Writing & vagabondage in southwest Western Australia: Kellerberrin Walking

Mark Minchinton

Abstract

I was born in Victoria, but my ‘Aboriginal’ grandmother lived in West Australia. In Busselton she was ‘black’; in Kellerberrin ‘white’. Her children were either ignorant of, or denied, their Aboriginal descent. I do not identify as Aboriginal. Nor do I identify as not-Aboriginal. Like Lynette Russell, I ‘deliberately choos[e] to not decide … I will be either/or and I will be neither/nor’ (Russell 2001).

In 2003, I walked c.600km from Busselton to Perth, Perth to Kellerberrin. This was auto-ethnographic research produced as a performance, Void: Kellerberrin walking, for the National Review of Live Art (Minchinton 2003). I wanted to walk some of the country from which I felt excluded by my family’s inability or refusal to acknowledge their indigenous past. I wanted that country to reclaim me. And I wanted to open my experience to others: twice daily, I stopped, took photos and wrote about what I heard, touched, saw, smelled, tasted, found, felt, thought, remembered, or imagined at the stopping places. Daily, I uploaded the photos and texts to the Internet where visitors viewed, read, and, in some cases, responded to them. This, then, was a journey in and through place, memory, imagination, and on-line. Simultaneously actual, virtual, psychological, and spiritual, I explored country, myself, and others through walking and my understandings of race, colonialism, and identity.

***

Slavin, ruminating on walking as a spiritual practice, reports that for Abraham (Abraham 1995) ‘there is not a perception of rhythm but a “rhythmisation of perception”. … In other words, the binary of perceiving subject and external object is undermined’ (Slavin 2003). This paper explores the undermining of subjectivity/objectivity through writing/vagabondage from my position as a post-colonial subject.

***