The itinerant text: walking between the lines with Stephen Muecke and Mark Minchinton

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Abstract

‘Itinerant texts’, like the ‘outlaw genres’ of Karen Caplan, may be found haunting the alleys that both separate and connect the dwellings of majority culture, shaking the foundations, rattling the windows and doors, distressing the occupants within. The itinerant text is that which refuses to be pinned down, moves around at will, eludes claims to knowledge and possession by critical orthodoxies, and threatens the cultural order by which it is encircled and which it is continuously attempting to disrupt, outflank and outmanoeuvre. The trope of the itinerant text was taken up by Stephen Muecke in the 1980s in relation to his cross-cultural collaboration with Paddy Roe on Gularabulu (1983) and Reading the Country (1984), and has been deployed somewhat differently by Mark Minchinton in his 2003 interactive web-based walking and writing project, Kellerberrin Walking. Kellerberrin Walking covers Minchinton’s physical, intellectual and psychological trek along a route that begins in Busselton via Perth and Wyalkatchem and concludes in Kellerberrin, Western Australia in order to retrace the Indigenous side of his family’s heritage. This paper will explore the ways in which Minchinton and Muecke each self-consciously ironise the problematic trope of the ‘nomad’ as it was used by settlers and anthropologists to characterise the structure and rhythm of Aboriginal relationships with land and place, drawing instead on models of itinerancy that can yield new ways of transforming static formations of cross-cultural power, identity and belonging without supplanting Indigenous claims or relationships to land. It will also touch on the way in which each of these writers provisionally constructs an ‘itinerant’ reader through the representational strategies and risks that characterise their texts.