

Thanks to the IRIS Graduate Student Summer Fieldwork Award and BLAC Foundation Award, I was able to complete research for my dissertation in Australia between May 15th and August 23rd. During those months, I visited sites of Indigenous media production, storage, and exhibition, where I conducted interviews and analyzed productions held onsite. This research has been integral to helping me answer the questions explored in my dissertation, which looks at the Australian film industry to theorize the relationship between landscape and cinema: how are mediated representations of landscape important to our sense of belonging? What are the different options for the stylistic expression of landscape? How have institutions mediated the meanings and reception of landscape themed works?

To answer these questions, I explore the relations between globally dispersed film production and exhibition and Australia's local production centres, including its media precincts, post-production houses, and Indigenous media centres. Last Fall, I conducted fieldwork in Australia at media precincts and moving image institutions. At the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) and Australian Centre of the Moving Image (ACMI), I viewed Indigenous made films that engage with landscape and focused on the ways that their meanings are framed by the conditions of their exhibition. This summer, I continued this fieldwork by visiting Indigenous media centres and organizations that produce, archive, and exhibit these films for local communities.

I had intended to visit two organizations in the Northern Territory; however, I discovered three organizations that were better suited to helping me answer my research questions: Bilbie Virtual Studios, which specializes in VR landscapes, CAAMA, the oldest Indigenous media association in the nation, and Watch This Space, a grassroots organization that supports experimental artists. As my previous research was focused on groups that have worked directly with these organizations, and because they enable me to answer questions to do with media convergence and the relationship between mainstream media, experimental,

and Indigenous art, I decided that I would use them as my primary case studies in three dissertation chapters.

Between May 15-July 22, I stayed in Brisbane, Qld. Here, I visited Bilbie Virtual Studios, a company that has initiated the “Virtual Songlines” project, which involves the creation of interactive, multi-user, precolonial virtual versions of Australian cities and rural areas, and it is currently being implemented in schools, libraries, and other private and public cultural institutions to educate its users about Indigenous cultural heritage. Many of these virtual projects are currently in development, so it was extremely helpful to view the initial prototypes and to talk with the company founder Brett Leavy about the philosophy, intentions, and challenges involved with the project. By attending events around Brisbane and surrounds during NAIDOC Week (National Aborigines’ and Islanders’ Day Observance Committee) – a week-long event celebrating the history, culture, and accomplishments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – I was able to observe the ways that the production centre exhibits its work to local communities, as well as how it is important to national remembering and archival practices.

In addition, I attended other events in QLD during the month of July that also helped illuminate the technologies, practices, infrastructural and cultural networks employed for the creation of virtual landscapes. At the State Library, I attended the “Black Gloves” experience, where librarian Tania Schafer presented First Nations collection items that were used to design virtual heritage landscapes. At the Powerhouse Museum, the developer software was presented along with new prototypes. It was incredibly valuable to see first-hand the local spaces in which this work is displayed and produced, and to learn more about these practices from the creators themselves.

The second phase of my research took place in Alice Springs, where I conducted interviews with curators working at Indigenous media institutions responsible for archiving

and disseminating Indigenous moving image media to local audiences. CAAMA is the oldest Indigenous media association in the nation, owned and controlled by the Indigenous people of Central Australia and operates as a not-for-profit Indigenous corporation. Today, many Indigenous media associations, both in Australia and overseas, draw upon the CAAMA model to broadcast media to remote areas. Visiting CAAMA allowed me to explore the rich history of the institution and to learn more about its strategies and challenges as it continues to provide a voice for Indigenous aspirations and to sustain languages and cultures that have long been threatened by settler colonial practices.

On the other hand, Watch This Space is an artist run organization established in 1993 that functions as a resource for local collectives and artists to produce, exhibit, and distribute their work. The organization positions itself against the mainstream media industries and the institutionalization, tokenization, and over-professionalization of art and artists. Here, I was able to experience an alternative, grassroots organization's processes of art making that is aimed at fostering critical conversations, experimentation, and ideas at a local level. By interviewing local artists and talking with audiences and curators, I gathered material that provides a useful comparison with my research at CAAMA, allowing me to explore the different ways that they operate in relation to the mainstream film industry.

This research trip allowed me to glean much insight into the different options available for the production, exhibition, and distribution of Indigenous moving image art in Australia. It allowed me to gather information that will help me write my dissertation, and importantly, it also allowed me to hear the ways that Indigenous artists conceive of landscape in their own voice, and to observe how their art functions within the local communities for which they are often made. I am extremely grateful to IRIS and the BLAC foundation for supporting this research and making it possible.