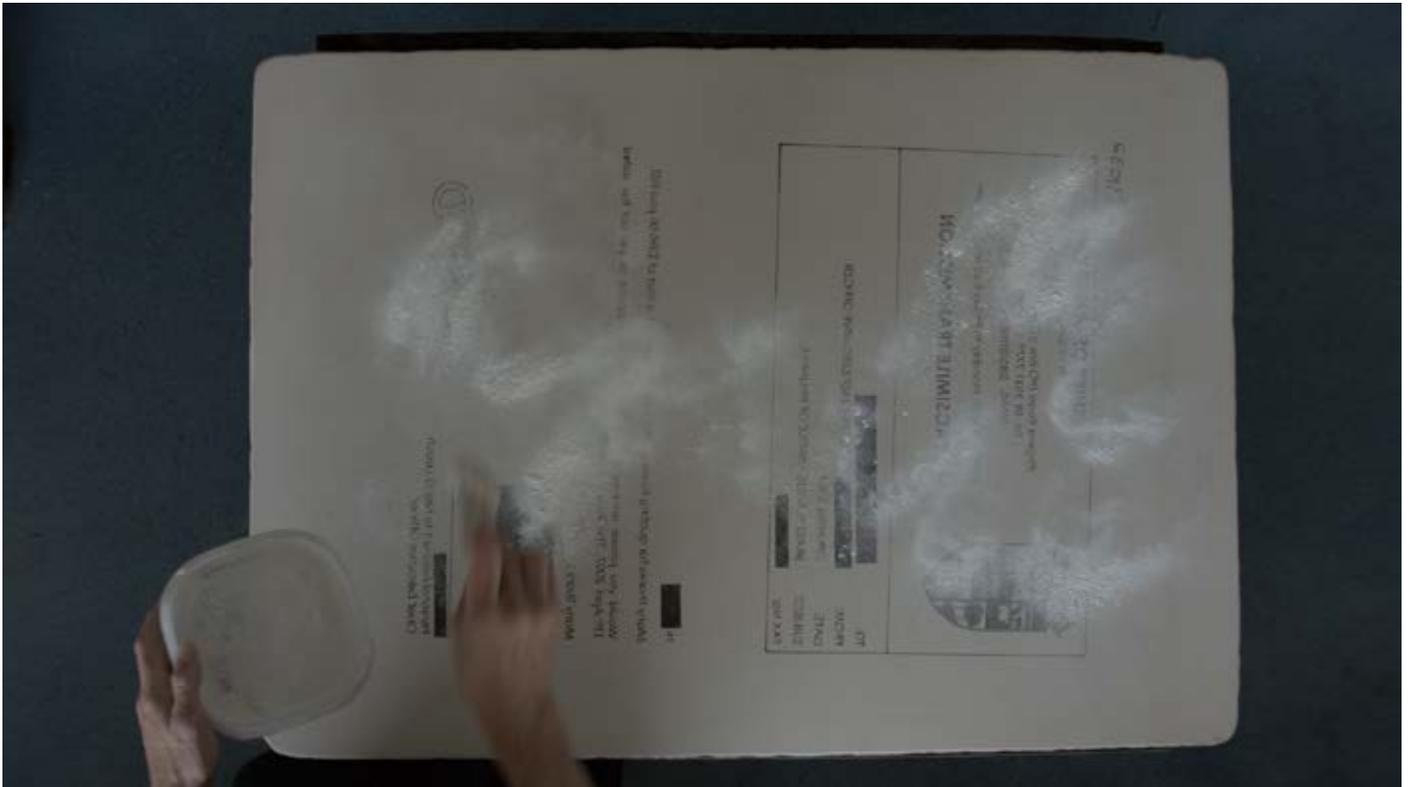
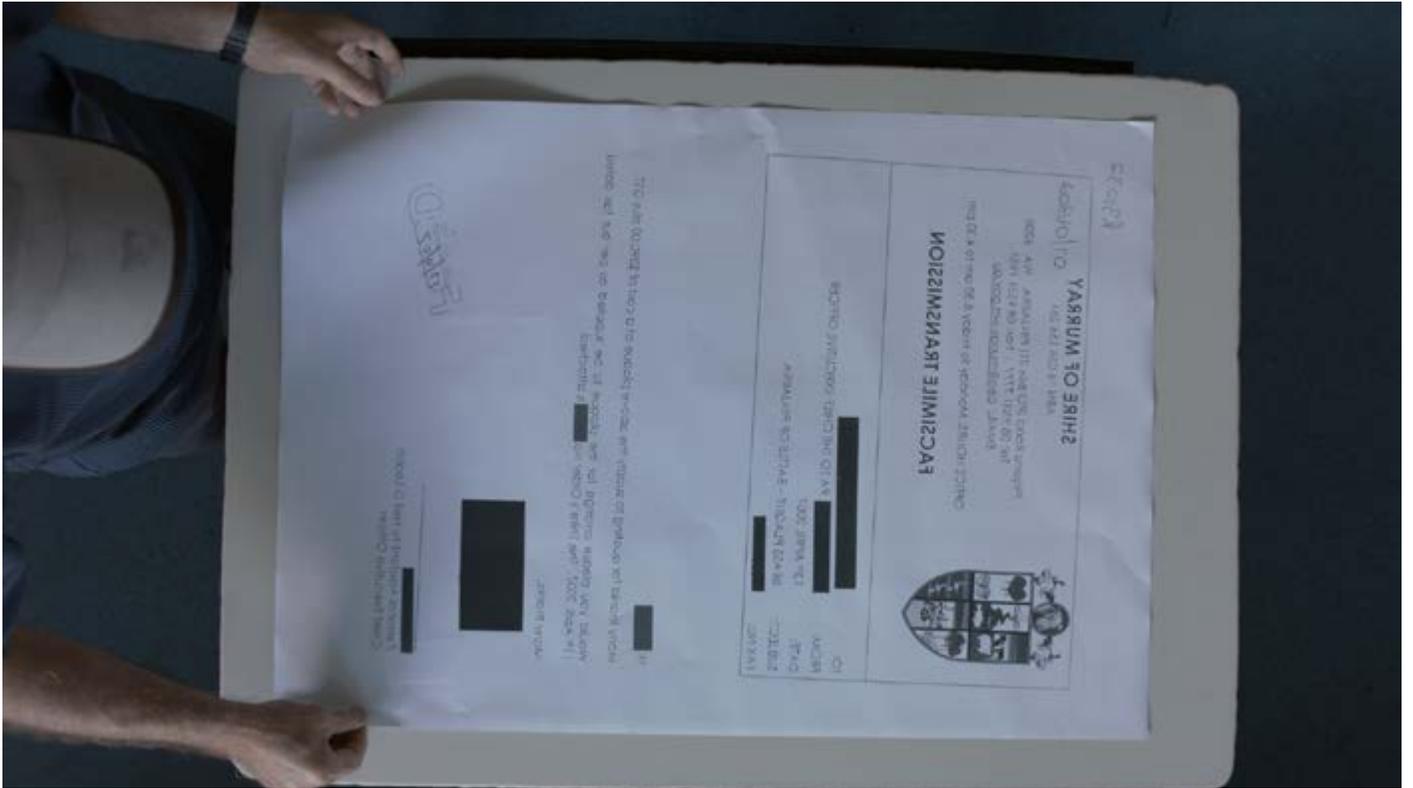


Figure 9. Mandurah, 2014.
Photo: Maddie Leach.



For Bindjareb Nyungar, and for many other locals, the ‘border’ between City of Mandurah and Pinjarra in the Shire of Murray remains nominal and fluid. Workers at the Alcoa Refinery live in Mandurah and work in Pinjarra and cross the Serpentine River Bridge every day. The colonial settlement of Mandurah was, for most of its short life, part of the Shire of Murray, and in 2015 there was the distinct ‘threat’ of amalgamation in which it was likely that Shire of Murray would reluctantly join City of Mandurah. The distance between the two places is about a 25-minute drive.

Although I tried to form various project ideas for the city of Mandurah itself, I repeatedly gravitated to Pinjarra, to the massacre site and specifically its memorial boulder and absent plaque. What transpired was conversation and research focusing on a large piece of rock marking the site and the removal of the two plaques that have been attached to it. Their noticeable absence and a decade-long impasse about the wording on the plaque between the Shire and the Murray District Aboriginal Council became a persistent force in my thinking.⁷ The resulting project has manifested in two parts: firstly, a film that records the reproduction of a redacted Shire of Murray fax document on a large lithographic stone and an enigmatic interchange of white, black and brown liquids, potions and powders within the process; secondly, a newspaper reproduction of the resulting lithograph, with further information removed, printed in the Mandurah Coastal Times on the day the *spaced 2: future recall* exhibition opened in Perth. In this public, deliberately ‘out of context’ form, the lithograph document was fleetingly circulated to 37,000 homes across the Mandurah-Pinjarra region. The specificity of the project’s title *28th October 2834* was taken from a recurrent typographic mistake in Shire minutes regarding the date of the massacre and intentionally operates as a form of enigmatic forecast. I simply liked the way a typist’s mistake adds a thousand years to any potential resolution within the debate.



Page 188. Figure 10-11. HD video still, 28th October 2834, 2015.

City of Mandurah were my hosts and my ‘community partner’ for the *Spaced* residency but they requested that none of their logos or their name were to be associated with my project. I understood that this was because my conceptual interests had crossed the City border to the Shire of Murray and, more specifically, to the Pinjarra Massacre site. In a meeting I explained how I failed to see why, after being taken on ‘Cultural Tour’ to Pinjarra in my first week in Mandurah, the narratives of that place were suddenly off limits. The answer I received was that ‘it was Shire of Murray business’.

I left Mandurah with a sense of my own resistance directed towards the place itself and the limitations that were outlined in my final meeting with the City. My thinking process had developed diagrammatically. I had maps that drew lines back and forth between Mandurah and Pinjarra, Mandurah and Binningup, Mandurah and Perth. These were trajectories I had observed actively in everyday conversations, in newspapers, on transport and communication routes. It was a thought process based on comprehending permeable, shifting relationships and perceived borders operative between one place and another. Not unsurprisingly, it also revealed long-remembered distinctions and entrenched divisions.

Evening Echo and *28th October 2834* are offered here for their shared exploration of artistic strategies in which the production or existence of permanent artefacts are navigated via methods of limited accessibility or reduced visibility, potential disappearance or displacement, adjustment or transformation. I position both within the broad term ‘public practice’ and each actively encounter memorials and ideas of memorialisation. They are also reliant on the circulation and social re-telling of a narrative (story) arising from context-based research. Together they propose an operational logic in which the absence, or partial presence, of physical objects and actions requests an imaginative act on the part of a viewing/visiting audience. Each project has developed through a combination of active administration and serendipitous diversion, what artist Ian Hunter has referred to as an unfolding of ‘the presented problem and the discovered problem’.⁸ I also suggest these projects have composed an ‘alternate politic’ to official histories, magnifying and revealing their gaps.

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THE TIMES, Mandurah, February 18, 2015

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Raine & Home

Figure 12: Mandurah Coastal Times, 18 February 2015.

Endnotes

1. Mick Wilson, 'Nightflight thoughts: Echoes, lights, darknesses'. *Evening Echo*, Cork, National Sculpture Factory, 2011.
2. Fred Rosehill quoted from personal conversation with Maddie Leach. Fred noted an alternative method used to determine sunset and when to light candles on the nights of Hanukkah.
3. The list of dates was intended as a reference for the first 50 years of the artwork's lifetime rather than proscribing a finite duration.
4. For an interesting analogy to the condition of artists and 'non-residency' see Jessyca Hutchens and Darren Jorgensen, 'Fly In Fly Out Artists of WA', *Artlink* 353, no. 3 (September 2015), <https://www.artlink.com.au/articles/4360/fly-in-fly-out-artists-of-western-australia/>.
5. Marco Marcon, Conversation with the author, February 2014.
6. Conversation with the author, March 2014.
7. Shire of Murray archives supplied documentation of council minutes where the debate reoccurs and is recorded over more than a decade.
8. Ian A. Hunter, PhD dissertation, Manchester Polytechnic (1992).

Biographical Note

Maddie Leach was born in Auckland, New Zealand and was a Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Massey University Wellington from 2001-2016. She is currently Senior Lecturer at Valand Academy, University of Gothenburg, Sweden. Recent presentations of her work include: *The Grief Prophesy* (2017) for Gothenburg International Biennial for Contemporary Art; *The Blue Spring / Mata Air Murni* (2015) for Jakarta Biennale, Indonesia; *28th October 2834* (2015) for Spaced: Future Recall at Western Australian Museum, Perth. Her project *If you find the good oil let us know* (2012-2014) was nominated for the Walters Prize 2014 at Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand. She also a candidate for PhD by Publication at Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia.

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