

THE YEOMANS PROJECT

IAN MILLISS & LUCAS IHLEIN

YEOMANSPROJECT.COM

NOVEMBER 2013

“No artist or artisan ever has such broad control of the medium through which he expresses his own character and personality as does the farmer or grazier in the control he can exercise over his land. The landman can create his own landscape, but the artist gives only his impression of it.” P.A. Yeomans from *The Challenge of Landscape*, 1958



Film still from P.A. Yeomans - *Keyline in the Kiewa Valley*, Geoffrey Booth 1981

ABOUT THIS PROJECT

Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein

This newspaper began as a blog. It is an integral part of a collaborative project by Lucas Ihlein and Ian Milliss investigating the work and influence of P.A. Yeomans.

Yeomans was an Australian farmer and engineer, whose early work in developing sustainable agriculture systems can (we argue) be seen as a model for a radical re-interpretation of the role of the artist.

Yeomans' early research in managing water flows on farms has been internationally influential. His “Keyline design principles”, including his particular ploughing method for drought-stricken land, are now part of the sustainable agriculture curricula in many colleges and universities, as well as being embraced by Permaculture design courses.

Since his death, Yeomans' work has also been adapted for sociological, psychological, and in some cases, even pseudo-religious purposes. As cities expand, some of the farms he experimented on are being reclaimed, controversially, as suburban housing developments. Yeomans' name is regularly evoked on talk-back radio as a key to solving the social and ecological crisis of the Murray-Darling water allocations. And from our own point of view, we see Yeomans as providing an alternative historical model for regenerative Land Art.

The *Yeomans Project* pursues all these strands simultaneously. The project will involve participation from a range of other artists, agriculturalists and rural interest groups, and will take the form of a blog, a series of workshops, prints and public tours.

Beginning with an extensive list of Yeomans' connections, we have embarked on a ‘rambling’ course of research, following leads as they arise.

As part of the project, we have printed a series of diagrammatic “info-graphics” using the Big Fag Press. We've run some bus tours to learn about Keyline ploughing techniques; and we've delivered a few performative lectures about our process of getting to know the phenomenon of P.A. Yeomans.

Our project has taken us to some of the particular “sites of Yeomans significance”, such as his original demonstration farm in Kurmond, Western Sydney; as well as to Milkwood Farm in Mudgee, and Taranaki Farm on the outskirts of Melbourne. We've been lucky to meet some of Yeomans' descendents, to explore his legacy from a more personal perspective.

We've also revisited (via archival research) a project initiated (but never realised) in 1976, in which Ian Milliss planned to present an exhibition about Yeomans at the Art Gallery of NSW (AGNSW). The 1976 exhibition was cancelled because the trustees of the AGNSW felt that it resembled too closely an “agricultural trade show”.

P.A. YEOMANS

Percival Alfred Yeomans (1904 – 1984) was an Australian inventor known for the Keyline system for the development of land and increasing the fertility of that land. As a mining engineer and gold assayer, Yeomans had developed a keen sense of hydrology and equipment design.

Upon his brother's death in a grass fire, Percival Alfred Yeomans assumed management of a large tract of land he later named Nevallan in New South Wales. Here he developed improved methods and equipment for cultivation. His designs won him

The Prince Philip Design Award in the year 1974.

His Keyline principles or concepts (Keyline Design) have been adopted by farm owners in almost every country in the world. Yeomans' Keyline concepts are now part of the curriculum of many sustainable agriculture courses in colleges and universities across the world. His ideas have also been a key factor in the development of permaculture design. P.A. Yeomans wrote four books; *The Keyline Plan*, *The Challenge of Landscape*, *Water For Every Farm* and *The City Forest*.

About Us

Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein

Lucas Ihlein is an artist who often works collaboratively with groups such as Big Fag Press, SquatSpace, Teaching and Learning Cinema and NUCA. His work takes the form of performances, cinema events, lithographic prints, writing, public lectures and blogs. In recent years Lucas has been working on a series of ‘blogging as art’ projects. In 2009 he completed a practice based PhD thesis entitled *Framing Everyday Experience: Blogging as Art*. His website is <http://lucazoid.com>

Ian Milliss in his 45 years as an artist has been a formalist, a conceptualist, a green bans and anti-prison activist and a founder of the Artworkers Union. He has worked with Christo & Jeanne-Claude, the trade union movement, the Australia Council and its Art & Working Life Programme, in squatting, political campaigning and social marketing, publishing, independent film and video distribution, policy development, IT consultancy, corporate mentoring, art and heritage management, blogging, creative industry development and more. Although he occasionally exhibits, he has always thought that galleries are just one small part of the range of tools available for the artist's job of cultural innovation and adaptation. His website is: <http://milliss.com>

We came together for this project because we have many shared interests

and surprising parallels in our careers (if you can call them that), while the differences in our ages and personalities means we also have quite a few minor but significant differences of opinion as we are sure you will see.

You can contact us on info@yeomansproject.com



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We would like to thank Allan Yeomans and Trevor Carter of Yeomans Plow Company for lending the plow and for their assistance in this exhibition, and Julie McGrath and Wendy Yeomans for loan of family material and their assistance.

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Where Do We Come From?

What Are We? Where Are We Going?

Ian Milliss

Published: 9 May '11

Just as Gauguin put it in the title to his greatest painting - *Where Do We Come From? What Are We? Where Are We Going?* Well, I'll try and give a quick summary of what we are doing here and what we hope to achieve.

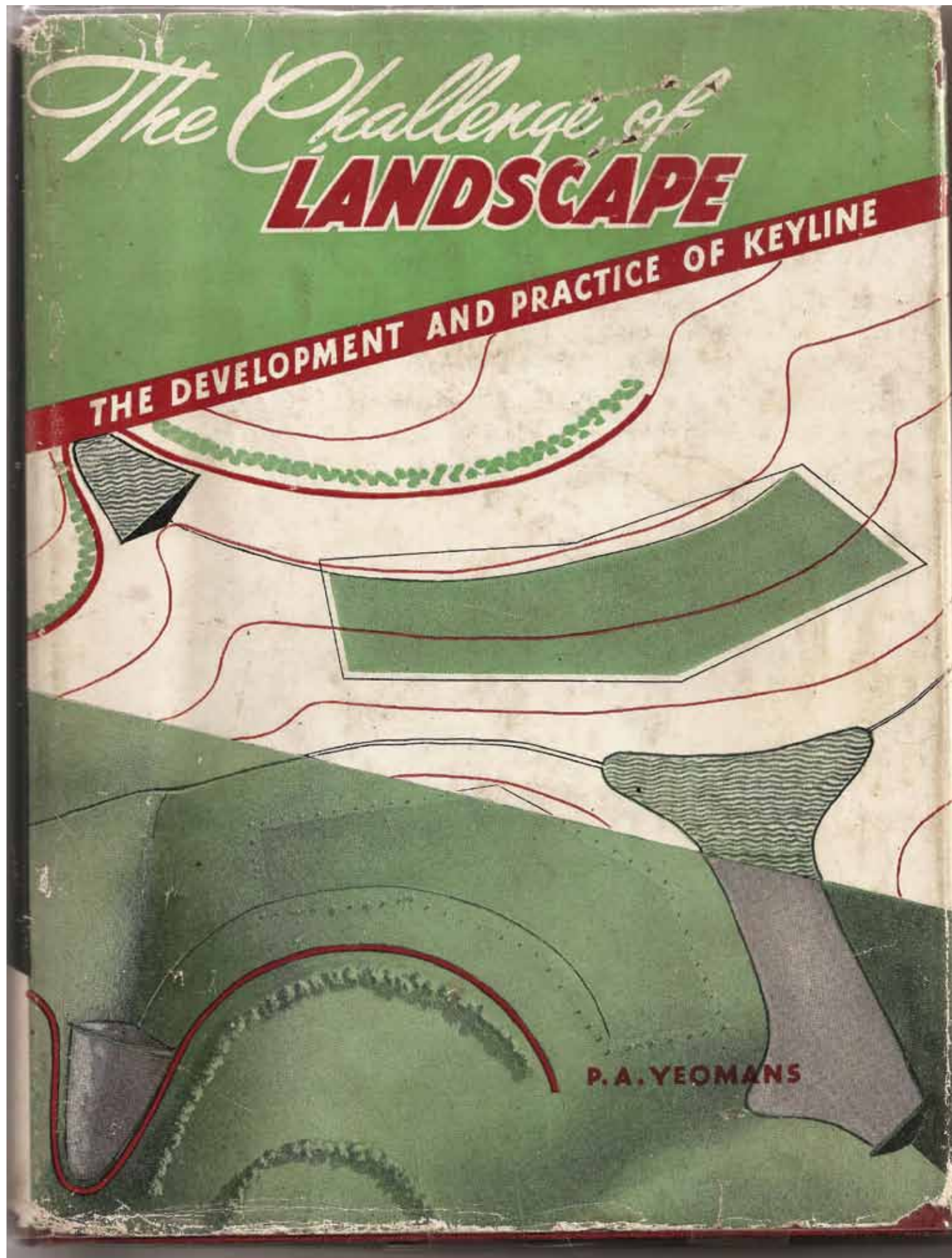
This blog is an exploration of the work of the Australian agriculturalist and engineer P. A. (Percy) Yeomans, but that is just the starting point.

While exploring his work, we will also explore the way cultural influence develops and cultural memes evolve, and we will be chasing off after the many links that his work has to issues ranging from sustainable agriculture and climate change to the definition of art, from the eminently sensible to the hilariously crazy.

The project began with an invitation by curator Hannah Mathews to Lucas Ihlein to participate in an exhibition she is curating for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA). (The show was originally to be called *Neo-Con*, but the title was later changed to the rather more wordy *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art*.) An early precis of the show gives you a sense of its scope:

"Neo-Con brings together a recent generation of Australian and international artists whose works are linked by a specific interest in the ideas, artists and artworks of the conceptual art movement of the 1960s and 70s. These artists' relationships to this period are often activated by a direct engagement with material sourced from first wave conceptual art practices, including art works and events. Some of the artists focus on the legends and myths that have been built around this movement and its attendant claims of mysticism. While others are connected through their adaptation and continuation of key strategies initiated by the pioneers of conceptual art almost fifty years ago. In a contemporary situation where revisiting histories and rewriting stories is an everyday practice, and a work of possible and continuous reinvention, these artists have approached Conceptual Art with an energising sense of freedom."

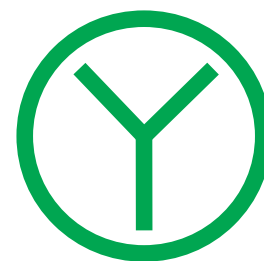
-Hannah Mathews, Curator



Yeomans' 1958 book *The Challenge of Landscape* was the second of his three books on farming and Keyline.



Artist as Family: Zero, Meg, Patrick, Woody, Zephyr: <<http://theartistasfamily.blogspot.com.au/>>



Milkwood Permaculture: <<http://milkwoodpermaculture.com.au/>>

Lucas approached me to do a collaborative version of an exhibition I had planned at the AGNSW in the mid 70s on the life and work of Yeomans, an exhibition that was cancelled by the Trustees – but more about that later. We will be approaching the same material in the form that would naturally be used now, a blog, some large prints in the gallery (done at Big Fag Press) and a number of events. We will probably also do a few things in other media as we get the urge.

We won't be following too much of a structure, we'll just blog on things as they occur and while addressing Hannah's premises we hope to cover a wide range of material, and also to bring in other people to talk about their work. Some of the artists we'll be looking at include Milkwood Permaculture, Artist As Family, (f)route and Diego Bonetto and hopefully a few other artists who are involved in creating the cultural change necessary for us to achieve sustainability.



Diego Bonetto: <<http://www.weedyconnection.com/>>

COMMENTS:

Lucas Ihlein Posted 19 May '11

Thanks Ian. Yes, it's exciting to finally start the *Yeomans Project*.

My own interest: I've been wanting for a few years now to do some sort of collaborative thing with Ian. When Hannah invited me to take part in her exhibition at ACCA about "the legacy of Conceptual Art", I realised the time had come.

This project gives Ian and I a chance to work together. We are an embodiment of the exhibition's aim to bring together "conceptual art then and now". Our collaboration will be an intergenerational "getting to know you", as much as it will be about Yeomans...

I must say, my knowledge of Yeomans and his work is almost nil. When I did a permaculture course with Milkwood last year, we did a bit of thinking about Yeomans' Keyline ploughing system. And I remember thinking that it was an amazingly simple and exciting innovation. I also keep hearing Yeomans mentioned on ABC radio, whenever discussions come up about dryland farming and water access (eg in relation to the recent water showdown around the Murray Darling). But that's about it.

So the *Yeomans Project* is my chance to move from Yeomans Novice to Yeomans Nerd. I'm sure Ian's motivations are somewhat different. But that's a start!



(f)route: <<http://www.froute.com.au/>>



Ian's Six-wheeler turns off the highway onto Yeomans Road

Beginning our Yeomans Adventure

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 10 Jun '11

Today Ian and I embarked on our first adventure into Yeomans-land.

I took the train to Penrith, where Ian picked me up in his macho ute (6 wheels!), and we headed north to Nevallan. We didn't really know what we'd do when we got there – and in fact, we didn't really end up doing much at all. Just nosy-ing around really.

As we drove north, Ian filled me in. Nevallan was one of Yeomans' experimental properties, where he tried out some of his Keyline farming techniques.

The Yeomans family doesn't own the land any more – and I'd heard somehow that it was slated for redevelopment. But when we got there,

we could see that it was still recognisable as having been seriously Yeomans-ised. There's a large dam at the bottom of the hill along Yeomans Road [bottom left]. You can also see a string of trees, just above the line of the dam [right].

On Google satellite, the treelines look quite striking [bottom right]. The whole landscape had a friendly feel. I don't know why. Maybe something about the rolling hills, the groomed lines of trees, the cheerful cows. We decided to push on up and visit the homestead, see if we could find out more.

Up the top of the hill, we found an old farmhouse. Nobody was there but a barking, harmless pooch. We drove on to the yard – still nobody. And then on the way back, we saw a ute approaching.



String of trees above the dam at Nevallan



Large dam at Nevallan



Google satellite image of Nevallan <<http://bit.ly/14WhdxD>>



Entrance to Nevallan (now called "Nevellan") farm

Ian hopped out, and had a ute-to-ute chat with the farmer. Both men were about the same vintage.

Ian explained our project (such as it is, having hardly begun) – that we're doing some research on Yeomans and his ways of designing landscape, and we're going around checking out the old properties he'd worked on.

The farmer replied, "Yeah well you know of course we don't do things the same way here any more". He explained that the labour costs of farming in the Yeomans fashion made it impossible these days. "I use pumps and pipes to move the water round now." The farmer agreed to meet with us for a bit longer, in a few weeks time, and show us around the land, "as long as you indicate on your website that it's a private place. I don't want hordes of people tramping up here." We reassured him that we would pass that message along. The farmer's name was Bob.

[Below] is the view from the yard where Ian and Bob had their ute-chat (note the meandering fenceline).

We drove around a bit, but we couldn't find any better vantage points – that will have to wait til our official visit with Bob. So we went up to the little town of Kurrajong to have some lunch.

* * *

While we ate, Ian and I talked about our own histories, our own relationships to the art world, how we ended up where we are now. Besides chasing Mr Yeomans, this chatting-with-each-other is another "keyline" of our project.

I guess the idea is to look into the intergenerational stuff surrounding this oddball brand of "conceptual art" that we do. I was surprised to find out how young Ian was in the early 1970s, how he was already exhibiting in the Sydney art scene *when he was still in*

highschool. Talk about precocious. Oh, and he didn't actually study art, formally speaking, but learned a lot from hanging around with the older artists at the Central Street Gallery, a key independent art space in Sydney in the late 1960s.

I love this photo, which shows a young Steve Mori in a poster for a guest lecture by Ian Milliss at East Sydney Tech art school c.1971 (Ian would only have been 21 years old at the time!) [top right].

These days, Ian has a particularly cranky way of looking at the artworld. It's a bit strange, because, as he says, when he was a teenager he was very keen to be a part of it all. But it didn't take long before the politics of polite avant-garde object-making, upon which careers are made, annoyed him too much, and he turned to other, more direct methods for making changes in the world: squat activism, union communications and graphics. (To be honest, I still don't really understand how it could be possible to see through the artworld's machinations so critically, at such a young age.)

As to Ian's current slow journey back to the artworld. How to make sense of it? Selling out? Going soft in his old age? I think Ian realises that the problems he identified with systems of art making and distribution, way back then, are still with us. But there are two ways of dealing with it. One is to turn your back on the whole thing and have nothing to do with it. The other is to take what you've got and head into the Heart of Mordor. (And in this *Yeomans Project*, I guess I'll be Sam to his Frodo...)

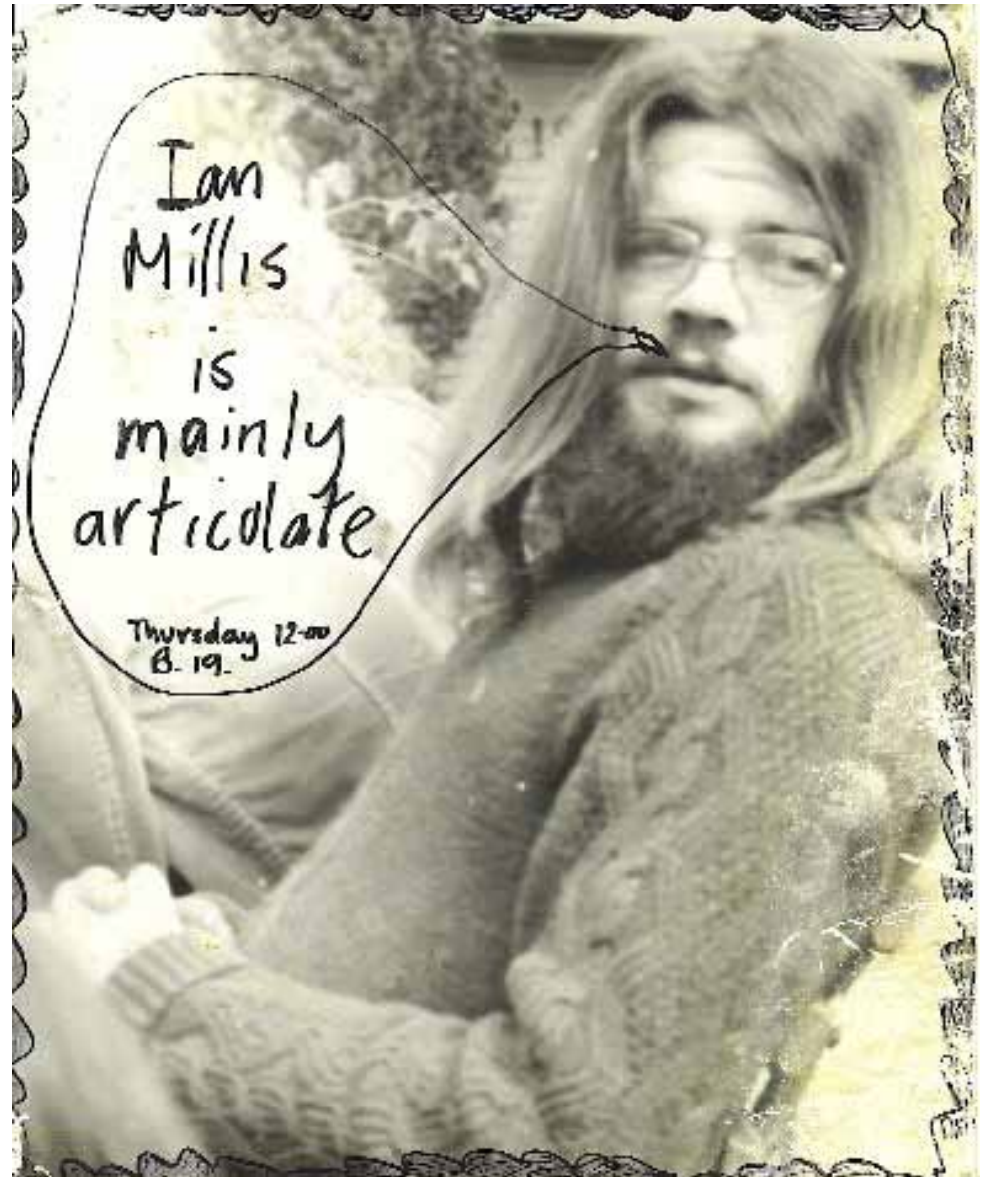
And as for why various figures in the artworld are all of a sudden interested in Ian again, after 35 years out in the cold? Ian's explanation is as follows:

"Well, as my wife Wendy says, I'm the biggest unrenovated house on the block."

And with that real estate metaphor I will leave it, for now...



Fenceline following the land contour at Nevallan



Poster for Ian Milliss guest lecture at East Sydney Tech, c.1971

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss

Posted 11 June '11

I suppose this means I'll have to break a lifelong prejudice and read Tolkien to work out exactly how much I'm being satirised in this instance. Is Frodo the one with goat's feet? That would explain it given Lucas's unlikely interest in goats, he got very excited whenever we drove past any. But we had a very enjoyable wander around, it's always fun showing a place you like to someone who appreciates it.

One curious thing about this property is the name. Yeomans called it Nevallan after two of his sons, Neville and Allan, but it is now Nevellan – so everything evolves, not just the way the farm now operates but even the name.

Lucas is right, there is something peculiarly comforting about it as a landscape, more than normal geometric farmland or even untouched bush the lush pasture and the mature tree belts curving around you give it a very comfortable feel, embracing almost. It really is a very beautiful property especially given that it is high up on the Blue Mountains eastern escarpment and has spectacular views to the east across the plains to Sydney. Or at least they were plains in Yeomans' day and now they are endless suburbia which is beginning to surround the property on all sides.

Oh and incidentally my birthday is October 29 so I was only twenty for most of 1971 but I had been hanging around the art world since my earliest teens and the first large shaped canvases I showed at Central Street and at the Blaxland Gallery in 1968 had been done when I was only sixteen. By the time my practice

had inexorably developed into a sort of cultural activism in 1972 I had been exhibiting privately and publicly for five or six years so it's not that surprising that I understood how the art world worked.

The problem was that I really misunderstood how far it was prepared to change, ie not very much at all as it turned out over the next few decades, in fact if anything the late 70s were a high point and it went backwards again from there. My immaturity really showed then as I got more and more angry because of my frustration with its incredibly limiting notions of what artists could do and be and my increasing isolation, as a commercialised version of conceptualism (that I despised) took hold. That institutionalised conceptualism retained the mannerisms of conceptualism while discarding the underlying radical intent. It has been exciting in recent years to see the appearance of younger artists with some of that original radicalism just when I thought all was lost.

COMMENTS:

Diego Bonetto

Posted 11 June '11

Loved the under-developed real estate reference! so apt, as real estate (and with it bubble economy) is the very reason why such a research project as this 'adventure into Yeomans intents' (indeed political and social as much as the 'likeable' conceptual artists you refer to Ian) is so important!

Uhhh convoluted sentence. What I mean is YAY, love this project, looking forward to see the results in years to come, as all good keyline systems, the benefits are best assessed in the future.

Well done, I'll be back.

The Yeomans Real Estate Stoush

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 11 Jun '11

There's a video on YouTube¹ called *Yeomans Property Threat from Development* which documents a community meeting up near Richmond, in north-west Sydney, a couple of years ago. The meeting was held to try and halt development on the piece of farmland that Yeomans had designed and set up with his trademark series of interlinking dams.

Bob, the farmer we met yesterday, said that the development application which the locals were fighting in the video (a proposal to build an aged care facility) has by now been passed. However, it didn't seem from our visit that any work had begun yet.

The video has some interviews with PA Yeomans' son, Ken, who is a strong advocate for his fathers' farming philosophies; and with Prof. Stuart Hill². It'd be great to be able to meet and chat with these fellows.

Stuart Hill says:

"[Yeomans' method] is the only landscape system that builds landscape capital to the maximum amount."

Obviously, what we're talking about here are two very different systems of "landscape capital" – one which is about improving the quality of the soil, and the other involving subdividing and selling off the land as "real estate"...

From what Ken says in the video, the two systems *could* work together, if the subdivisions were sensitive to the water flows and storage on the land. But it's hard to imagine that actually happening in Sydney...

¹<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s1ll-znogTk>

²<http://www.stuartbhill.com/>

*Consult the genius of the place in all;
That tells the waters or to rise, or fall;
Or helps th' ambitious hill the heav'ns to scale,
Or scoops in circling theatres the vale;
Calls in the country, catches opening glades,
Joins willing woods, and varies shades from shades,
Now breaks, or now directs, th' intending lines;
Paints as you plant, and, as you work, designs.
Still follow sense, of ev'ry art the soul,
Parts answ'ring parts shall slide into a whole,
Spontaneous beauties all around advance,
Start ev'n from difficulty, strike from chance;
Nature shall join you; time shall make it grow
A work to wonder at—perhaps a Stowe.*

- Alexander Pope

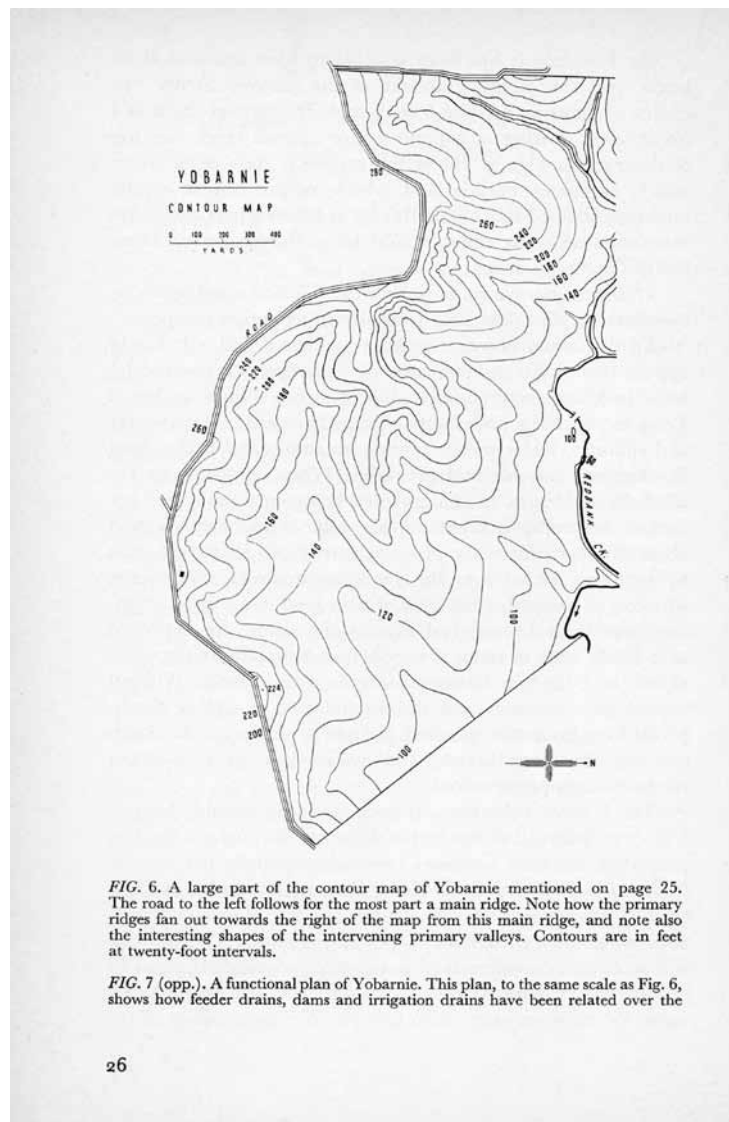
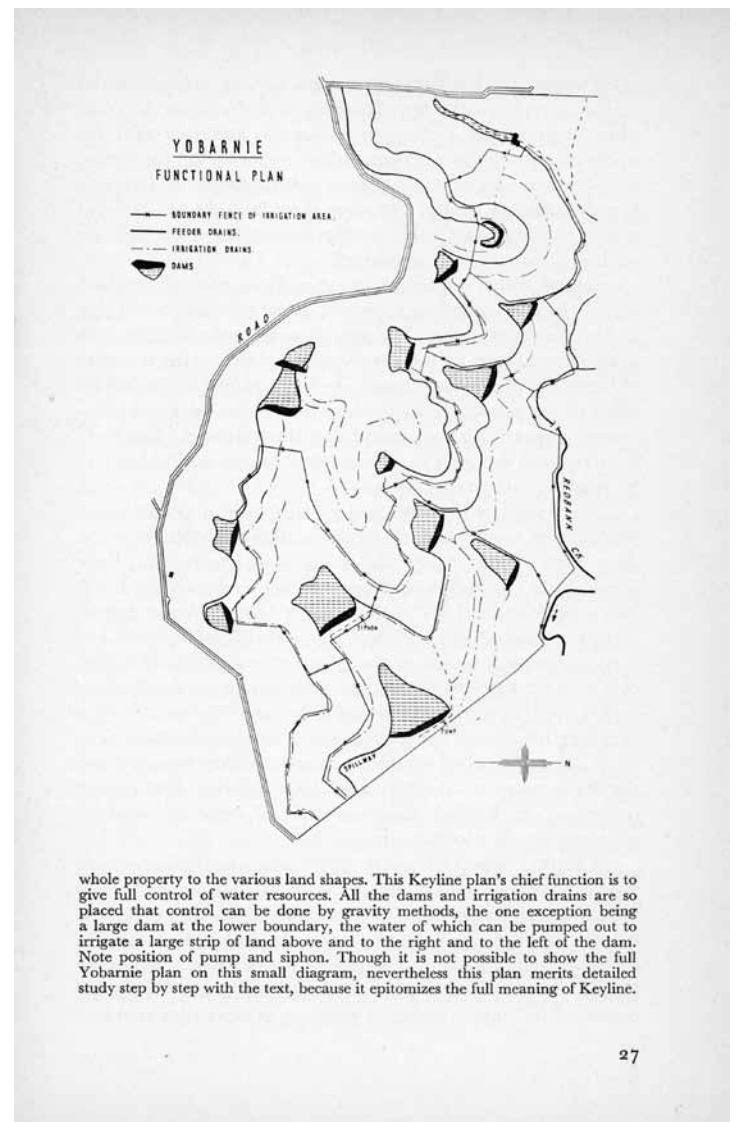


FIG. 6. A large part of the contour map of Yobarnie mentioned on page 25. The road to the left follows for the most part a main ridge. Note how the primary ridges fan out towards the right of the map from this main ridge, and note also the interesting shapes of the intervening primary valleys. Contours are in feet at twenty-foot intervals.

FIG. 7 (opp.). A functional plan of Yobarnie. This plan, to the same scale as Fig. 6, shows how feeder drains, dams and irrigation drains have been related over the



whole property to the various land shapes. This Keyline plan's chief function is to give full control of water resources. All the dams and irrigation drains are so placed that control can be done by gravity methods, the one exception being a large dam at the lower boundary, the water of which can be pumped out to irrigate a large strip of land above and to the right and to the left of the dam. Note position of pump and siphon. Though it is not possible to show the full Yobarnie plan on this small diagram, nevertheless this plan merits detailed study step by step with the text, because it epitomizes the full meaning of Keyline.

Yobarnie contour map, and PA Yeomans' Keyline design for the site, from J. MacDonald-Holmes, *Geographical and Topographical Basis of Keyline*, 1960



COMMENTS:

Lucas Ihlein

Posted 28 June '11

This stoush was featured on ABC TV in late 2009. Here's a transcript of the programme: <http://www.abc.net.au/7.30/content/2009/s2776373.htm>

A lovely thing that Percy says, which is quoted in the programme is this: PERCIVAL YEOMANS: *As soon as you've got the right attitude and the right feeling for land, it sorta tells you its secrets.*

And this is a particularly telling statement:

TRACY BOWDEN: *Heritage expert Stephen Davies was asked by Buildev to assess the heritage value of Yobarnie. He says while PA Yeomans' Keyline work is important, the property has deteriorated over the years.*

STEPHEN DAVIES: *It's no longer a good working example of it. There's some remnants of it and particularly in the dam systems and in the landscape, but not as an operating system. And so the costs involved of restoring it, actually putting back to the way Yeomans had it in the 1950s, is now considered prohibitive for the return that one might get out of that land.*

TRACY BOWDEN: *However, Buildev has agreed to retain some of the elements of Keyline in its development.*

This sounds a bit like demolishing the heritage building and keeping the facade. To retain some elements of the "look" of keyline is not really capturing

what it was all about. It was, rather, about a very particular functionality (which, for sure, resulted in a certain look.) To destroy the *functionality* is to destroy the spirit of the heritage elements of Yeoman's work.

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss

Posted 29 June '11

In all my early descriptions of Yeomans I described him as the Australian equivalent to the great 18th century English landscape gardeners like William Kent, Capability Brown and Humphrey Repton.

As it happens, Yeomans' comment *"As soon as you've got the right attitude and the right feeling for land, it sorta tells you its secrets."* has a wonderful 18th century precedent in a poem [left] by Alexander Pope, himself not only a poet but also a gentleman gardener whose garden at Twickenham was an early example of the naturalistic style. In his Epistle IV To Richard Boyle, Earl of Burlington he castigates the vulgarians who build extensive formal gardens in a nouveaux riche show of wealth and instead advocates a naturalistic landscape gardening based on classical precepts, a sort of Poussin landscape brought to life.

"Consult the genius of the place in all" was to become the great catch cry of the landscape gardening movement and it is still endlessly quoted as the basis of good landscape design.

Time Team

Ian Milliss

Published: 22 Jun '11

The late 1970s were a long time ago and it is sometimes a bit difficult to remember exactly what happened. My original proposal for an exhibition about PA Yeomans at the Art Gallery of NSW in 1976 seems so lost in the mists of time it's hard to get much together about it. Maybe it's because there are so many of these "projects that didn't happen" in my life, or at least didn't happen completely or didn't happen in their desired form, that I have a bit of a thing about them. All too often the projects that didn't happen are the really important ones, the ones that shape your thinking and lead you on to the next important thing and that is certainly true of my Yeomans exhibition proposal.

In fact I think Lucas probably came to know about it because we discussed it as part of a group of prints I wanted to do with Big Fag Press called "What Didn't Happen" and I was suggesting that Big Fag should take this on as an ongoing series inviting other artists also to make prints about their favourite projects that didn't happen.

One of the underlying aspects of this current project, but only one of several, is a bit of discussion about my original AGNSW project and its implications in the development of conceptual art in Australia. It's easily answered, there were no implications because it never happened, only myself and a couple of curators at AGNSW were aware of it. Nonetheless it was an important step in my thinking.

Lucas and I have discussed what it was meant to be like and even though my original files have been lost or discarded there are a few fragments, so trivial that they obviously weren't even filed, just tossed into my boxes of sketches and rough notes and so they have survived. It's hard to even date exactly. All that is certain is that I was working on it when I was in retreat from the Sydney madness of post Green Bans violence and anti-prison movement stress, it was one of my two major projects at the time.

Although I visited Sydney nearly every week, I was living at Napoleon Reef, just east of Bathurst, from late

1974 until 1977. In late 1977 I broke my knee and wrist during anti-uranium shipment demonstrations at White Bay container terminal so I had to remain in Sydney because I was in plaster from hip to ankle for six months. From then on I lived in Sydney for the next twenty years or more.

The remaining fragments are some notes about the exhibition which are quite possibly the earliest notes, some pamphlets about Yeomans' ploughs, a copy of a proposal by Yeomans for the design of a new city at Monarto in South Australia on Keyline principles, a letter dated September 1975 from Jeff Moss who was writing about Yeomans and a very early draft of an essay that seems to relate to the exhibition although I'm not certain because every time I start to read it I cringe in embarrassment so much that I soon give up on it.

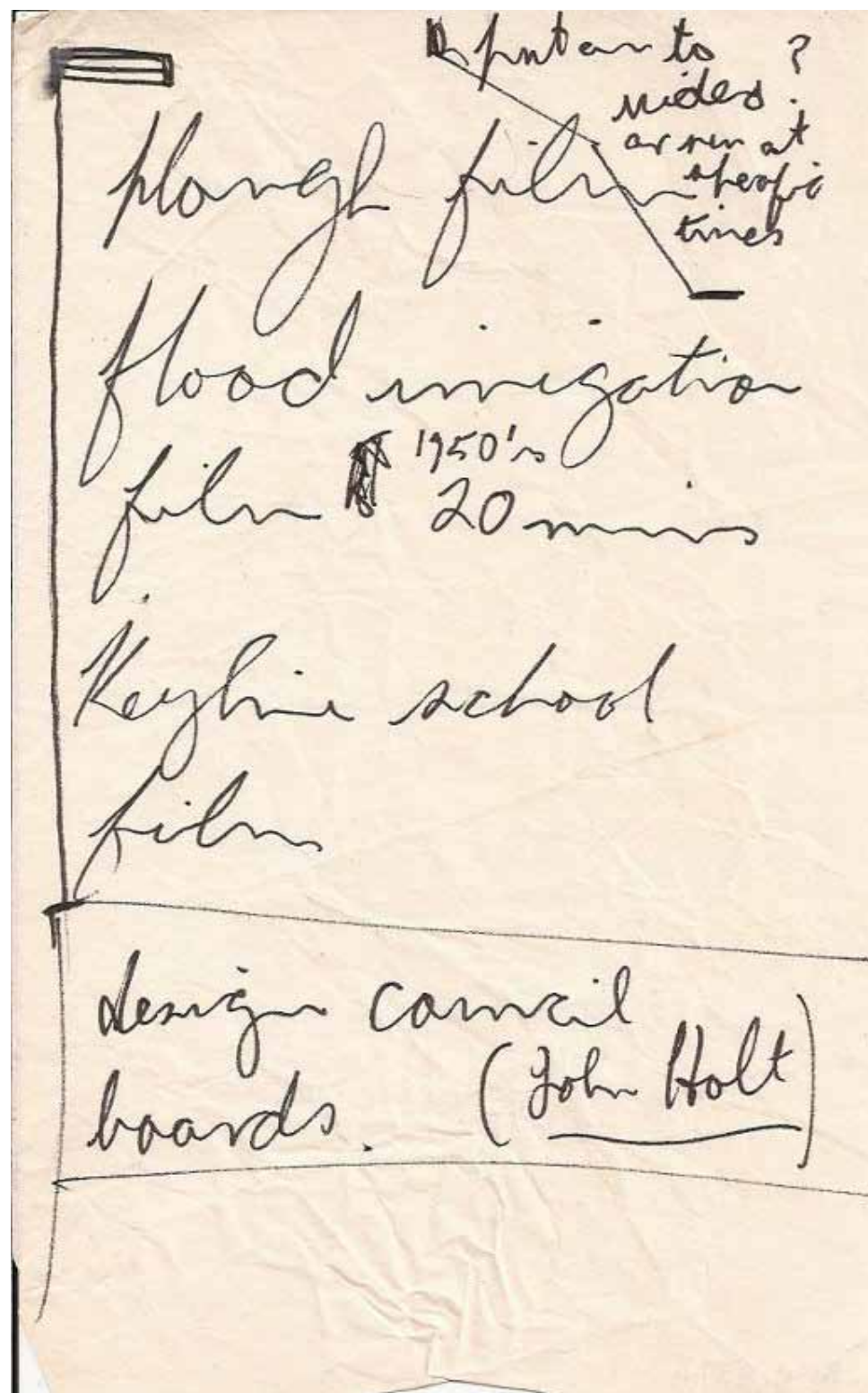
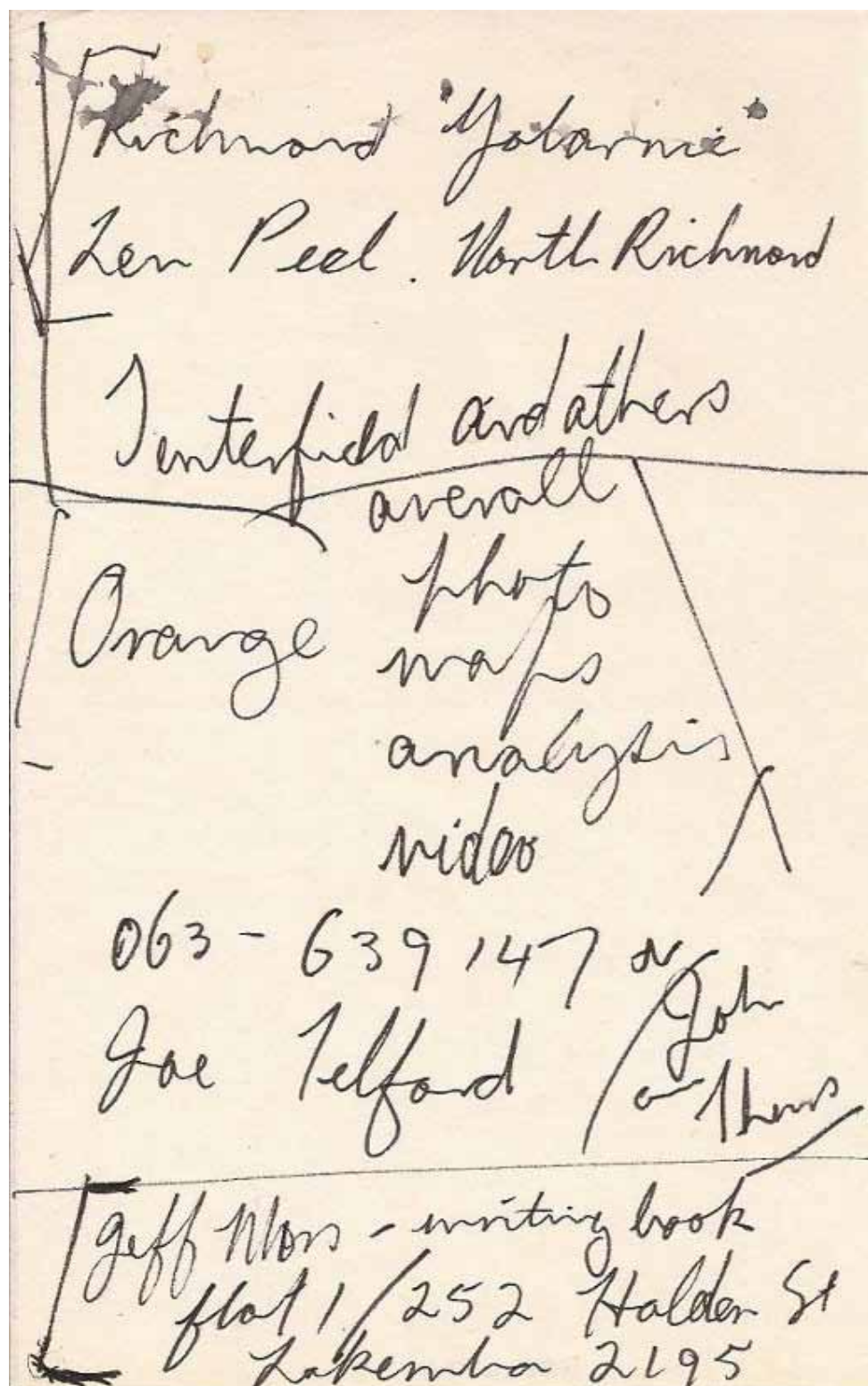
The notes are below.

I think that makes it clear the exhibition which was to be part of the AGNSW project series in the contemporary project space was to have

some of Yeomans' equipment – ploughs, lockpipe valves for dams, water levels, irrigation flags – and films and videos of his farms as well as "photo maps analysis video" explaining how the farms worked, in particular Yobarnie and his Orange property. There is even mention of Len Peel, presumably the brother of Bob Peel who we met briefly on our visit to Nevallan.

Apart from the fact that maps and photos had become pretty common in performance documentation there was not much about this that shouted "art" so you can see why the AGNSW Trustees might have been a bit puzzled by it. Although it was an exhibition curated by an artist it was almost aggressively lacking in art, it was unashamedly about an agriculturalist with controversial views on the future of farming. It wasn't even an act of Duchampian appropriation, in fact it was the exact opposite if you thought about it a bit.

What the hell was it doing in the Art Gallery of NSW?

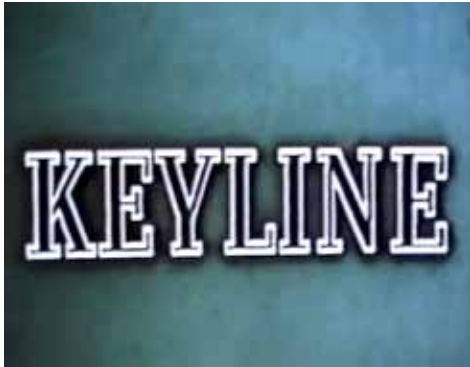


Ian Milliss' notes in preparation for 1975-6 exhibition at Art Gallery of NSW

Truly it can be said, that when the worm turns, it's a good turn for the farmer...

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 28 June '11



Film still from *Keyline*, 1955

Keyline is a film¹ on Yeomans' work in developing his landscape design system. It was made in 1955, and uploaded a year or so ago thanks to Darren Doherty², who runs workshops in contemporary Keyline farm design.

One of my favourite lines from the film is this:

"He's ready with cold logic and forceful argument to present plans to the benefit of Australia."

... which tells us something of the respect with which Yeomans was sometimes held (ie, he was not a hippy).

Even though the film was made over 55 years ago, it's a pretty good

explanation of how Keyline works, and why it's a good idea.

Here are a few stills I extracted from the film.

This is the turn off the highway [middle left] into the drive leading to Yeomans' former farm Nevallan (note, as Ian says, the slight spelling change (the property is now called "Nevellan"):

This looks to be more or less the same vantage point where I took a shot of the modern Nevellan farm a few weeks ago.

And I really enjoyed this part of the film, where the two fellows mark out the Keyline by eye [middle right], using a long transparent hose and a bunch of stakes (it's about five and a half minutes into the film).

Makes you think, "Hey, I could do that!"...



PA Yeomans on his land, film still from *Keyline*, 1955



Film still from *Keyline*, 1955



Film still from *Keyline*, 1955



Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein *Nevallan* 2011 offset lithograph print

Heritage versus subdivision

Ian Milliss

Published: 29 June '11

We were hoping to go back to Nevallan this week to interview Bob Peel, but he rang to say he didn't want to talk because he didn't run the property according to Yeomans' original principles and so he didn't really have anything to say.

It was disappointing because we wanted to discuss in more detail the reasons he didn't follow Yeomans' principles given the design of the property – he had said earlier that it was too labour intensive. But his reticence is understandable because the property is a bit under siege in many ways, completely surrounded by the big block version of suburbia and his brother's property Yobarnie, the other original Yeomans' property, has just been the subject of a controversial development application for an aged care facility as Lucas wrote.

Development applications raise another of the almost infinite number of issues that now surround Yeomans and in this case it is the issue of development versus heritage. Given my earlier interest in Yeomans I was shocked in 2009 when I first heard about the plans for redeveloping Yobarnie, it seemed impossible that it would not be listed on the local council's Local Environment Plan (LEP) list of heritage properties. Heritage items are characterised as either local, state or national significance with a clearly defined range of criteria for each ranking and it is arguable that Yobarnie/Nevallan is of national significance, not just local significance, and would easily make it into the top ten historical agricultural properties in Australia.

On my list would be: Experiment Farm at Harris Park¹, now irretrievably buried in suburbia, where in 1789 James Ruse was the first successful European farmer [bottom left].



Belgenny Farm Photo by trent shepherd, on Flickr

John and Elizabeth Macarthur's Belgenny Farm at Camden Park², where they bred their flock of merino sheep laying the foundations of the Australian wool industry [above], and William Farrer's Lambrigg³, now being encroached on by Canberra suburbia, where Farrer's wheat breeding experiments produced the first rust free wheat [bottom right].

These properties are among the most important European heritage sites in the country but farm landscapes notoriously are less well protected or even understood as important heritage sites.

When I contacted Prof Stuart Hill in 2009 about my interest in the sites, among the documents he sent me was the following excerpt from the minutes of the meeting of the NSW State Heritage Council, the body charged with advising the minister for Planning on heritage issues. [See opposite page].

In essence, the NSW State Heritage Council found that both properties (except for the area subject to the aged care facility DA) were of state significance and should be protected by an interim heritage order (which would temporarily

prevent subdivision or development) pending further action to list them on the State Heritage Register which would provide permanent protection.

But this was in 2009 and when I searched the Register today they weren't there nor was there any mention of the Minister approving an interim heritage order. Curiouser and curiouser. I'll follow this up a bit further and see what I can find out.

See page 35 for an update in 2013.

¹<http://bit.ly/15DEVBJ>

²<http://bit.ly/15DF3AU>

³<http://bit.ly/15EEcuw>



Experiment Farm Cottage Photo by angusf, on Flickr



William Farrer's property Lambrigg

HERITAGE COUNCIL OF NSW:

MINUTES OF MEETING - Meeting Number 348 - 3rd June 2009



4.0 Matters for Consideration and Decision

4.1 Original 'Keyline' System, North Richmond

The members received a report from the Heritage Branch requesting advice on how it wishes to proceed on matters concerning the significance and conservation of PA Yeomans' original Keyline system found on two properties in North Richmond known as "Yobarnie" and "Nevallan".

The members were advised that a portion of the property, "Yobarnie", in Hawkesbury LGA, is currently the subject of a Development Application (D A) for a seniors living village and nursing home. A heritage assessment lodged with the DA was referred for Heritage Branch comment by Hawkesbury City Council seeking the Branch's view of the property's heritage significance.

The proponent envisages application for release and rezoning of the remainder of the property for residential development at a future date.

It was on the Yobarnie property that Percival (P.A.) Yeomans, a retired mining engineer, first developed the "Keyline" system of soil improvement, erosion control, water storage, cultivation and irrigation on undulating topography, which was subsequently adopted by farmers in almost every country in the world. The site has a system of dams, channels and contours which were utilised to capture and manage the water on the site. The system was developed at a time when soil erosion was a major issue across Australia.

The Heritage Branch has received representations requesting urgent protection of the entire Yobarnie property on heritage grounds following the advertisement of the Development Application. The members received a presentation on the site and the development proposal by Mark Regent the Project Manager, Buildev Group, Stephen Davies and Stephanie Barker of Urbis, Heritage Consultants for the owner. Also in attendance were representatives from Hawkesbury City Council, Mr Matt Owens, Director City Planning and Dr Donald Ellsmore, Heritage Advisor who were available to answer questions from the Heritage Council if required.

The following outlines the presentation received:

It is agreed that there is historical significance at both Yobarnie and Nevallan sites. The System was developed on both Yobarnie and Nevallan in 1940s - 1950s. Nevallan contains Yeomans home and was the farm visited by the public when it was operational. Only 183 ha is owned by Buildev (approx 70% of the 270ha former holding) not the entire former Yobarnie site. The Yobarnie Keyline system is functionally compromised due to multiple land ownership and interrupted contours and it is believed it can't be restored to its functional operation. It is believed that the existing dams have safety issues; dam failures in mid 1980's and 2007.

In the case of the Yobarnie Site the Keyline System Contours are interrupted in over 16 locations from physical work and property boundaries. Also the downstream drainage system in existing urban area has deficiencies and that the proposed urban residential development provides opportunity to improve overall drainage in the catchments.

They advised that an Interim Heritage Order on the site is premature, believing it is not required as the developer is prepared to work cooperatively with Hawkesbury Council, the Heritage Council and Heritage Branch and other agencies believing that integrated retention and interpretation solutions are achievable.

They advised that a Site Suitability Certificate was issued by Department of Planning in March 2008 and that the proposed development for a seniors living proposal is able to retain dam and incorporate contour design features. They believe that residential development provides best opportunity to accommodate interpretation of the site.

In conclusion the members were advised by the presenters that there is no ability to consolidate the former landholding and notwithstanding consolidation, the land would still remain economically unviable for agriculture. The land is economically unviable for agriculture with or without the Keyline system and that adaptation in this case requires a non-agricultural use. Any restoration solution would be financially unrealistic and that reinstatement is not achievable, so a heritage outcome would be part conservation and interpretation.

The members thanked the presenters for attending and providing the information. The presenters left the meeting.

The members discussed the site and agreed that both the Yobarnie and Nevallan are sites of potential State Significance. Concerns were expressed that the significance of the site had not been identified earlier in the process prior to development applications being submitted for approval. It was agreed that without a full assessment, the actual significance could not be fully determined. It was discussed that in the evolution of the Keyline system the site is of possible National significance due to its huge leap in changing the way soil erosion was managed. In its time it was an extremely important site.

The members agreed to recommend to the Minister that an Interim Heritage Order be placed on the Yobarnie and Nevallan properties but excluding the area of the current DA application for Seniors Living. The members requested participation of the Heritage Council in discussions on the current and future Development Applications for the sites. The members requested that further research on the significance of the sites to be carried out as outline in the following resolution.

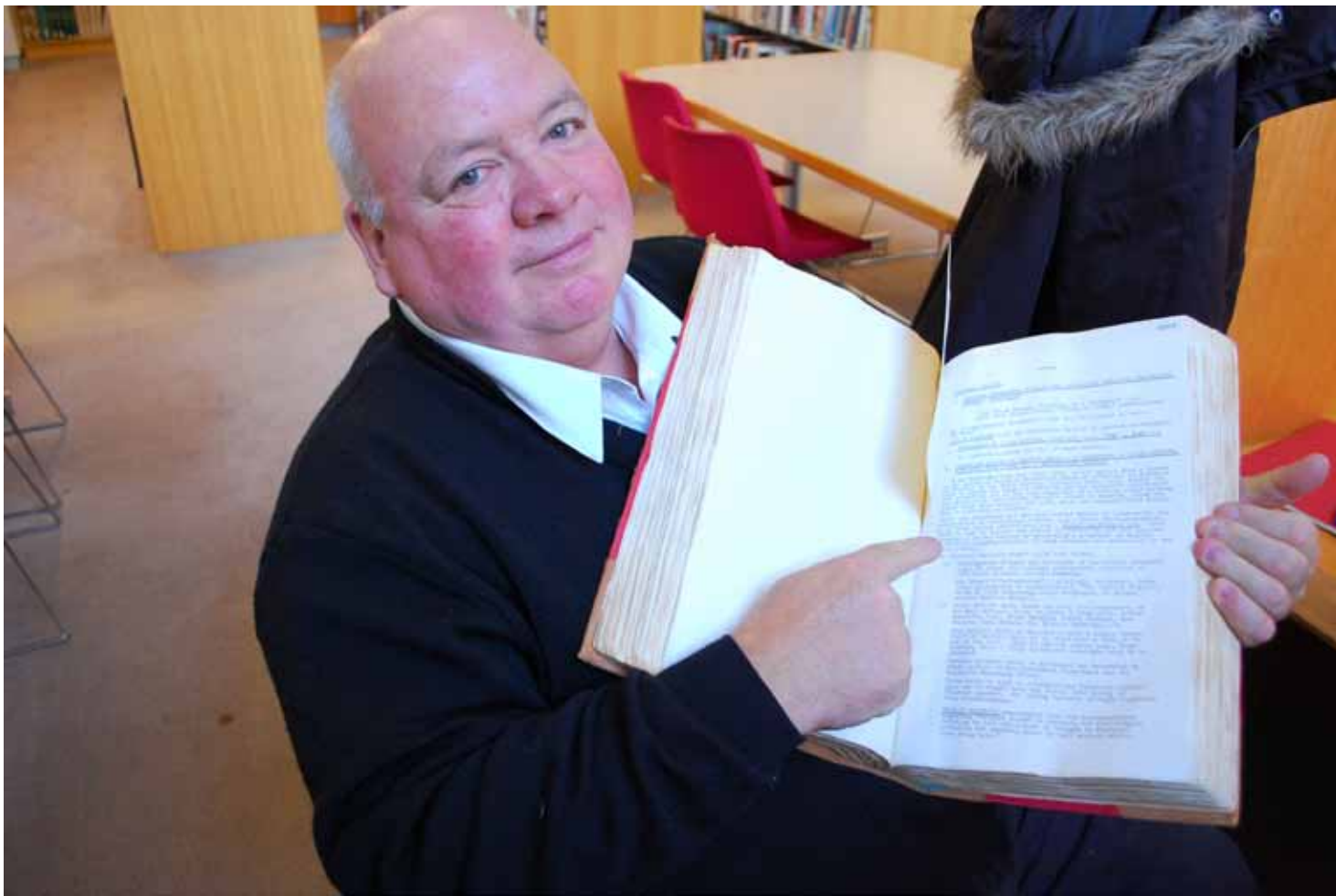
Resolved: That the Heritage Council of NSW:

1. Finds that both Yobarnie and Nevallan are potentially properties of State significance;
2. recommends an Interim Heritage Order be placed on the Yobarnie and Nevallan properties, but excluding the area of the current DA application for seniors living and requests participation of the Heritage Council in discussions on the DA;
3. considers that any development on the land must be undertaken in such a way that does not compromise the key State heritage values of the sites;
4. requests the Heritage Branch to carry out further research to assist the Heritage Council to determine if the site should be considered for listing on the State Heritage Register and advise the implication for future management and interpretation;
5. requests that a Conservation Management Plan be developed.

In the archives with Ian Milliss

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 6 July '11



Ian points to the discussion about the (original, cancelled) Yeomans Project in the 1975 AGNSW Trustees Minutes Book.

Last Friday we descended into the bowels of the Art Gallery of New South Wales.

Our mission? To dig up documents in an attempt to discover:

a). if Ian really did propose an exhibition about Yeomans at AGNSW in the mid 1970s (ie, we'd like to know that he's not hallucinating about all this history);

b). that the AGNSW did actually consider the show, and subsequently refused to exhibit it;

c). what possible reasons they might have given for not going ahead with the show.

To bring readers who are not familiar with our story so far up to speed: ...according to Ian, early in 1975 he was negotiating with various luminaries at the art gallery (including Daniel Thomas) with the idea of putting on an exhibition about the work of Percy Alfred Yeomans, the great Aussie agricultural inventor. As Ian tells it, the show was all the go and then was nixed by the trustees of the gallery, never to see the light of day. So it was this thread of events that we were hunting for...

At the gallery, Ian explained what we wanted to the nice lady behind the desk. She disappeared, and returned shortly after with this gorgeous dusty tome [top right].

It's the minutes book for meetings of the board of trustees, Jan-Dec 1975. (For more on what "trustees are, see the end of this post...)

Man it's a gorgeous thing. The pages are thick and crinkled. After each meeting, pages of minutes are typed up, photocopied and glued in. So the book has a really fat feel about it, and the

pages crackle as you turn 'em.

Anyway, here's what we found, huddled around the minutebook in the study cubicle: Ian's original project proposal!

So, he wasn't hallucinating. I have transcribed the minute from the book here (liberally correcting the many spelling mistakes of the obviously overworked typist):

Proposal No. 1

P.A. Yeomans – "Keyline"

Exhibition proposed by Ian Milliss. Gallery Organizer, Frances McCarthy.

From Duchamp onwards artists have increasingly questioned the concept of art as a "precious object", and have concerned themselves with breaking down the barriers between art, life and nature.

From the late sixties one of the main movements has been 'ecology' art, so called because it is concerned with the landscape and environment. It is art removed from the context of museums, that recognizes that almost anyone can be an artist in the way of his work, in the area of his interests, in the manner that he views the world.

P.A. Yeomans is regarded as an "artist" who has contributed more to Australia than any "recognised" artist. Yeomans might never have attached the title "artist" to himself, yet much farming activity – tree-planting, dam building – does have a consciously aesthetic motivation, and farmers are always willing, perhaps shyly, to admit it. Yeoman's philosophy of land development and his achievements in the agricultural field make him a man of national and international significance.

Yeomans' Keyline system of irrigation is "land sculpture" on a large scale, though practical in its end result, it is art that makes the work of American artists such as Smithson and Serra pale in comparison.

The exhibition will comprise: –

(a) Photographs, maps, diagrams, explanatory notes.

(b) Videotapes.

(c) Implements and equipment.

(Publication "The Challenge of Landscape" by P.A. Yeomans tabled).

See overleaf for a couple of photos from the minutes book itself.

Interesting things to note from this proposal:

1). Ian's use of language (straightforward, manifesto-like) hasn't changed much at all over the last 35 years.

2). Nor has Ian's key idea changed much, that he's always banging on about: that anyone can be an artist; it's all about how you approach what you do in life, and what kind of contribution you make to society. Not only practically, but also aesthetically.

3). And this is possibly the biggest discovery for me: – the artist under whose name this exhibition was put forward was not "Ian Milliss", but P.A. Yeomans. Ian (alongside Frances McCarthy) was mooted, rather humbly, as the exhibition's "organiser" (more evidence of this is in the minutes of the previous page).

As for what the trustees made of all this... well, it's a pretty brief dismissal, I'm sad to say. All they could say was this:



1975 AGNSW Trustees Minutes Book

There was some discussion regarding the "Keyline" project exhibition, Trustees expressing the opinion generally that it would not be suitable for the gallery.

The Director and the Deputy Director both recommended acceptance of the exhibition but it was

RESOLVED by majority that P.A. Yeomans "Keyline" be not accepted as project number (1) for 1976.

Note – the resolution to not accept the project was "by majority", not "unanimously". The Director and Deputy Director disagreed! But what did they say?

I'll leave Ian to speculate on this (and some of the other juicy tidbits we gleaned from the minute books...)

*According to the intermaweb, a trustee is "an individual person or member of a board given control or powers of administration of property in trust with a legal obligation to administer it solely for the purposes specified".

The Art Gallery of NSW lists its current trustees on its website¹.

¹<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/about-us/people/agnsw-trust/>

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 - (b) Videotapes.
 - (c) Implements and equipment.
- (Publication "The Challenge of Landscape" by P.A. Yeomans tabled)

Proposal for Keyline in the 1975 AGNSW Trustees Minutes Book

Applications would close on 7th November, 1976.

The Director recommended the acceptance of these project exhibitions and a lodgement of an application for financial aid.

There was some discussion regarding the "Keyline" project exhibition, Trustees expressing the opinion generally that it would not be suitable for the Gallery.

The Director and Deputy Director both recommended acceptance of the exhibition but it was

75/10-35 RESOLVED by majority that P. A. Yeomans "Keyline" be not accepted as project number (1) for 1976.

Consideration was given to proposed exhibitions numbers 2, 3, 4 and 5 and it was

75/10-36 RESOLVED unanimously that they be accepted in principle

The Director pointed out that it would be necessary to add another two project exhibitions to the 1976 programme. It had been suggested that an exhibition of Caligraphic Images might be organized by Miss Jackie Menzies, the Assistant Registrar of Collections.

75/10-37 RESOLVED unanimously that Caligraphic Images be included in the Projects programme and that the Director recommend one further exhibition to complete the 1976 programme.

IT WAS AGREED that proposals regarding project exhibitions of the work of Kevin Mortensen and of Peter Delafield-Cook be brought before the Board for further consideration.

75/10-38 RESOLVED unanimously that application be lodged prior to 7th November with the Visual Arts Board for a grant in aid of Projects for 1976.

Rejection of Keyline in the 1975 AGNSW Trustees Minutes Book.

The Family Farm

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 20 July '11

I reckon Ian's broad definition of art is a useful provocation:

1. *Art is action which changes the culture.*

2. *This action can be undertaken by anyone.*

When operating with a definition like this, it's perhaps worth reiterating point 2: cultural change is not the sole domain of special professionals from the current narrowly-defined "artworld".

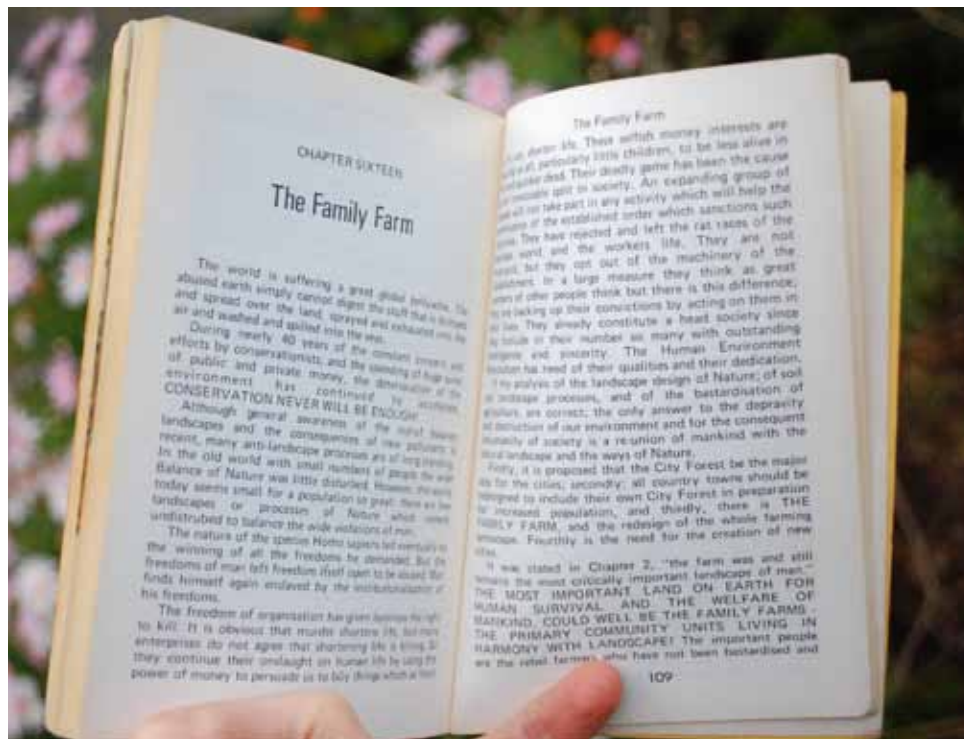
However, the interesting and tricky thing about this kind of definition is that the folks who are most effective in producing cultural change are often not particularly worried, one way or the other, about being defined as artists. Either it's not very important to them to show up in the artworld, or the stuff they do doesn't look like the kinds of things the artworld normally accepts. And in this way, the myth that art is the domain of special professionals operating within the "artworld" continues.*

For the purposes of this here *Yeomans Project*, we're operating on the presumption (and gathering evidence for the notion) that Percy Yeomans was this sort of artist, vigorously working to change (agri)culture through actions and words.

Operating in Yeomans' tradition in Australia today are Kirsten Bradley and Nick Ritar, who with their young son Ashar live up in Mudgee. A while ago, Kirsten and Nick *did* define themselves as artworld-artists¹, and they popped up quite often with high-profile video installations, projection performances and gallery shows. But for about five years now, they have eased away from all that stuff, and gone into... farming. And since Nick and Kirsten aren't particularly active in promoting themselves as artists right now, the artworld has, to a large extent, stopped paying attention to them.

Not that this matters a great deal to their project of cultural change. As Milkwood Permaculture², they have been using all the skills acquired over their years working in the artworld (and many more acquired since) to make an even bigger impact. By setting up their own farm as a "case study research project", and running dozens of educational courses for their peers, Milkwood is exploring how we might live our lives differently.

Importantly, they're not seceding from society, or dropping out like luddites up in the hills. They're actively involved in urban transformation (running courses and gathering communities together in Sydney as well as out in the country) and they do a lot of it using the web. Their blog³ is particularly effective (and aesthetically satisfying) as an ongoing critical reflection as they



The Family Farm in PA Yeomans *The City Forest*

transform their bit of "clapped out" land into a thriving food forest...

How does this relate to Yeomans?

I've been reading Yeomans' little green book from 1971, *The City Forest: The Keyline Plan for the Human Environment Revolution*. For the first half of the book, Yeomans discusses the fundamentals of his Keyline design ideas... But towards the end, he includes a passionately written chapter called, rather innocuously, "The Family Farm". In this chapter he talks about the return to small-scale (but commercially productive) organic farming as a 'rebel' activity in the face of large-scale chemical agriculture.

As I was reading it, I was thinking of Milkwood. It's like Yeomans was predicting their move from Melbourne to Mudgee, thirty years in advance, when he writes that "a successful Human Environment Revolution will depend on youth and the 'rebel' farmer."

For Yeomans, being a "rebel farmer" is not just about growing organic vegies. It's about a conscious process of influencing culture. This process involves actively publishing, educating, community building: bringing together farming families and "young people". Yeomans is very keen on youth – whose uptake of these ideas he sees as key to the transformation:

"A necessary first step is for the two groups of critically important people [farmers and youth] to get together and to get to know each other. The place of meeting should be on the good land of the farmers."

Milkwood is not just altering the use of their bit of land. They are doing that (as Yeomans himself did, using his own family farm in Western Sydney for a major case-study).

But just as Yeomans did, the Milkwood family farm is simultaneously

wrangling all the arts of contemporary communication media they can, to gently nudge at the culture beyond the boundaries of their own farm gate.

* It's possible that this attempt to redefine art is a bit futile. Coming, as Ian and I do, from the artworld, any redefinition we make is merely an expansion of the artworld definition to incorporate activities which hitherto were outside the artworld. Hence it's not really a redefinition but a loosening of the boundaries.

But I think the thing we've been getting at, in our recent discussions with each other about this stuff, is something like a return to the understanding of art which you get in phrases like "the art of cooking" or "the art of motorcycle maintenance".

Art in this sense means an activity done skillfully and in a way which, to some extent, shifts the goalposts. In Yeomans' case, you could talk about

"the art of agricultural innovation". What cannot be left out when thinking about these arts, I would say, is their *aesthetics*, meaning the way that they are carried out: their material economies, their social ethics, their physical forms.

¹<http://bit.ly/19PkWVJ>

²<http://milkwoodpermaculture.com.au/>

³<http://milkwood.net/>

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss

Posted 26 July '11

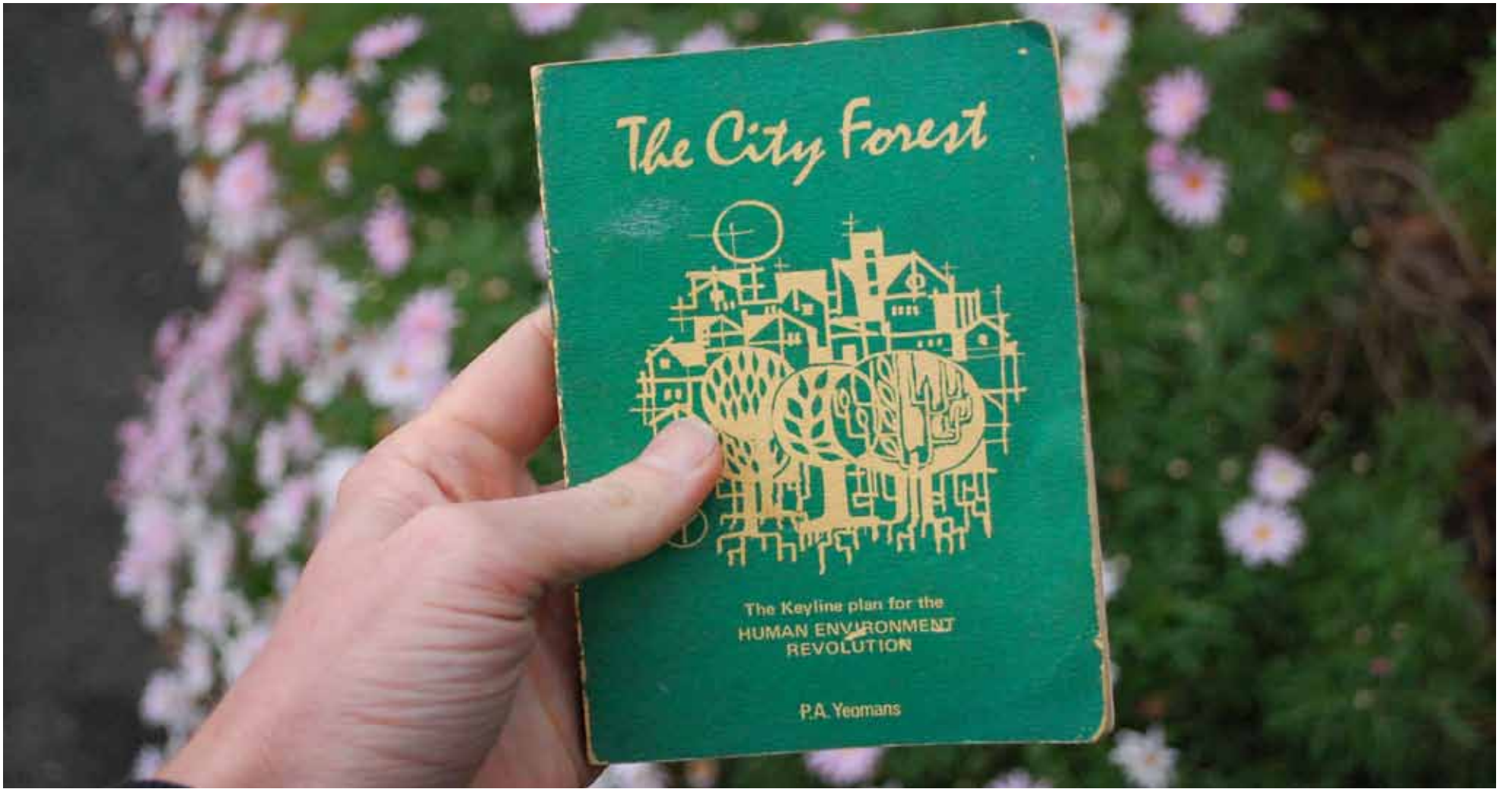
I don't think it matters whether or not cultural innovators care about being categorised as artists. The conventional art world is so precious about this sort of thing yet they barely notice that nearly everybody else regards their imagined special status as a bit of a joke.

However I would like to see the term artist take on an even more special status but only if it's earned - ie if you don't really innovate, if you don't really change the culture even in a small way, then you don't get the title artist. It should become as laughable to describe yourself as an artist as it would be to describe yourself as a genius.

In that way Lucas is right about common parlance. The way that it is commonly said that "so and so is a real artist" (when talking about anything from hairdressing to motor repair) is a way of acknowledging a particularly impressive combination of skill and creativity, and that is part of what I'm talking about. But I'm also suggesting it should extend much further, that the institutions should be searching for and exhibiting and debating the merits of the life work of people like Yeomans rather than the vacuous pompers of the biennale industry.



Kirsten and Nick in the top paddock at Milkwood



PA Yeomans, *The City Forest*, 1971

More from the City Forest

Lucas Ihlein
Published: 2 August '11

My last post didn't really scratch the surface of Yeomans' book *The City Forest: The Keyline plan for the Human Environment Revolution*. Instead I got caught up thinking about art.

So I figured I'd return to this book a bit, and register some of my first impressions of it. Here they are:

1. The book seems very fresh.
I'm not sure if I'm alone in this, but I have a misguided tendency to imagine that widespread awareness of impending environmental catastrophe is a relatively recent phenomenon.

So it always comes as a surprise to read somebody's warnings from long ago – warnings which indicate that sufficient information was circulating, even as early as 1971, to start ecological alarm bells ringing. Yeomans himself was worried that it was already too late.

As far as his ideas being (depressingly) fresh, listen to this:

"The chemical sciences which have been debauched by business to make billions from polluting the Planet will continue to out-shout the healthy but financially crippled biological and social sciences. Business will fight strenuously and as ruthlessly as ever against changes which threaten their influence and their profits, while at the same time, they will advertise with the power of their money, that they will save the world."

Which seems to be exactly what's going on, right now¹.

2. The logic of the book seems to run a bit like this:

(pardon the huge simplifications...)
a). There is a massive problem with the world. That problem is pollution (both local and global).

The cause of this problem is humanity's inability to design landscape properly, coupled with the large scale industrialisation of agriculture.

b). A major cause of pollution is mismanagement of water flows in landscape (both rain water, and human effluent). One proposed solution for this is Yeomans' "City Forest" scheme – designed to process the nutrients of human waste, and slow the flows of rainwater.

Yeomans is proposing that forests be deliberately designed and grown in very close proximity to – or indeed, as an intrinsic part of – cities.

This is a radical extension of his techniques for working on farmland. Yeomans is proposing urban design solutions.

I'd be curious to know whether these ideas were picked up by anyone. Town planners, city designers, urban revolutionaries? Does anyone carry this little green book in their breast pocket and refer to it when laying out new urban conglomerations?

¹<http://bit.ly/19hRH3x>

The Permanence of things

Lucas Ihlein
Published: 2 August '11

Continuing my exploration of the little green book...

Yeomans' proposition (to grow forests as intrinsic elements in urban design) is followed by a long middle section which is essentially pedagogical.

I've not read Yeomans' other books yet, but I am presuming that a lot of his teaching material in *The City Forest* is synthesised from his previously published research.

He delves into the ways that natural landscapes are formed by water flows, and how these "landscape-shapes" (ridges, valleys etc), in turn, influence water flows. It's his basic curriculum for cracking the code of the planet's operations. I'm trying to immerse myself in it, but I think it won't make much sense until I get to experience it *in practice, on a bit of land*.

There are some enlightening concepts in this pedagogical section of the book. I found his so-called "Scale of Permanence" to be a fascinating way to begin thinking about landscape design.

Here's his scale:

1. Climate
2. Land shape
3. Water
4. Roads
5. Trees
6. Buildings
7. Subdivision
8. Soil

This list represents a "descending order of permanence" of these eight factors. In other words, the elements at the top of the list are more permanent (relative to human timescales) than those towards the bottom.

"The first two factors, climate and land shape, are the more or less unalterable background of the landscape. Water, with its lines and its patterns of flow, is the first factor of the landscape design of Nature which we change." (p. 40)

That notion – how to go about judiciously changing water's patterns of flow, seems to form the basis of much of Yeomans' work. The descending scale of permanence could come in handy when thinking about how any landscape comes into being. It's a humble way of seeing humans in relation to the universal forces which make the surface of the planet how it is.

Of course, we now realise that Climate is not exactly as "permanent" as Yeomans' scale might have it. But his schema is still correct in the sense that the climate of any particular local piece of landscape is not really something that we humans have the ability to intentionally influence. (Well OK, I could be wrong²).


Not that this humility stops Yeomans' from thinking in terms of large transformations. Even attempting to improve the lowliest item on his list – soil – can have big effects.

I wonder how much (if any) of this curriculum has been integrated into professional disciplines like landscape architecture and engineering? "Permanence" is not a concept which you hear about much – we've gotten used to the idea of 50 years as a long lifespan for any element of the human-built environment.

²<http://bit.ly/16CGzEb>

The Red Book

Yeomans' PLOW CO.



L65SJ-10
(L for Three Point Linkage.
65 for Distance Across Beams in Inches.
10 for Approximate Frame Width in Feet.
SJ for Stump Jump Model)

AS YOUR SOIL GETS RICHER SO DO YOU

Yeomans' Plows... Gotta love that slogan! A catalogue of options, in case you wanna buy one, is here: <<http://www.yeomansplow.com.au/yeomans-plows.htm>>

Making Dirt

Lucas Ihlein Published: 2 August '11

Continuing my harvest from Yeomans' book *The City Forest*... I'm trying to get down some key ideas before their freshness runs away from me...

The book (pages 61-2) has a clear explication of why Yeomans' ploughing technique works to build up the soil:

-Poor soil is chisel ploughed to 3 inches deep. Into this gap are sown a mixture of clovers and grasses.

-Some superphosphate is used to artificially stimulate the growth of the grasses and clovers initially, and then never used again.

-The pasture that results is in turn chisel ploughed in the autumn of the next 3 years. In these successive years, the plough is allowed to penetrate further, reaching 6-7 inches by the final year.

-This allows a lot of air into the soil, and also allows more rainfall to penetrate.

-The grass is eaten by cattle, just before it gets to the flowering stage. It suffers a severe shock. The deeper roots die and "become in various ways the food for the whole universe of life of the soil". In other words, there is an increase in organic matter in the soil; the soil becomes a more open structure, which in turn allows

the roots of the grasses to penetrate more deeply. And so the soil-making process continues.

What is chisel-ploughing? Simply, "the modern equivalent of the ancient stick-plow" [middle left]

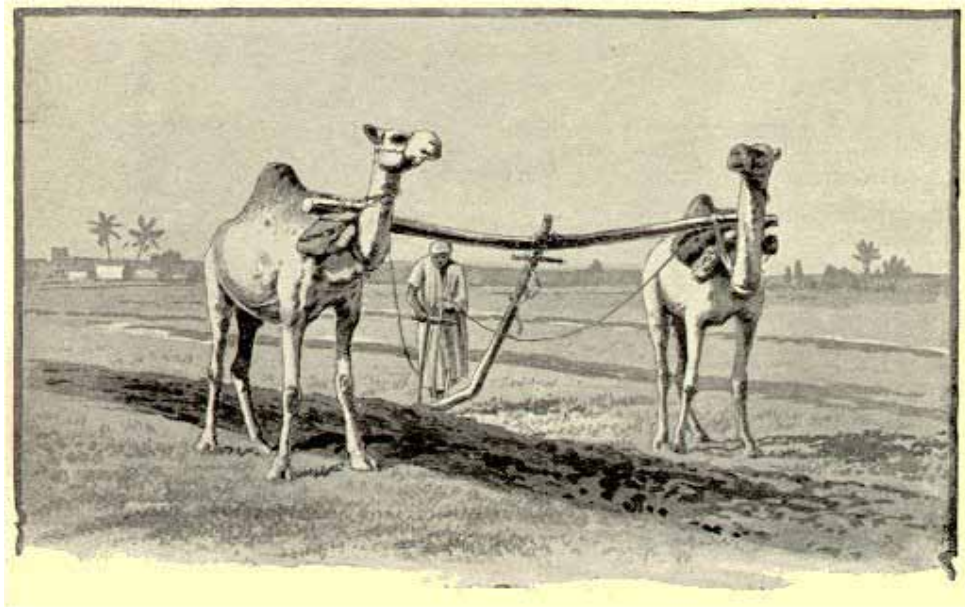
However, it's a bit different from the old-skool stick plow. How? Our guru explains:

"The particular attributes of the chisel plow are that it does not turn the soil under and secondly, it is a tough go-anywhere affair. It has two-inch wide chisel-like tynes attached to heavier spring-loaded steel shanks mounted on a steel frame."

Occasionally, Yeomans inserts tantalising political statements like this into his educational text:

"This is the Keyline soil making technique which authority has rejected for two decades. They have said, soil cannot be made in that way, it can only be improved by the constant use of chemicals."

What I would like to know is this: What happened so that "authorities" rejected Yeomans' research? What was going on behind the scenes? Is this another instance of the Australian story of inventors' ideas being quashed in their own country?



From Stoddard's Lectures, 1897. A stick plow, of ancient design, in use in Egypt

New CHISEL PLOW SHANK



PRICE:
COMPLETE
BLADE SHANK
AND
WOMBAT SLIPPER
EACH \$55.50
EXTRA: WOMBATS
\$5.80 EACH
DELIVERY:
FROM STOCK

**DOUBLES DIGGING DEPTH
MULTIPLIES AERATION**



TESTING



WORKING

Yeomans

Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein *New chisel plow shank* 2011 offset lithograph print based on an enlarged page from the 1970s sales pamphlet for Yeomans plows advertising one of his specialised tynes.

Seeing Landscape

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 2 August '11

A lot of Yeomans' criticisms of city design are based around the idea that we've lost our ability to "see" the landscape. (I'm still exploring ideas from his book *The City Forest*, 1971...)

His argument is that a farmer living on an acreage for some time (if s/he is that way inclined) can get to know it intimately: the topography of the land, the different minerals, soil-types, and micro-climates which prevail within the property boundaries. This knowledge of the land (*the ability to see it*) comes from a lot of time spent living and working on it.

In cities, by contrast, the density of buildings often distracts from our capacity to read the rise and fall of the land. We are tempted to see vast areas of space as largely undifferentiated, even though they do still consist of ridges and valleys which determine water flows. The much smaller parcelling up of land boundaries contributes to this problem – it's that much harder to see "the bigger picture".

Besides which, no individual (or team) is ever given the jurisdiction over the design of the bigger picture:

"The professions have produced many masterpieces of design within the

environment, but for the landscapes of town and country, which should have been planned to last indefinitely, there is no logical basis of design. The best of cities appear to be Topsy planned – they just grew and grew out of a series of accidents into the malignancies they are now."

(Note Yeoman's use of the words "planned to last indefinitely". These days, the term "sustainable" would surely be used to signify the same thing.)

Much of Yeomans' teachings, then, are an attempt to get us to "read" landscape topography, as this will aid in our development of more intelligent urban/rural designs.

I have to say I agree with him about the difficulty in reading urban land. When Ian and I visited the Nevallan property, I could see (or least I imagined I could see) the contours of the land. (This perception was, of course, assisted by the inscribed lines in the landscape formed by strips of trees, and the judicious placement of dams.)

But in the city, it's much harder to see this topography. Take downtown Sydney, for instance. The only reason I know that there are ridges and valleys

in Sydney is because, when I ride my bike through town, I feel gravitational resistance. But apart from that, my perception of the city horizon is muddled by tall buildings, and water flows are sequestered underground through drainage. The natural undulations of the land are regarded by urban designers as an inconvenience to be tolerated or flattened, rather than as a potential asset.

I reckon it's reasonable to suggest that Yeomans' work here — attempting to educate the public (and professionals) in *techniques of perception* — is a good example of what we're trying to call "art".

He uses his skill and experience to push us to see the world with fresh eyes; his work grants us an improved intimacy with our immediate environment; it expands our horizons of understanding. It's a kind of landscape-literacy.

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss

Posted 2 August '11

Europeans have found the Australian landscape hard to read right from the start.

I've been involved the last few years in planning the bi-centennial celebrations for the first European crossing of the Blue Mountains in 1813 and the building of Cox's Road in 1815 (or the First Crossing by English Toffs as I always call it because it was actually crossed earlier by at least one

feral convict, John Wilson¹ and one Frenchman, Francis Barralier².

And even Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth had a 'local guide' – "The expedition also included a local guide, three convict servants, four pack horses and five dogs". This was James Burns/Byrnes, a kangaroo hunter who in fact seems to have lived in the Mountains. He presumably showed them the way but never gets a mention because he wasn't gentry. More false history created to serve those in power.

One of the comments that regularly comes up is that all you have to do to cross the Mountains is follow the ridge tops. This can only be regarded as a sort of joke because in fact it is nearly impossible to even see where the ridge tops are let alone work out where they are heading. If Caley had been able to recognise the Bilpin Ridge he would have succeeded in crossing the Mountains in 1804 on the same route now followed by Bell's Line of Road. The same problem applies to modern cities as Lucas notes.

Funnily enough my interest in Yeomans and the things I learnt about landscape through his work led me to a slightly different interest, to try and understand the aboriginal reading of the landscape. After more than thirty years I still of course have only the faintest inkling.

¹<http://bit.ly/qtEdO2>

²<http://bit.ly/p1fS3K>



Plate 1.

Aerial view of portion of our first farm near Richmond, New South Wales.

The road left, through the picture follows along the line of a main ridge. The dams in sight, except two, are in primary valleys which fall from the main ridge to the creek below. The dam on the creek supplies, via pump and pipe-line, the horse-shoe shaped dam on a primary ridge. Out of sight there is a smaller dam on the creek where it enters the property, which diverts creek flow to fill four interconnected dams. Keyline pattern is the system of irrigation used. (See Chapter 6, Design for Environment.)

Started in 1943, the Richmond farm was the principal site where the landscape design concepts originated. Many soil and irrigation experiments and the dam construction techniques — called double vibration — were developed on this area. The site of first successful forest plantings are out of the picture to the West, — right.



Plate 3.

View from the main ridge of Bellevue Hill (Sydney eastern suburb) near a primary valley, right, which falls towards Bondi and the ocean. The Keypoint is near the lowest building on the right. The shapes of the land have been ignored and are now disguised.

A Mystery Letter for Mr “Mellis”

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 9 August '11

An amusing story has it that Ian Milliss met his now-wife, Wendy, because she was a keen art historian rummaging through the archives at Sydney University's Power Institute. Wendy was researching the legacy of conceptual art in Australia, and found a few traces of this rather elusive character, who seemed to have disappeared from the art scene in the mid 1970s. Wendy somehow found some contact details for Ian, and went to visit him, digging through his piles of paperwork for a more detailed version of his role in (and out of) the Australian art world.

Besides the very narratable fact that all this librarianship led to romance, one of the things that tickles Ian the most is that a whole lot of his dishevelled paperwork ended up in carefully coded white cardboard folders, like the one pictured above.

I'm working my way through this, the "IM 1975/Yeomans" folder (aka Pr198.436-444) right now. As to what that complex code could mean, I have no idea, but it does seem to lend some authority to the scraps of paper, carefully wrapped in glassine, inside. (Ian has referred to some of these scraps in a previous post).

For the moment, I just want to draw attention to this one letter addressed to "Mr Melliss", from Jeff Moss, the Managing Director of Random Writers. It is unclear as to what kind of

arrangement Mr Moss might have had with Mr Melliss.

Our only clue: "I will be very interested to discuss the Yeomans project with you but will not be in Sydney from Thursday, September 18 to Sunday, October 12, inclusive. My wife and I are taking a trip to Malaysia".

Who was this Jeff Moss? (The use of the word "inclusive" in the letter suggests he must have had a secretary to help him "put pen to paper" with his typewriter.)

Anyway, the answer surely is not hard to find. Up in Wallewerang, on t'other side of the Blue Mountains, sits Mr Melliss himself. I'm hoping my posting of the letter here will prompt him to reveal all.

If, that is, he can recall! (If not, perhaps Wendy can jog his memory).

PS - you can read Wendy Carlson's essay about Ian, entitled *the invisible artist* at <<http://www.ianmilliss.com/text/textindex.htm>>

COMMENTS:

Wendy Carlson Posted 9 August '11

Well it's a nice story, and I would be happy to leave it at that, but in the name of art historical accuracy that won't do unfortunately.

I was actually employed as a researcher on an ARC large grant into

the origins of conceptual art in the UK, Australia and New Zealand. Ian was one of the artists I was 'investigating' and probably the most forthcoming if you know what I mean. I interviewed him and he corrected his own transcript, adding approximately another 30,000 words, and then I sorted through about 2000 bits of paper and assorted works of art. I tried to make sense of them by providing a context/chronography, entered the works into a very basic database, that I set up with the help of 'databases for dummies' not knowing at the time that he was also a professional database developer.... shook the mould off all those papers which had been stored for yonks under his mother's house, put them into clean envelopes AND THEN wrote a thesis on 'deconstructing the database'. After that I decided to keep him.

BTW, the letters are quite easy to decipher. With the help of 'cataloguing for dummies' I duly designated the name of the institution, thus prl is Power Research Library, 1998 with the number of the work following. I made up various categories, of which Yeomans is probably the most straight forward. Easy.

Fine romance indeed.

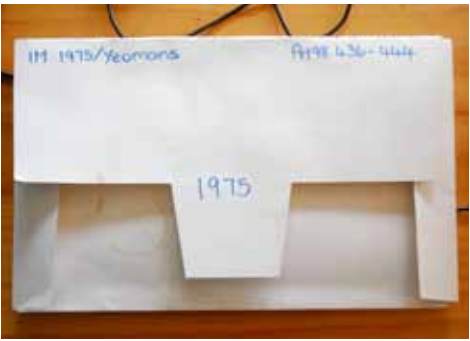
COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss Posted 10 August '11

To tell you the truth I can't remember. I don't think I ever had a meeting with him because it was around this time it all got called off. Personally I think the best thing about the letter is the Mellis bit. These days people mishear my name as Willis but then it was Mellis. The infamous Wally Mellish, possibly the greatest deal maker in Australian history, was still fresh in people's minds back then. His memory can still bring guffaws of delight to older Sydney siders.

Lucas of course wasn't born then so he missed this.

In 1968 Wally took a potshot at the the police who arrived at his Glenfield house to question him about stolen car parts. They surrounded the house ready for a good old style shootout then discovered his girlfriend Beryl Muddle and baby were inside. The police commissioner, the notoriously corrupt and inept Norm Allen, took control of the operation. When he went in to negotiate he ended up as a hostage himself. One of Wally's demands was that Beryl marry him so Norm Allen was witness as well as supplying the ring and a takeaway curry wedding dinner. He also provided the already well armed Wally with an army armalite assault rifle and 200 rounds of ammunition as a good will present. The siege continued for two weeks with Wally making constant calls to talk back radio to chat about how it was all going. Eventually as everyone including himself was getting bored he made a deal to give himself up



on condition he could join the army and go to Vietnam and all charges including shooting at the cops were to be dropped. They took him to the army camp where he apparently failed the intelligence test (go figure!) and was then shipped off to psych hospital. Everyone had been enormously entertained and the only real damage was to Norm Allen's already abysmal reputation.

One interesting sidelight (given that Lucas and I just spent the weekend involved in the Woolloomooloo and Victoria Street Green Ban Art Walks) is that Allen put detective Don Fergusson in charge. Fergusson was associated with the tabloid celebrity cop Ray "Gunner" Kelly whose ostentatiously corrupt activities included an abortion extortion racket allegedly with Fergusson as the bagman. Fergusson later made a spectacular exit by "committing suicide" in the CIB toilets in 1970. Shooting himself twice was a nice touch. In fact it is claimed he was killed by his former offsideer Fred Krahe because he had some principles and wouldn't take drug money. Krahe then worked with organised crime figures Lenny McPherson and Abe Saffron and for the developer Frank Theeman in Victoria Street. As a member of the group fighting Theeman's development I was always highly aware of Krahe's reputation for extreme violence and we were probably rather foolhardy in standing up to him. Apart from large scale systematic intimidation, bashings and kidnapping a group member he was ultimately allegedly responsible for organising the murder of Juanita Neilsen, the last remaining Victoria Street campaigner.

COMMENTS:

Lucas Ihlein Posted 11 August '11

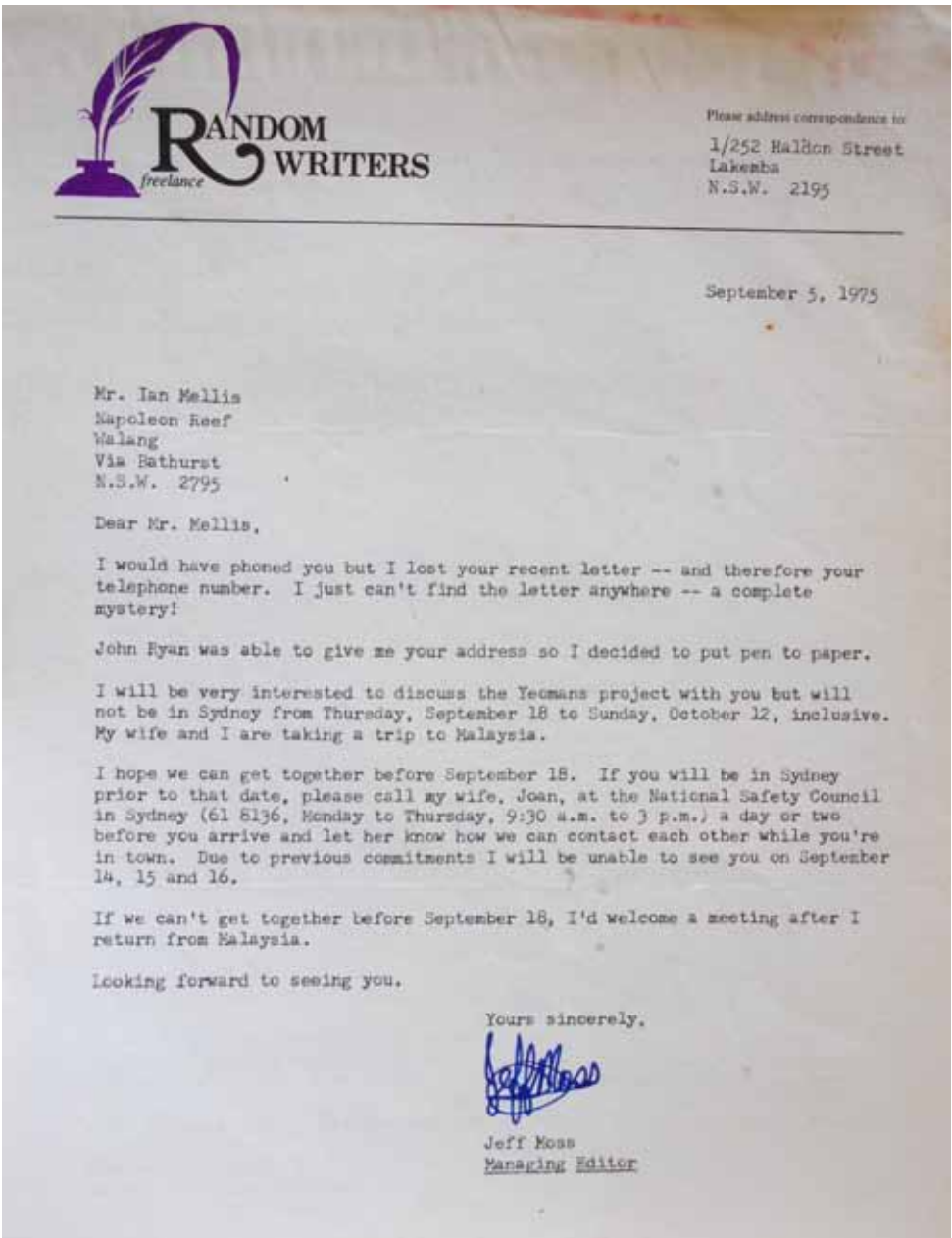
Oh well, if nothing else, I guess the letterhead "Random Writers" was a prophesy, thirty five years ahead of its time, for this blog post and its subsequent comments!

Thanks Mr and Mrs Melliss! The mystery remains...

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss Posted 12 August '11

I suppose I should add that I did actually google Jeff Moss and Random Writers a few weeks back and found nothing of use. Obviously we were going to talk because he seems to have been writing a book about Yeomans, in fact what little I can remember is that I think Yeomans himself put me on to him, but that's all.



In the archives with Lucas

Ian Milliss

Published: 11 August '11



Photo by Sacha Fernandez under Creative Commons Licence

The excursions with Lucas are turning out to be fun. Lucas is good company especially because he is uncommonly polite – his suggestion that I might be “hallucinating” when anyone else would have said “bullshitting” is an illustration of his politeness which hasn’t however prevented him from suggesting that I’m selling out by dealing with the art world again, a question I will deal with later in the unlikely event that anyone else gives a rats.

But faced with the ponderous bureaucratic might of the Art Gallery of NSW, I must confess I didn’t expect to find anything much on our trip. I thought the archives might have, say, a list of proposals and then a later list without the Yeomans show. But it turned out there are several mentions, two of which are fairly detailed. That is probably because of one of the first things you notice reading through the minutes, the fact that the Trustees in the mid 1970s were incredibly intrusive and overbearing to a degree that these days would earn them a fail in any Institute of Management corporate governance course.

It is now taken as standard practice that boards are there to give an organisation direction, to inform policy and also to help generate necessary linkages to the wider world, particularly in the case of art institutions for fund raising. They aren’t there to dictate which exhibitions will be programmed, how the exhibitions will be managed or to vet every phone call a curator makes. Yet back in the 1970s that seems to be what they were doing.

No wonder that a number of key staff took off to the NGA and NGV in the mid 70s including all the people involved in my proposed exhibition – Daniel Thomas, Francis McCarthy (now Frances Lindsay) and Rob Lindsay.

But as Lucas points out, it wasn’t simply my exhibition, it was presented as PA Yeomans’ exhibition with myself and Frances as the organisers. This was of course always the point, he had produced

everything that was to be in the exhibition, it was just that by putting it in the AGNSW we were raising issues about cultural innovation and cultural change – that if you defined artists as the producers of cultural change then in fact they weren’t necessarily, or even commonly, going to be found in the art world. We were arguing that it was the role of art museums to cast a wider net both in terms of how they defined art and culture and who they exhibited.

It was also interesting that the backing for the exhibition went to the top. The minutes mention specifically that the director and deputy director argued strongly for the exhibition, as if they had insisted that it be noted. The incredible thing about that is that in preceding years I had waged a very public campaign against the director, Peter Laverty¹, an artist and former head of East Sydney Tech, accusing him of being a timid and unimaginative bureaucrat who was not up to the job. I had such an effect that I was summoned by George Freudenstein², the Minister for Cultural Activities, to a lengthy meeting in his office to explain exactly what my complaints were. Laverty

has certainly been overshadowed in public memory by his successor, the flamboyant Edmund “Fast Eddie” Capon, but it seems I owe him and his deputy director Gil Docking an apology in this case. If you ever see this Peter accept my genuine thanks even if it is thirty- six years late.

The other interesting thing in the minutes, well actually there were a lot of interesting things if you understood the implications of what you were reading, was another exhibition proposal that didn’t get up. It was by Terry Smith and Ian Burn, to set up a room at Art Gallery of NSW with a telex (them were the days, high tech communication at the cutting edge) direct to them in New York where they would discuss regionalism on line with all comers. I hope I misunderstood this, since they were both my friends, but sadly there seemed to be not the faintest hint of irony involved. If you read this Terry, please explain?

¹<http://bit.ly/16NO9oC>

²<http://bit.ly/18DKOgL>

(ix) Proposed Project Exhibition

(b) Project 4

As required by resolution 74/11-34 (Board Minutes 22/11/74) following is further information on the "Art and Language" project proposal.

Title: Art and Language

Dates: 21 April - 4 May, 1975

Staff Organizer - Frances McCarthy

For this project exhibition a small "seminar room" is planned (adjacent to Project 3) with a table displaying Art/Language material. Each day for one week telex messages will be sent from Ian Durn and Mel Ramsden in New York to Terry Smith at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. Terry Smith will conduct open discussion sessions in response to the telex messages at a specified time each afternoon with one invited guest and audience. These discussions will be recorded, transcribed, edited, typed and displayed on the wall and table as the show progresses. At the end of the show it is proposed that the discussion material be collated into a catalogue. One of the questions the "discussion" is expected to examine is the problem of "provincialism" and "Internationalism", particularly in relation to Australian Art.

Costs:

Telex messages will be sent free via the New South Wales Government Office in New York.

Costs will involve the following (overleaf):

Page from 1975 AGNSW Trustees Minutes Book showing proposal for exhibition by Ian Burn, Mel Ramsden, and Terry Smith.

We'll have none of that here, sir!

Ian Milliss

Published: 11 August '11

My feeling is that the original exhibition never happened precisely because of the very issues it was addressing, the limited nature of the prevailing definition of legitimate “art” activity, especially because it didn’t look like anything that had been done somewhere else. Of course I would not be surprised if there were a lot of similar things going on all over the place but not well publicised. One of the ironies of the internet is that artists like me are discovering in our old age similar artists we should have known about when we were desperately isolated a few decades ago.

I finally heard of one about a year back from Diego Bonetto via Lucas, the incredible Italian artist Gianfranco Baruchello and his small farm outside Rome, ‘Agricola Cornelia’, which he assembled in the 1970s by buying back, one by one, the small plots of a fairly unsuccessful real estate development subdivision.

I suppose the cancellation of the exhibition was the clear omen that redefining who was an artist and what activities were legitimate forms for generating cultural change was not going to happen here any time soon, in fact probably not until it had already been done many times in Europe or the US for a few decades. As I always say, Australians don’t really like art but they like stuff that looks like art and what I mean is that if something is a genuine example of “memetic innovation” as Donald Brook says³, then it is going to be different, probably a bit threatening to the existing order and certainly not necessarily easy to come to grips with.

And despite claims to the contrary, the Australian art world doesn’t really like anything that is actually different in underlying thought, they just like the window dressing to change regularly because that’s all part of business as usual. Today I saw a quote by Cocteau making a similar point:

“Art produces ugly things which frequently become more beautiful with time. Fashion, on the other hand, produces beautiful things which always become ugly with time.”

If an artwork instantly looks like the most brilliant work of its time that will be because it conforms to an already well digested meme and will probably be completely forgotten in a few decades – but not before a lot of mug punters have been fleeced. There are a whole range of human cognitive biases that come into play in the art world that then get dressed up as “connoisseurship” or “having a good eye” – things like the bandwagon effect⁴, the mere exposure effect⁵, status quo bias⁶, availability cascade⁷ – and none of them are helpful in terms of understanding cultural innovation. But since I find cognitive bias the most interesting subject imaginable I’ll back off immediately before I get completely diverted.

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The Awful Truth About What Art Is

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The Awful Truth

THE AWFUL TRUTH ABOUT WHAT ART IS by Donald Brook, paperback, 136pp.

This new book was commissioned by Artlink magazine to put before the general reader a radically new answer to a pair of questions that have been made insoluble by running them together as if they were a single question. One of them is What is art? The other is How do we know whether something is a work of art?

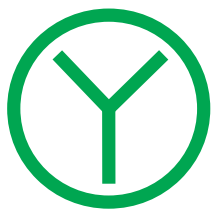
The awful truth extracts the main themes from forty years of the author's lectures, discussions and essays. Donald Brook identifies art as the engine of cultural evolution. He argues, wittily and persuasively, that cultural kinds such as the cubist painting and the food mixer evolve by imitation and adaptation just as biological species evolve by replication and adaptation. In both of these evolutionary processes the unintended and the unexpected are crucial elements.

Turning from abstraction to the artworld, he shows that things may be recognised by the artworld as works of art for any reason, or for no reason. The artworld may classify the switching of a light bulb on and off as a work of art if it chooses, but as the audience for its entertainments we are free to find the performance so unilluminating that we may decide it has no significant role in cultural evolution. Art (when it is properly understood) and works of art (as they are recognised by the artworld) are only accidentally related.

Donald Brook brings to this revelatory construction his training as an artist, a philosopher and an engineer as well as his experience as an art critic, educator and writer. He was a founder of the Tin Sheds at Sydney University in the late sixties and of the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide in 1974, and is Emeritus Professor of Visual Arts at Flinders University of South Australia. He has influenced generations of students smart enough to recognise that here is a truly original thinker. Now in his early eighties, he is an iconoclastic living treasure.



Donald Brook, *The Awful Truth About What Art Is*, at Artlink website: <<http://www.artlink.com.au/awfultruth.cfm>>



³<http://bit.ly/18DIcNW>

⁴<http://bit.ly/19aDIYw>

⁵http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mere_exposure_effect

⁶http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Status_quo_bias

⁷http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Availability_cascade

COMMENTS:

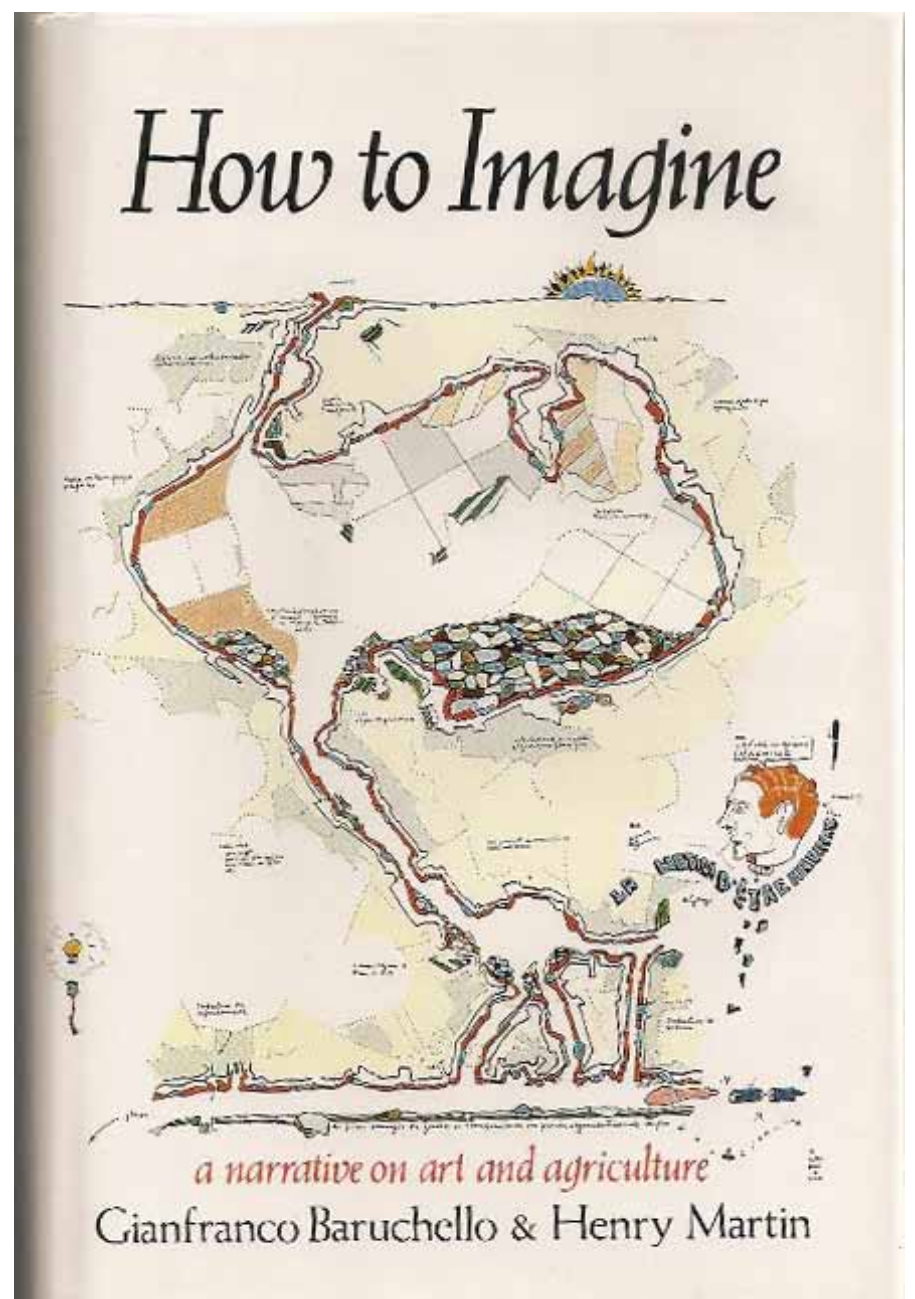
Lucas Ihlein

Posted 12 August '11

Ooh, I like the idea of the mere exposure effect: "a series of laboratory experiments by Robert Zajonc demonstrated that simply exposing subjects to a familiar stimulus led them to rate it more positively than other, similar stimuli which had not been presented." (from the wikipedia link you posted above, Ian.)

It reminds me of a notion I was toying with a few years ago (without actually doing any research on it), about how "visibility=relevance".

I wrote a short blog entry on it here: <lucazoid.com/bilateral/visibility-is-relevance/>



Giancarlo Baruchello and Henry Martin, *How to Imagine: a narrative on art and agriculture*, 1983, with extensive discussion about Baruchello's art-agriculture experiment at Agricola Cornelia, established in 1973.

Just thinking

Ian Milliss

Published: 22 August '11

On Friday I attended part of a conference at the National Institute of Experimental Art at UNSW specifically to listen to Donald Brook's keynote address where he summarised his recent thoughts on defining art. His approach corresponds closely with what we have argued here, that art in the cultural evolutionary sense can take any form ... but anyway you should read his address¹ rather than my clumsy precis. This is the clearest and most readable summary of his ideas that I have seen and it relates closely to the overall theme of the ACCA exhibition. It is important to understand that from very early on there was a split within conceptualism between those intent on developing a marketable product and others like myself more determined to pursue the radical implications of the analysis inherent in early conceptualism. The commercial strand of conceptualism won out of course (as money always does in the short term) and has dominated for decades.

But seeing Donald reminded me that he also had ideas that were torpedoed by the cultural gatekeepers that now look increasingly prescient. Take a look at this project² that failed to get funding.

¹<http://bit.ly/1eT5Def>

²<http://bit.ly/16NRjZy>

COMMENTS:

Lucas Ihlein Posted 23 August '11

Is part of the moral of this story that Donald thought about this idea, and then (admittedly, after a delay of some decades) it came to pass, without him actually having to execute it himself?

In other words, he succeeded in having his brain's "volitional waves" produce an effect in the world!

He really is a national treasure. I wonder if he ever met Percy Yeomans?



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TECH

GADGETS GAMES @HOME

Hey, that's my electroencephalograph!



Donald Brook in 1969, left, and today, aged 82. Inset: Emotiv's \$US299 headset.

Asher Moses
May 9, 2008 - 10:09AM

Donald Brook, a former *Sydney Morning Herald* art critic, felt a real sense of déjà vu when reading Wednesday's article, published on this website, describing a new computer headset that allows people to control video games using only the power of their minds.

And for good reason. Almost 40 years ago, on May 15 1969, an article written by Brook was published on page 2 of the *Herald*, predicting the development of virtually identical technology enabling people to control machines using just their thoughts.

At the time, he wrote that primitive versions of the technology were already available and that, as part of his work as an academic at the University of Sydney's Power Institute of Fine Arts, he would seek funding to research the area further.

"To put the point very plainly, it is now possible for a suitably wired person to walk into a room and WILL the light to come on - and succeed," he wrote.

Brook, who studied engineering before becoming an art theorist, tried for several years to obtain a research grant to fund his project but was ultimately unsuccessful. The art historians who were assessing his grant application had no idea what the technology was about so provided no research assistance or equipment.

Fast forward to the present day and Emotiv, an Australian company, is gearing up to release on the US market later this year a \$US300 headset capable of doing exactly what Brook described.

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- New game gizmo uses mind control

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Mrs Yeomans

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 27 August '11

Recently Ian and I visited Kirsten, Nick, Ashar and Trevor at the wonderful Milkwood property outside of Mudgee. We were all having a cup of tea after touring the farm, and chatting about P.A. Yeomans and the wider Yeomans clan. All of the sons (Neville, Ken, Allan) have gone on to do interesting things with their lives. Each of the sons contributed to P.A.'s book *The City Forest*: Ken wrote a back-cover-blurb entitled "For Youth"; Neville wrote the Foreword; and Allan the Afterword.

But, as Kirsten asks in her email: "What was the story with P.A.'s wife? I was thinking about the sons this evening and realised I had no idea about her, or where she intersected with Yeoman's work, the sons' take on things, etc..."

Good question Kirsten! Well, when I opened up a copy of the book *The Challenge of Landscape*, 1958, I discovered that the foreword¹ was in fact written by Rita Yeomans. She begins:

"This book of my husband's is the natural outcome of the results of "The Keyline Plan", published in 1954."

So there you go! Yeomans' wife WAS heavily involved in what was going on in the "family business". This is evidenced by the rest of the foreword.

It's clear that Rita had a strong understanding of the importance of the Keyline principles of landscape design:

"The interest shown in [P.A.'s] efforts over the last four years has been outstanding, and visitors from all over the world have continued to visit our places.

His Keyline Plan has been admired, condemned, criticised, accepted in part and even pirated in part. Many have tried out sections of his plan on various types of properties and farms, and where faithfully carried out, has yielded results that have been more than satisfactory."

It also seems that Rita had a significant "public relations" role (as we would call it these days). She received visitors to the various Yeomans farms and showed them around, explaining the transformation of run-down, neglected or abused landscapes to good green pastures and water-filled dams. Her interactions with female visitors are particularly insightful:

"My experiences [...] have been interesting, sometimes exasperating, and often amusing. There was the woman who arrogantly demanded to be shown through the "Nevallan"

home and became quite indignant when politely told it was a private property. A charming old lady in her eighties tramped around the paddocks and her interest and enthusiasm were infectious. Another, a woman doctor, became so keen during a visit that she vowed on her return to the country practice her land-owning patients should receive large doses of Keyline with her course of treatment whenever she visited them. Others arrive for a quick inspection, checking their watches on arrival and allotting perhaps a fifteen minute "stay". These people usually are on their way from the city to their inland properties and the visit to our place is to be "just a passing look". They generally remain for hours. One couple had four young children and a long journey ahead of them. They arrived about lunch time, but it was dark before the husband finally agreed to leave. His wife had my sympathy that day."

In her Foreword, a portrait emerges of Rita as – how should I put it? pragmatically loyal – to her man:

"On first inspecting Kencarley² [at Orange] as prospective buyers the weather was hot, the country dry, and the area altogether extremely discouraging and uninviting. I looked at its rundown, neglected appearance, heavily covered with scrub and trees, the barren soil, and broken fences – even the house was uninhabitable. My husband said to me, "Well, what do you think of it?" and my answer was, "If it wasn't for Keyline and tractors I wouldn't want to touch it.""

In a 2005 book³ by Allan Yeomans, I found another trace of Rita. She was, it seems, a trustee of The Keyline Research Foundation. Here's a picture of her [above] in August 1955. I've copied Allan's full caption for the photo, as it describes many of the things Rita did, and shows the illustrious Keyline team, in which she was an accepted full member:

The Ten Trustees of the Keyline Research Foundation taken at the second meeting of Trustees, August 1955.

From left to right: **Mrs. Rita Yeomans** (my mother), who entertained, advised and catered for often up to one hundred unexpected visitors at the Nevallan farm – almost every week. In addition she was involved with the Flying Doctor Service, the English Speaking Union and the Country Women's Association. She also managed

the Brahman stud operation on the farm. **Mrs. Anthony Horden, Jr.**, managed her own Southdown stud at Culcain (N.S.W.) **Anthony Hordern Jr.**, President of the N.S.W. Sheepbreeders' Association. A grazier running Merino and Romney Mash stud sheep, and also a beef cattle breeder. **Professor J.R. A McMillian**, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture at the University of Sydney. **C.R. McKerehan**, President of the Rural Bank of New South Wales. **P.A. Yeomans** (my father), President of the Keyline Foundation, Grazier, Mining Engineer, Originator of Keyline Plan, author of several books on agriculture. **Professor Sir C. Stanton Hicks**, Professor of Human Physiology and Pharmacology at the University of Adelaide, Scientific Food Consultant to the Australian Army and founded the Australian Army Catering Corps during World War II. **David R McCaughey**, (Sir) Chairman N.S.W. Elder Smith Goldsborough Mort, grazier of Borambola Park Beef Shorthorn stud, Wagga (N.S.W.). **John Darling**, Chairman and Managing Director of Darling and Co.Ltd (our milling and stock-food RM). He was also director of various companies including British Petroleum Co. of Australia, Alcoa of Australia, Perpetual Trustees Australia, Consolidated Metals, and Commonwealth Mining Investments. **Harold N. Sarina**, Organizing Secretary Keyline Research Foundation. (former long term secretary of the Sydney Royal Agricultural Society, (R.A.S.) where he was Executive Officer and Registrar from 1933 to 1955. He was also an agriculture and livestock consultant. And **G.B.S. Falkiner** (not shown), of Haddon Rig Merino Stud, Warren (N.S.W.), Vice President of N.S.W. Sheepbreeder's Association, chairman of the Industrial Committee of the Nuclear Foundation and a member of the Council of the N.S.W. Bush Nursing Association.

There is a less cheerful ending to this story, I'm afraid. According to his account⁴, Allan Yeomans says that after writing the Foreword to *The Challenge of Landscape*, his mother lived for only another six years:

"Rita Yeomans died 1964 and the two original Keyline properties at North Richmond N.S.W. were sold to pay death duties."*

... and later on, Yeomans had another family:

"P. A. Yeomans married Jane Radek in 1966 and they had two daughters, Julie and Wendy."

Anyway, at least this meagre piece of research goes a little way to answering Kirsten's question about Yeomans' wife/wives. It's an important question to have asked, because this farming business can seem to be very much dominated by male forces (especially when big handsome pieces of earth-shaping machinery are in question).

I hope more on Rita and Jane comes to light for us, while we continue to explore the world of Yeomans.

- - -

*[I have to say, I don't know enough about taxation law to properly understand this. Two pieces of land had to be sold, just because Rita died?? That seems a bit unfair. There's what looks like a good essay about death duties (and their 1978 abolition)⁵ for anyone who might make better sense of them than I...]

**Oh, I found more!

In his previous book, *The Keyline Plan* (1954), Rita wrote the Foreword too!⁶

[UPDATE 2013: This year we met up with both Julie and Wendy! Wendy will be an invited speaker at the Art Gallery of NSW, and Julie has contributed a box of her father's documents for the exhibition.]



Rita Yeomans

¹<http://bit.ly/18DJ4Cf>

²<http://bit.ly/1he5vB3>

³<http://bit.ly/1he5AVp>

⁴<http://bit.ly/16NTbl6>

⁵<http://bit.ly/16NTmg6>

⁶<http://bit.ly/18Fv8Xq>

Creeping Suburbs

Ian Milliss

Published: 29 August '11



Aerial view of Yobarnie - photograph from Yeomans' book, *The City Forest*, 1971.

Lucas and I have been looking at photos to use in the prints we have been working on and I've been struck by the way the suburbs are creeping up on Yeomans' early properties. I was born in late 1950 and the population is two and half times what it was then which in itself explains why sustainability has become an issue

during that time and also why the art world is a very different place.

Just look at this early photo of Yobarnie, Yeomans' first property [top left], and this recent shot from Google Earth [top right].

The figures are that Australia's population¹ in 1950 when Yobarnie was being developed by Yeomans was



Recent aerial view of Yobarnie showing housing development.

around 8.3 million and in 1975 when this project was originally proposed it was around 13.9 million, a 67% increase. Now in 2011 the population is around 21 million, a 153% increase.

Sydney's population was 1.7 million in 1950 at which time Yobarnie was well out in the country, now in 2011 when it is over 4.5 million (165% growth) Yobarnie is probably closer to the geographical centre of Sydney than it is to the outer

edge. In reality, the outer edge is now probably the western escarpment of the Blue mountains near where I live and nearly 150 kilometres from the coast. Much of the land that is being swallowed up in urban sprawl² was among the most fertile agricultural land in the country and crucial to food security.

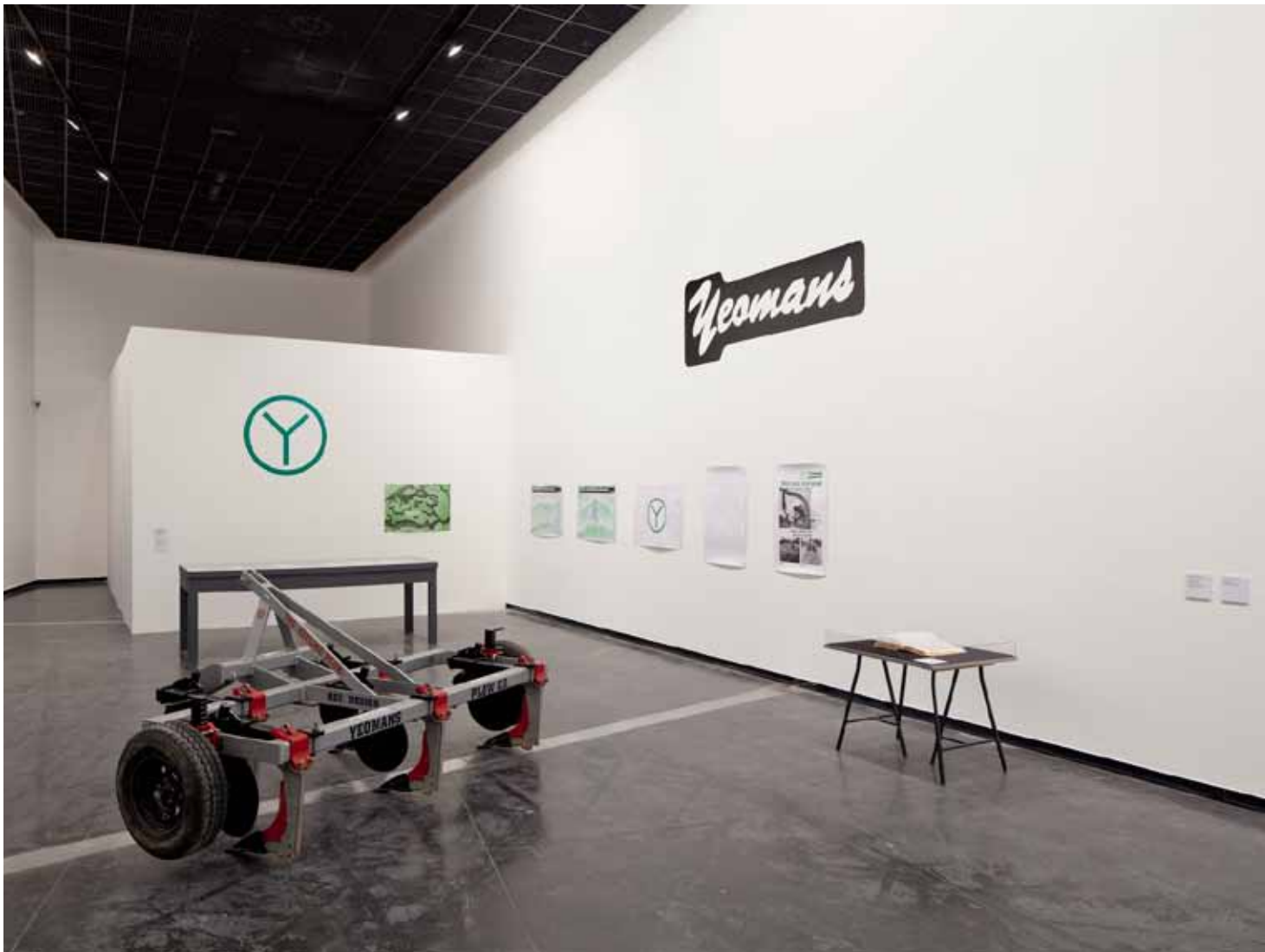
¹<http://bit.ly/1aDvLmC>

²<http://bit.ly/1681D2Y>

Exhibition Circus

Ian Milliss

Published: 30 October '11



The Yeomans Project installation at ACCA photo Andrew Curtis © ACCA

³<http://bit.ly/1fVkgLb>

⁴<http://www.taranakifarm.com.au/>

I know we have looked really slack not posting for two months but the reason was simple enough, we had to do the work for the exhibition *Power to the People: Contemporary Conceptualism and the Object in Art*³. What an effort it has been, you wouldn't think anything so simple could involve so much work and not just by us, an enormous amount was done for us by ACCA and the exhibition curator Hannah Mathews. The irony of this exhibition, with its title that references the radical activism of the 1970s, occurring at the same time as there is finally some growing public resistance to the pervasive corruption and decadence of the last few decades is an irony you could never have scripted.

Of course the *Yeomans Project* overall consists of this blog which will continue as we put in more of the mountain of research we have accumulated, the work in the *Power To The People* exhibition and the bus tour to Taranaki Farm⁴ on October 8, 2011. We'll talk about the bus tour later, but in the exhibition we have a recently manufactured Yeomans Plow, a vitrine of Yeomans publications, signage of Yeomans logos, six prints recently made at Big Fag Press and the AGNSW Trustees minute book, kindly lent by AGNSW and showing a snippet of the exhibition's history.

Let's talk about the prints first...

The Power of the Press

Ian Milliss

Published: 30 October '11



Lucas holding up the first print *Nevallan*, 2011

The big FAG printing press (from which Big Fag Press gets its name) is a wondrous thing especially to someone like me who once worked in publishing. It is horrifying to think it almost went into the scrap metal crusher. Its survival is partly responsible for this project which originated in discussions Lucas and I had about some prints I wanted to do, a series to be called “What didn’t happen” about my past projects that had never happened or had failed or turned out differently to the way they had been conceived.

But one fact about the original *Yeomans Project* as envisaged back in 1975 was that it would never have contained prints, or anything else

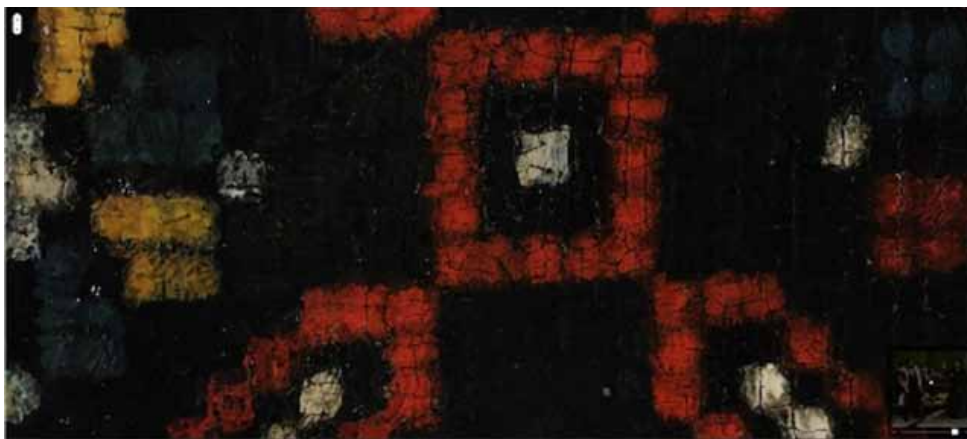
resembling conventional art works. The original proposal was an exploration of the idea that if you regard cultural innovation as the essential characteristic of artists then a lot of people working in areas that would not conventionally be regarded as art media (like farming) could be seen as artists. As a consequence their work should be collected, analysed and presented in cultural institutions.

But that was 1975 and the art world has passed a lot of water since then. In the ensuing twenty years the cultural institutions expanded in size, wealth and power until, tag teaming with the art market, they seemed to have a complete stranglehold on the entire cultural debate and dissenters like myself had

long been kicked aside. Previously the institutions had collected and presented artefacts that had come into existence out in the world, now they incestuously manufactured their own, artists made art for the institutional world alone and the institutions and the art market promoted only the work which supported and promoted their power.

But then, suddenly, everything started to change because the internet came along. What the internet provided

was an almost free distribution mechanism that could potentially reach anyone in the world, a far greater reach than any institution. Most important of all, the internet had no gatekeepers and the key to the institution’s power was their usurpation of the role of cultural gate keeping – either you played it their way, limited yourself to the forms and issues they found acceptable, or you were locked out of the game entirely. On the internet, however, suddenly



Detail from Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, 1533, National Gallery London as seen on Google Art Project.



Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein *Nevallan* 2011 offset lithograph print



Ian Milliss interviewed and Lucas Ihlein interviewed, 2011 offset lithograph prints with spray stencil enamel.

all the barriers to entry were gone. Although there are innumerable people out there who still don't get it, the reality is that the art world has been stood on its head and increasingly the galleries and institutions position resembles that of big box retailers in an age of online shopping- their audience may drop in occasionally to get a sense of the physicality of the objects but the really enhanced experience is online where you can get infinitely more information and even view the object more comfortably and in greater detail [bottom left page 23].

All of that was in our minds as we set about this project. The institution had its priorities and we had ours, how could we both get a reasonable result out of this? The solution to some degree was to use exactly what had been the original criticism of the project back in 1975 – we treated it like a trade show. In other words, we treated it as a form of advertising for something that was happening somewhere else – the sustainable farming movement that has built up around P.A. Yeomans work – and we produced a range of merchandise for the occasion. Hence the prints.

There are six prints: two by me, two by Lucas and two by Yeomans, so to speak.

The first “Yeomans” print is based on the Google Earth view of Nevallan [top image, page 23], the property we visited early in the project. I rotated the image to place the river parallel to the bottom of the frame but other than that

it has only been manipulated by printing it as a duotone.

The second and third prints [left], which I produced, are the interviews Lucas and I did in which we each discussed the development of the project in term of our personal artistic histories. Louise “The Intern” (Louise Anderson), while helping with the printing, rather cruelly observed that when I was being interviewed I gave lengthy answers and when I was doing the interviewing I gave lengthy questions so that overall there is much more of me talking than Lucas. Sadly, that is completely true and my only defence is that I talk too much and Lucas is too polite to tell me to shut up.

In terms of design, I have spent far too much of my life laying out newspapers and magazines where I had to align every last column. In this case, I didn't. In fact I ignored almost every conventional print nicety because just for once I could and guess what, it hardly makes any difference to the readability or lack of it. The contours and dam shape are based loosely on illustrations in Yeomans books and have been sprayed over the finished print using stencils in a sort of gentle parody of the artists' authentic touch – yes folks every single one has been graffitied by me.

The two interviews can be downloaded in their lengthy entirety online¹.

¹<http://bit.ly/1c2kwb2> & <http://bit.ly/171YazF>



Detail of Lucas Ihlein interviewed, 2011 offset lithograph print

Right page: Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein, Keyline Map detail, 2011 offset lithograph print

can exercise over his land. The landman can create his own landscape, but the artist gives only his impression of it, and few pictures can rival those seen

family for generations. Age constantly improves the cultivated landscape; lakes, hills, and the flowing streams all gain in beauty and usefulness under

as it is continuously being reflected in the life of the streams, the ponds and the soil, as in grasses, crops and trees. There is nothing still or dead in this scene

THE GEOMETRY OF SHAPES AND FORMS
The contour lines on a map show the shapes and the forms of the land within them into lesser regions. The attack by water on the land and the draining of the water back to the sea, aided by other forces of the rivers.

THE WATER- DRAINAGE DESIGN
The dividing line around each was a contour. THE FIRST LINE OF NATURE'S LANDSCAPE DESIGN. Here in the drainage line of the land, Nature made first use of the branching and joining pattern which became one of her favorite

THE HARMONY OF PURE DESIGN
The loop pattern of the primary valley below the Keyline. Then they converge again on the other side of the primary valley to open out again to display the pattern of flow is at right angles

NATURAL WASTE PRODUCTS FROM PLANTS AND ANIMALS
Polluted water should not be allowed to cross these vital lines. The shapes and forms may not always

THE FARM WAS AND STILL REMAINS THE CRITICALLY
In this manner shallow soil in which grass roots penetrate deeper root systems. Supposing at this stage the grass is mown

These scenes like these, but, unfortunately, there are very different landscapes which have been developed by man on which his hand



The Yeomans Project: A Social Ecology Perspective, 2011 offset lithograph print

The fourth print is by Lucas - but is not a print at all, and we don't even have photo of it, although you can see it in the background of the exhibition photo in the previous post. It is in fact the original that will be made into a print, because in the rather haphazard tradition of this project, Lucas's partner Lizzie gave birth to a daughter Alberta May only two weeks before the exhibition, and just when the print was to be produced, which was a bit of a distraction. [2013 Update - the work is now a print, shown above].

It is a diagram illustrating some of the ideas of Stuart Hill, Professor of Social Ecology at the university of Western Sydney. Stuart has written extensively on Yeomans and has developed many of his ideas in innovative ways. We'll talk more about his work later.

The next rather beautiful print is also by Lucas, made by cutting and

pastings, word by word, quotes from Yeomans books over one of his Keyline contour drawings. It's my favourite of the prints I think [previous page].

The final print [left] is Yeomans again, it's an enlarged page from the 1970s sales pamphlet for his plows, in this case advertising one of his specialised tynes, but very much in the optimistic mode of that era when everything still seemed possible.

It includes an image of an earlier version of the plow we feature in the exhibition, and the plow deserves a discussion all of its own.

So there it is! Our merchandise, our collectibles. We thought of doing some T-shirts because you've always gotta have T-shirts, we thought of mugs, then we thought no, stay classy, it's an art gallery, make it look like art.

Whatever that is.



Lucas holding up New chisel plow shank, 2011 offset lithograph print



Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein, detail of New chisel plow shank, 2011 offset lithograph print

PA Yeomans and Social Ecology

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 31 October '11



Stuart Hill with conversation notes, at Wollongong University Library, September 2011.

In the previous article, Ian mentioned a “fourth print”, based on Professor Stuart Hill’s research into PA Yeomans [far top left]. Of all the Yeomans prints we’ve produced on the Big Fag Press, it’s the one which most resembles a highschool project (which is also why it’s the most daggy). Aesthetics aside, I’m going to try and make sense of some of Stuart’s ideas which this poster grapples to exhibit.

I sketched up this diagram after having a chat with Stuart in a meeting room within Wollongong University Library [above], and then delving into a bunch of his academic texts – some of which are available online.¹ Stuart is Foundation Chair of Social Ecology at the University of Western Sydney.

Social Ecology is a way of applying ecological understanding to the design and management of human systems.

In other words, it’s a field of study and action which attempts to wholistically combine ecological, economic, and social spheres in order to design better systems for the planet. As Murray Bookchin, one of the pioneers of the field pointed out in 1964, people who want to “save the environment” had

better, first of all, put some effort into understanding the way that *humans* think and work. Bookchin writes:

“To separate ecological problems from social problems—or even to play down or give token recognition to this crucial relationship—would be to grossly misconstrue the sources of the growing environmental crisis. The way human beings deal with each other as social beings is crucial to addressing the ecological crisis. Unless we clearly recognize this, we will surely fail to see that the hierarchical mentality and class relationships that so thoroughly permeate society give rise to the very idea of dominating the natural world.”

Here’s another interesting attempt at a definition, from the School of Social Ecology at the University of California.

“A modern definition of social ecology understands it as the interactions within the social, institutional, and cultural contexts of people-environment relations that make up well-being [...] At its core, Social Ecology’s motivating philosophy is a pragmatic one — the most persistent ills of society (sprawl, malnutrition, deforestation, urban violence, waterborne disease,

obesity, housing insecurity, and countless others) seem to resist the prescriptions emerging from uni-disciplinary research.”

When we met up, Stuart and I talked about dozens of different things: from psychological analysis of “the self” and its relation to “the world”, to more concrete stories about co-existing with weeds on productive farmland. In my diagram, I’ve focused on just one element of our conversation – the notion of “redesign”.

In Stuart’s account, the desire to improve the way particular systems work usually happens in one of two

ways: by increasing **efficiency**, or via the **substitution** of different inputs. These two approaches can be thought of as incremental steps towards the more wholistic (but more difficult) process of **redesign**.

I’ve written out a simplification of the EFFICIENCY- SUBSTITUTION- REDESIGN (ESR) concept.

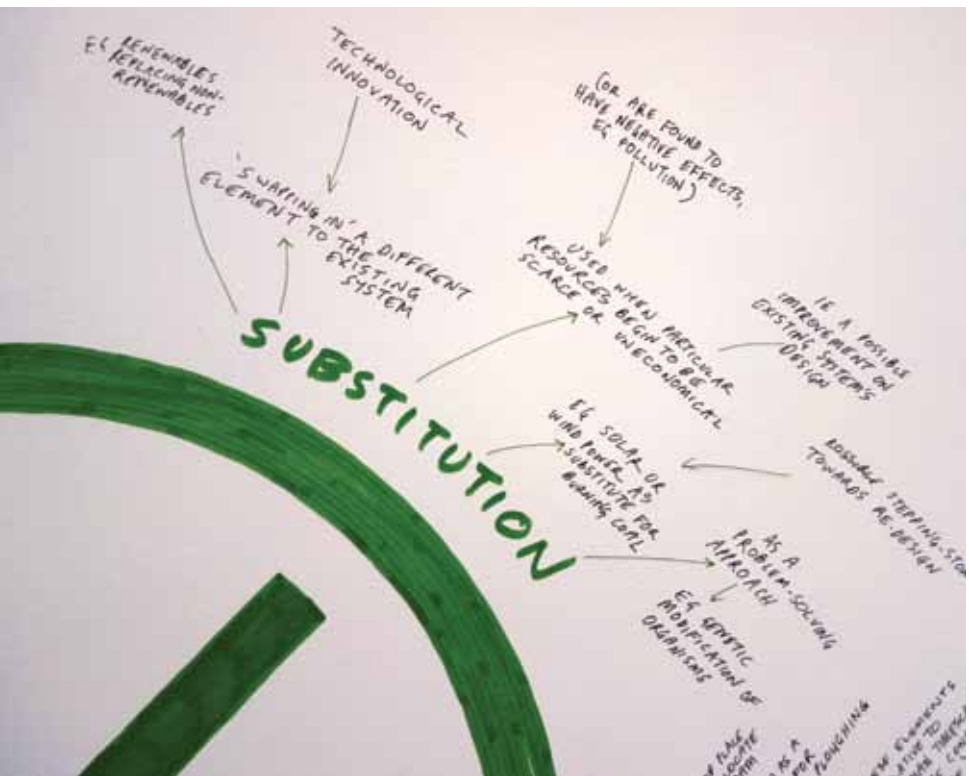
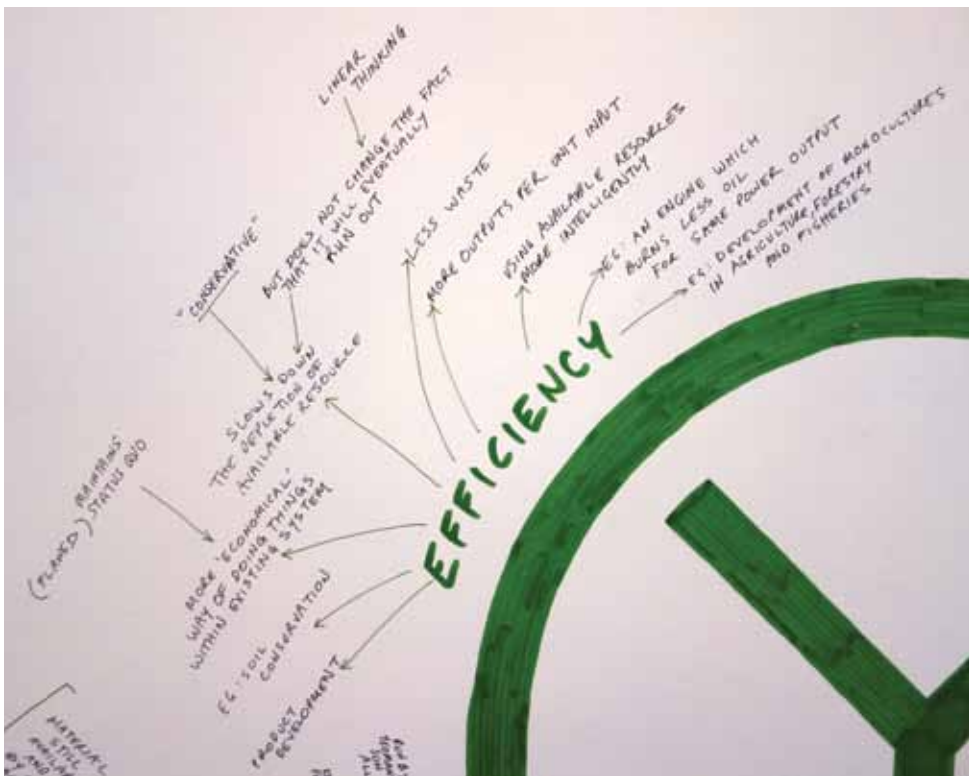
Efficiency: this is about using available resources in a manner which is likely to generate more yield.

For example, a more efficient motor will propel your car further for the same amount of fuel. There’s often an economic imperative for product manufacturers to improve the efficiency of their own systems, as it can yield more profit (or be more attractive to consumers).

My 2011 Hyundai is far more efficient than my old 1978 Ford Transit Van ever was, meaning it’s not only cheaper for me to drive, but it also produces less pollution per kilometre travelled. That’s great, but it still only *reduces* (but doesn’t do away



¹<http://www.stuarthill.com/>



with) the basic underlying problem – that car travel is a polluting activity. With the number of cars on the road increasing all the time, this efficiency gain is outweighed by the sheer volume of drivers – and so carbon emissions continue to rise.

To use a different example (and perhaps a more silly one) – the amount of fuel used to freight rolls of toilet paper from factories to supermarkets can be improved by making each roll more “efficient” – ie, by decreasing the size of the cylinder of air in the middle of the roll, and making up the difference by having more sheets of toilet paper per roll. But this still doesn’t alter the fundamental problem of all that human shit being flushed down the toilet – the existing system remains unchanged.

Substitution: here, an attempt is made to go beyond efficiency, by substituting a different kind of input material.

Unleaded petrol is less poisonous than the old “super”, and using bio-diesel from vegetable oil means that you can potentially run your car using a renewable resource, rather than oil.

Similarly, the widespread acceptance of recycled paper for toilet roll manufacturing means that fewer trees need to be chopped down for us to wipe our arses. But again, substitution is a way of patching up – and possibly even scaffolding – an existing, flawed, way of doing things.

The approach of **redesign** involves taking a step back from the situation, and reframing it more broadly. What

exactly do we want to do here?

The way things are currently set up, humans want to rapidly move their bodies, as well as manufactured goods, from place to place. We happen to find motorised road travel a convenient way to carry out this function right now, but it’s not the *only* way to achieve this goal.

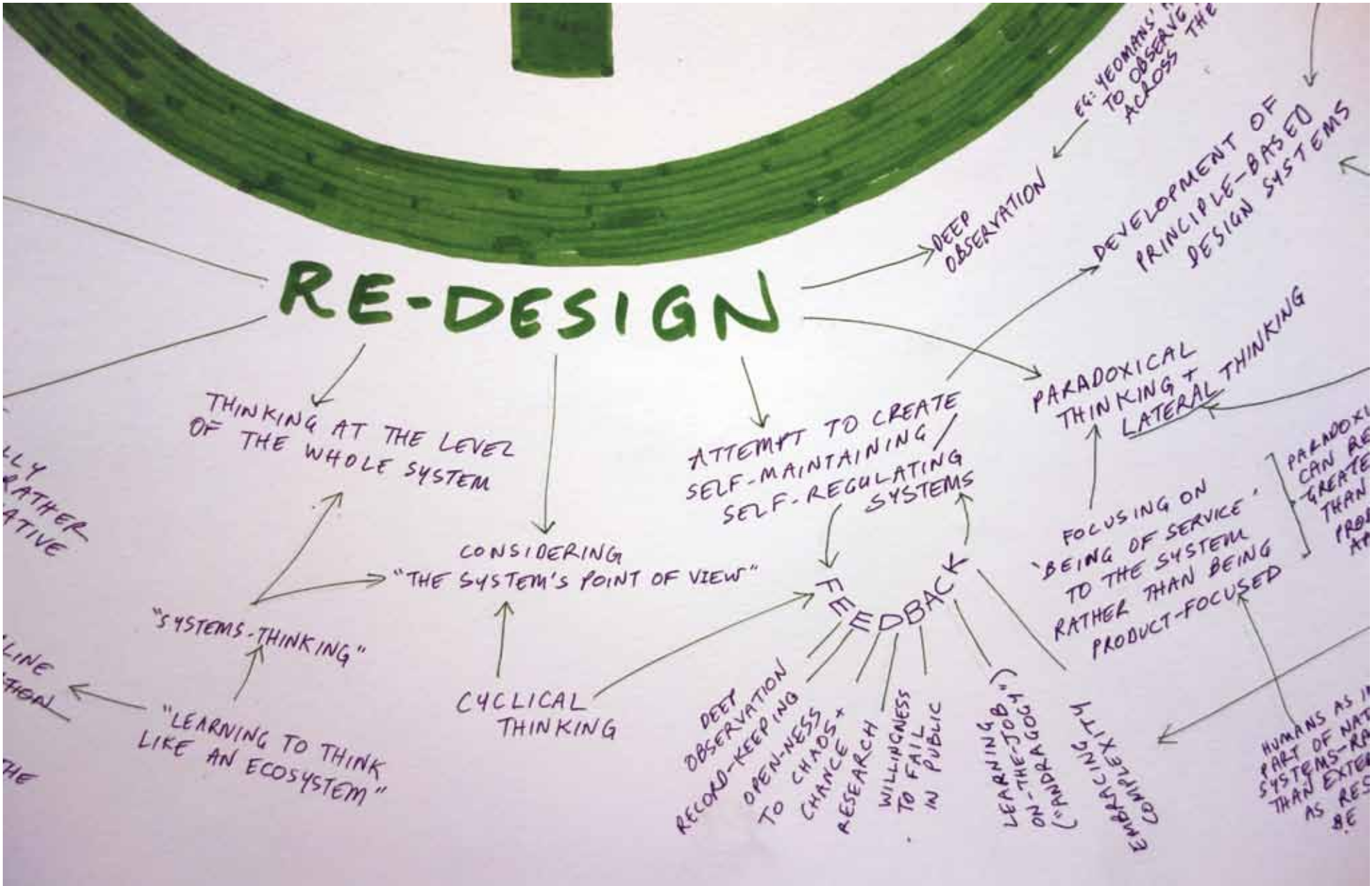
To zoom back even further, we could ask – why do we need to move our bodies about so much anyway? Is there some way we could redesign human systems so that we don’t require this level of physical mobility? Experiments in the “relocalisation” of society are part of the process of redesigning this problem.

And what of my toilet paper example? Nick and Kirsten of Milkwood Permaculture love talking

about this sort of shit.¹ To paraphrase their redesign of the problem:

“The dumb thing about our current way of organising sewerage systems is that we take two substances – human poo and fresh drinking water – and we mix them together to make a third substance which is not useful for anything. We then flush it away, and have to spend vast amounts of energy treating it, to make it safe again. But if we were to look at human excrement as a resource instead of a pollutant, we could then think about harvesting it and breaking it down (eg via a “humanure” composting system) to make an excellent agricultural fertiliser.”

¹<http://bit.ly/Ihnam>



And where does Yeomans come in all of this? Interestingly, Stuart Hill discusses the work of PA Yeomans extensively in his explanation of the EFFICIENCY-SUBSTITUTION-REDESIGN concept. The poster we've made tries to accumulate a whole bunch of anecdotes and ideas about redesign stemming from Yeomans' work. For Hill, Yeomans' approach to landscape and farm management is an excellent example of redesign.

Farming is often thought of in economic terms – *how can we get the best yield for the least input?* In the 1960s, chemical fertiliser and pest control became cheap enough to make agricultural food production a global industrial process. But in an environment like Australia, with its poor soils and drought-prone climate, an industrial approach like this can lead to diminishing returns – not to mention to the degradation of the very resource (the land) upon which the whole enterprise relies.

For Yeomans, the problem is reframed by thinking of the farm landscape as a *wholistic system*, rather than a resource to be used – and thinking of the farmer as being “in the service” of that system.

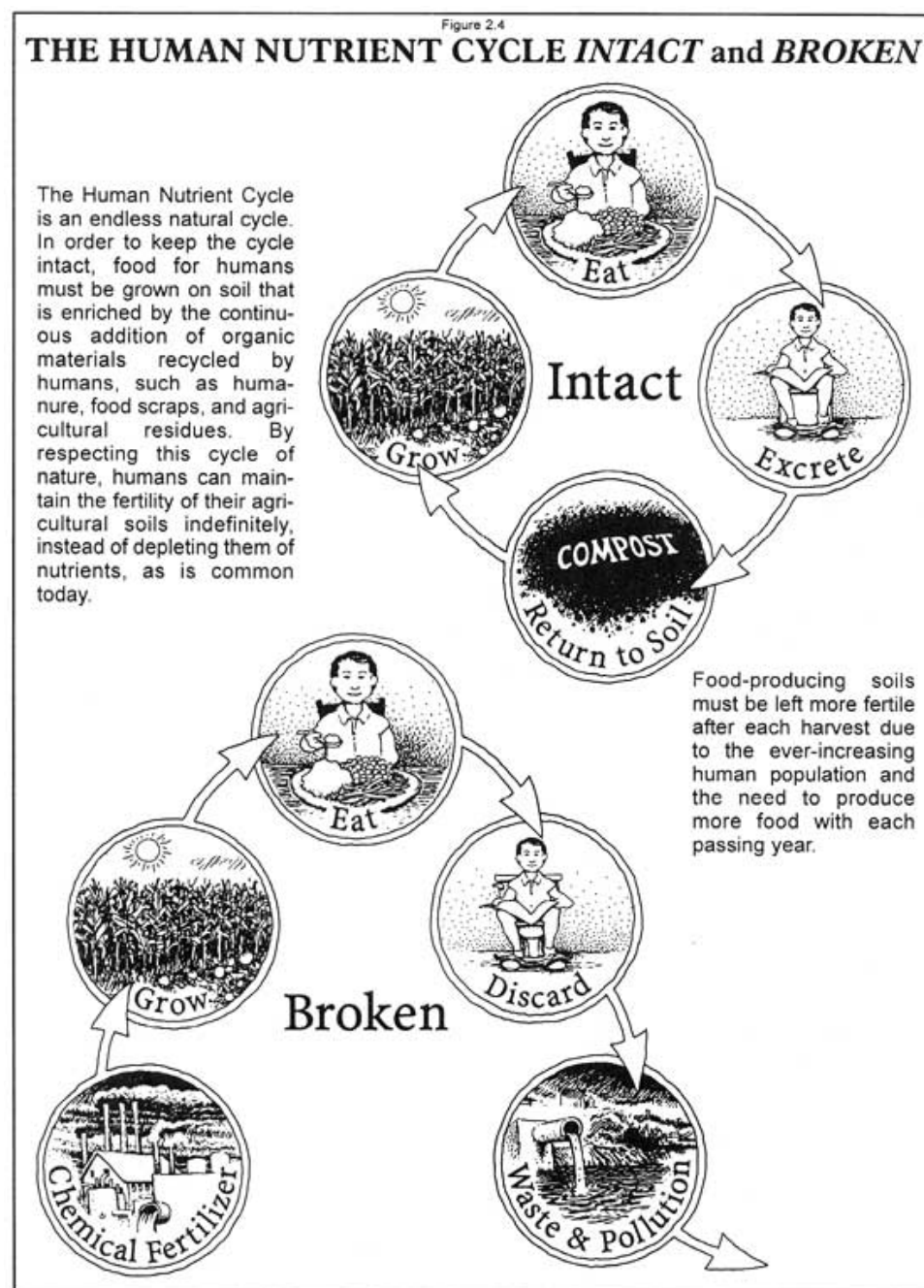
The question itself then changes. Rather than wondering how to preserve the precious little soil we have, Yeomans asks: “how we can create an abundance of new soil?” Rather than asking “how can I extract more product from this harsh climate?”, he asks “how can we improve the climate of the soil for the life within it?”.

Having thus reframed the problem, Yeomans then set about to develop a whole range of interlinked approaches (beginning from the close observation of land shape and water flows) to “improve the capital” in the system itself. The idea is then to live off the interest, rather than depleting the capital.

Those who are inclined to poo-poo this “organic farming” approach might say that it's not workable on a large scale; that it's merely a “boutique” method and cannot feed the earth's billions. Arguably, such critics aren't taking into account the fact that conventional farming has a whole host of unaccounted-for inputs (unrenewable energy, chemical fertilisers) and outputs (carbon emissions, long distance freight) which prop it up. In other words, the apparently high yields of conventional agriculture come at a cost which has, up to now, been bracketed out of the equation.

A social ecology approach not only generates ideas for redesigning human-environmental systems, but also explores why good ideas may have failed to gain wider acceptance. In his own lifetime, Yeomans' Keyline design system, for example, never became the “human environment revolution” that he'd hoped for.

Hill hypothesises that a combination of elements may have contributed to this limited uptake during his active Keyline years (roughly 1950-80).



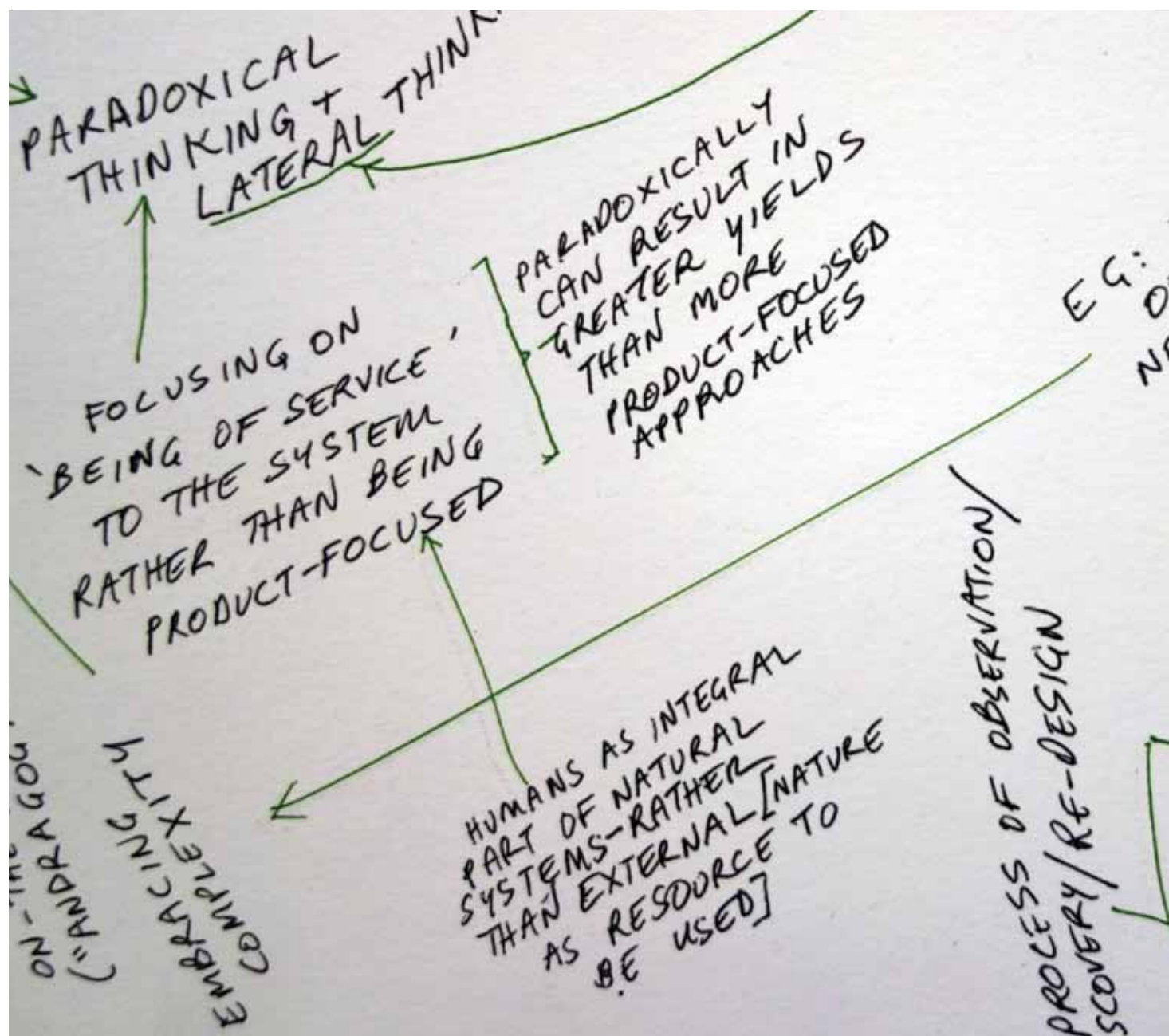
Human Nutrient Cycle Diagram – from the *Humanure Handbook* by Joseph Jenkins (via Milkwood)

These include:

- a lack of consumer demand at the time for green products, organic and pesticide-free foods;
- the flooding of the market with cheap “magic bullet” agricultural solutions (like superphosphates and weed-killers) making it easy for farmers to bypass Yeomans' more long-term solutions;
- a limited general understanding of ecological systems thinking in society at large;
- Yeomans' own style of operation – his writing is at times confusing, and flips back and forth between the highly technical and the quasi-evangelical.

Yeomans is often described as a “pioneer” of sustainable agriculture. Perhaps, as the cliché goes, he was simply ahead of his time. These days, he's often cited as an influence on permaculture movement, which has risen dramatically since the 1970s, and begun to infiltrate mainstream thinking.

In permaculture teaching, Yeomans' Keyline design methods are just as likely to be used as a *metaphor* for a particular approach to problem setting and solving in a wide range of circumstances (ie, not only for farming and land management). And it's this “integrative thinking” – the ability to bring experiences from diverse fields onto a problem situation – that makes Yeomans an important contributor to social ecology research.



Field Trip

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 1 November '11

Field Trip

Lucas Ihlein and Ian Milliss

Join artists, Lucas Ihlein and Ian Milliss, for a bus trip to see the art of lateral thinking in the wilds of Woodend. Their work, *Yeomans Project*, investigates the influence of P. A. Yeomans the Australian farmer whose sustainable agriculture systems can be seen as a model for the radical re-interpretation of the role of the artist. **Meet ACCA foyer 10.30am Saturday 8 October. Return ACCA 4pm**
Cost Free. BYO own picnic, blanket and thermos
To book Places are strictly limited. Bookings close Monday 3 October.

We met at ACCA in the morning. Some enthusiastic punters beat us to it, and were already milling around in the foyer. They had brought cute-looking picnic baskets and thermoses, and there was an excited feeling of agricultural anticipation. Field Trip!



Like nerdy highschool students, we piled onto the bus...

I quite like the period of calm which a short bus trip creates. Someone else is in charge of the navigation and the driving, and all you have to do is sit back and drowse, until you arrive.

...unless, of course, you're on a bus with Ian and Lucas, armed with a funny old microphone furnished by the nice bus driver. In which case, you're likely to be regaled with stories about Yeomans (and about ourselves) for most of the journey. [top right]

This was our "artists' talk" about the Yeomans Project – the sort of thing you usually get when you go to the gallery and the artist stands in front of his/her work and gives you a bunch of extra info which hopefully will help you understand or appreciate it better.

The great thing about rumbling along in a bus while you do this, is that you can have pauses to look out the window, and contemplate the landscape rolling by. These silences seem significant, not awkward.

While we had the mike, we picked on a few folks on the bus to get a bit of a random sample: who were these people, and why were they on this trip? When you organise a Field Trip to a farm, starting from an art gallery, it's helpful to know these things.

Most of those we spoke to had some sort of affiliation with the art

world. But like us, they were interested in agricultural processes – an interest distinct from (even if overlapping with) their interest in art. There were a few who said they had a particular enthusiasm for "social processes as art" – of which our Field Trip was an example – so I suppose for them, the tour itself was an item of study.

There were also some kids who just wanted to see the chickens.

We arrived at Taranaki Farm around noon, and were greeted by the farmers: Ben Falloon, his partner Nina and their daughter Maya.

Ben began his introductory statements by reminding us why we were visiting Taranaki, and not some other nice-looking Victorian farm: PA Yeomans. Taranaki Farm has developed, over the last six years, from a conventionally run cattle farm, to a shining example of "regenerative agriculture". That is, land which is on its way to better things, rather than running down its biological resources until they are exhausted. Studying and applying Yeomans' farm design principles is a key method in this shift for Ben and Nina.

We all tramped off for our first paddock walk. It took about forty seconds for my mesh sneakers to sink deep into muddy water, and I definitely wasn't the only one with impractical footwear. [right]

Ben walked us up to where his cows were stationed for today. He pointed out an area of land which he was planning to develop according to Yeomans' Keyline principles. The



Ian and Lucas hoggin' the mike...



Jumping the puddles in the paddock



The contour is the line between the lighter area and the darker area of grass...

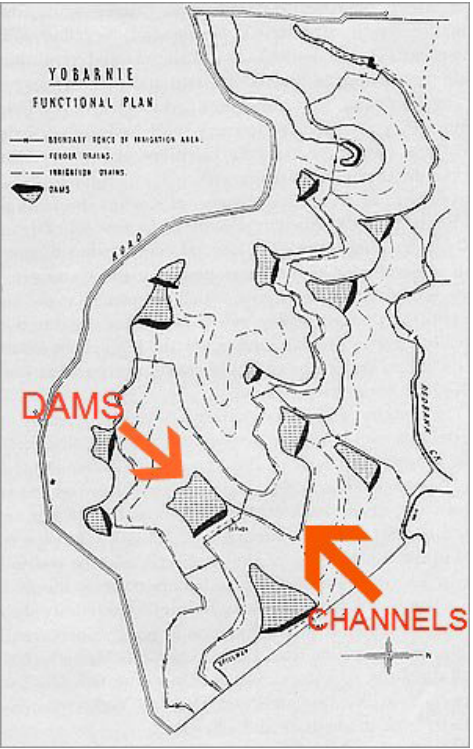


A new dam on Taranaki Farm

beginning of this process, he explained, was finding the contour of the land, and making it visible. This can be done with coloured pegs or stakes, or, as in this case, by fencing off along the contour and allowing the cows to graze up to the edge of one side. [opposite page, bottom]

This allows him to “see” where the water can be made to flow, along and just below the level of the contour. He can then start to think about how to link this particular water flow line with elements like roads and dams.

The basic principle here, Ben explained, is to keep the rain that falls onto his land, on his land, for as long as possible. Ultimately, that might mean that the rainfall landing on a hilltop could zigzag from dam to dam, following multiple channels, for a long time before it exits the property. In the meantime, it seeps into the soil, and fills up all those storage units – the dams.



Yeomans' farm, "Yobarnie", showing dams and water flow channels

I haven't got a diagram of Taranaki Farm's water design to show you, but here's one from Yobarnie (one of Yeomans' farms on the outskirts of Sydney) which clearly shows a whole bunch of dams situated at crucial points in the undulating landscape, linked by water channels running between them [bottom left].

According to Ben, the purpose of all of this is twofold. First, to improve the land itself: to bring extra moisture into the soil, increasing its capacity for growing pasture to feed cows and so on; and second, to build in a sort of water storage “buffer”, so that the land can better take care of itself during periods of drought.

After this explanation we tramped over to look at an actual dam that Ben recently created. It's a beautiful piece of land engineering [top left].

Ben showed us – this time with peg and string lines – where the water flow channels will join this dam to future dams he will make. This is hard to get your head around. As one lady on the Field Trip remarked – sometimes the water flow channels seem, to the naked eye, to travel up hill! But Ben explained that the eye can play all sorts of tricks, and it's his trusty laser level that he relies on to tell the truth about where the water will really flow.

There's a tale about PA Yeomans, that whenever it rained, he would race

outside to see how all his dams and channels were working, and from this he would know how they could be improved. It was a constant cyclical process of observation and action. Ben, almost foaming with glee, told us that he is the same. The rain tells the truth about whether his Keyline design plan is working or not.

After a visit to another dam, the crowd was ravenous, and so we sloshed back to the farmstead for our picnic lunch.

This was lovely. Though it'd been threatening to rain all day, the sun shone feebly for just long enough for us to spread out our blankets in Taranaki's ramshackle orchard, and recline for our luncheon *en plein air*.

The picnic was a good chance for the Field Trippers to get to know each other a bit better, share some snacks, and chat about what they'd seen and heard. For those who had hitherto heard little of Yeomans' Keyline principles, Ben's rapidfire introduction needed to be calmly digested, so to speak.

Small clusters of picnickers organically composed themselves within the orchard [below]. The whole thing was very bucolic. (But why hadn't we thought to bring wine?!)

And then it was off again, for the second half of the day, to the “bottom paddock”, where some of Ben's Keyline experiments are a bit more established. We rolled down the hill and crossed a sort of bog [overleaf bottom left], where Ben had constructed a makeshift bridge so our woefully inadequate shoes wouldn't have to suffer any more indignities.

Crossing this bog – which to a farmer might present itself as an irritating inconvenience – was, to us cityfolk, an adventure in itself. (“Sophisticated” urban dwellers, perhaps, don't get the chance to wobble and play and risk getting mucky very often.)



Picnic at Taranaki Farm



A Keyline Dam System at Taranaki Farm

At the bottom paddock, we got to see an example of Keyline design in action. Ben showed us two dams which were strategically positioned in relation to one another. I've tried to label the photo collage [above] to show how the water flows work.

So, the water comes down the hill on the right hand side of the photo, flows along a road (which has been bulldozed in that position on purpose) and winds up in the big dam on the left hand side. This dam, when full, will overflow and the water will run along a channel to the second dam, on the top right hand side of the photo.

This system is pretty nifty. It satisfies the intellect – physics and all that. But there's more. Part of the reason for doing this is that you can predict where water will be a lot of the time, and therefore start to plan the landscape accordingly. For example, you don't have to wait for the dam to overflow – you can release some of the water whenever you like. In this way, irrigation can happen, and the areas below the channels can begin to support things like intentionally planted forests.

This is exactly what Ben has started to do, just on the other side of the crest from this system. Here you can

see the beginning of his mixed forestry plantation [opposite page top].

The following photo shows quite well how the forested land drops away below the contour where the road we're all standing on is situated [opposite page, middle].

Importantly, Ben's forest is not just for "feel good" purposes. He intends to harvest the timber. Having a forest performs a host of other services too, like providing shelter for the cattle.

Oh the cattle, we haven't even got onto them yet!

...because, besides a bit of timber, the product which sustains this entire

enterprise is, of course, beef. And so it's worth mentioning, before I sign off here, the amazing system of "cell grazing" which ties in with this whole Keyline farming business.

Taranaki employs a version of Joel Salatin's beef management method¹. This means keeping the cows in a really tight area (a "cell"), and moving them every day to a new piece of pasture. This way, the cows intensively graze – eating almost everything – including weeds – shit all over it, and move on. The grass has a shock to its system, and starts to

¹<http://bit.ly/19TXQUs>



Crossing the bog, single file...

regenerate rapidly. By the time the cows come back again, some months later, the grass has fully recovered, and has deeper roots than before.

In an ideal world, a mobile chicken shed (or “eggmobile”) follows behind the cows, pecking at all the bugs in the cow manure, and adding even more diversity to the nutrient mix. (Taranaki’s chicken shed is built, it just doesn’t have wheels yet!)

According to Joel Salatin, this method mimics the traditional movement of animals through land:

“Herbivores in nature exhibit three characteristics: mobbing for predator protection, movement daily onto fresh forage and away from yesterday’s droppings, and a diet consisting of forage only – no dead animals, no chicken manure, no grain, and no fermented forage. Our goal is to approximate this template as closely as possible. Our cows eat forage only, a new pasture paddock roughly every day, and stay herded tightly with portable electric fencing. This natural model heals the land, thickens the forage, reduces weeds, stimulates earthworms, reduces pathogens, and increases nutritional qualities in the meat.”

Below is an aerial shot of Taranaki Farm, from Nearmaps. You can see the radiating lines coming from the dam in the bottom middle of the picture – these correspond to individual cells used on a rotating basis, day by day. Ben is able to shift one thin electric fence wire each day and the cows cheerfully shift to the next cell for a fresh day’s foraging.

Unfortunately, our day had come to an end. We were already running behind time, so we skipped back to the bus to head back to Melbourne.

I had prepared a special CD of (rather crappy but topical) farming songs for our weary Field Trippers to listen to (if anyone wants a copy, let me know), and there was much animated chatting about all we had seen and heard (and, I noticed some drowsing) on the bus.

One last thing, which I have been meaning to draw your attention



Ben striding towards Taranaki Farm's Keyline Forest plantation - which you can see growing on the right hand side of the picture



Field Trip group inspecting Taranaki Farm Keyline Forest

to – amazingly, Ben, Nina and Maya have been farming at Taranaki for six years. What’s more, they started with Yeomans’ Keyline methods just three years ago.

It’s fantastic to be able to witness this transformation as it happens, with

one’s own eyes. And it’s thrilling to be able to feel the land’s undulations, with one’s own legs. Of course, any narrative and photographic account can only be a shadow of the embodied experience we had on our Field Trip.

COMMENTS:

Ian Milliss Posted 1 November '11

I would add that it is always enjoyable to meet someone who is articulate, enthusiastic and thoughtful and Ben was all of those things. It was great to spend time with him. The pleasure he took in the work he was doing to recreate his farm was incredibly contagious and I’m sure most people came away with a real sense of the creativity and awareness involved in the process and also real sense of how humanity’s looming difficult future can be faced positively.

Another point about how much Ben has achieved in a short time is that two quite different forms of farming practice are still quite visible on the farm. You can still see the old structure because there are old fence lines still in place although they don’t function because the wire has been removed. It helps enormously in understanding the conflicting approaches that have been operating there.

COMMENTS:

Lucas Ihlein Posted 5 November '11

Oh also... On the way back on the bus, I got to talking with a few final year art students from RMIT. One of them mentioned that for her graduation piece, she is going to hire a helicopter, to hover in a stationery position over the city for an hour.

I know this, seemingly, has nothing to do with Yeomans (although someone is bound to find a connection), the reason I mention this is that if she happens to come here and read this blog entry, maybe she could get in touch and tell us how the event goes.

I thought it sounded ‘just the right amount of crazy’ to be interesting... Oh, another thing! In the week before our big bus trip, Ian and I visited Ben at Taranaki to get the lay of the land. Ben hooned us around the farm in his little cracked-windscreen Suzuki four wheel drive. Ian sat in the front, I sat in the back.

On the backseat, amongst laser levels, bits of old barbed wire, and odd rusty tools, I found two objects which, possibly, sum up Ben’s character.

One, on the right [below], is a notepad with a listing of PA Yeomans’ elements in the Keyline Scale of Permanence. The other is a DVD of Kurosawa’s great samurai film Yojimbo.



Aerial View of Taranaki Farm showing lines left by cell grazing



Yeomans

New CHISEL PLOW SHANK



PRICE:
COMPLETE
BLADE SHANK
AND
WOMBAT SLIPPER
EACH \$55.50
EXTRA: WOMBATS
\$5.80 EACH
DELIVERY:
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**DOUBLES DIGGING DEPTH
MULTIPLIES AERATION**



TESTING



WORKING

*Livingston
J. McMillan*

Yobarnie Heritage Update 2013

Ian Milliss

Published: 1 November '13

Since my original research [see page 9], the heritage significance of Yobarnie has now been recognised and protected. In March 2013 the NSW Government listed Yobarnie on the NSW State Heritage Register, giving it protection as an item of state significance. The listing protects the remaining parts of the original property (including ten of the twelve original dams) from future redevelopment or subdivision and provides a framework for future restoration work or conservation through some form of adaptive reuse.

The Statement of Significance which is required for listing noted that the property met the requirements for state significance on all major criteria. A summary indicates that while meeting the the state significance criteria the property is in fact of national and even international significance making it unique in Australia. The criteria are:

- Historical significance: Yobarnie is the place in which the Keyline system was first developed and demonstrated. This system has since been adopted by farmers in almost every country in the world and is considered to be the precursor of the Permaculture movement.

- Associative significance: for its association with Percival A Yeomans, inventor of the Keyline system whose achievements were recognised internationally by the Prince Philip Design Award, in 1974, and a nation-wide poll conducted by Country Life magazine placed him among the top 3 Australians who had contributed most to Australian agriculture.

- Aesthetic significance: The distinctive cultural landscape resulting from the Keyline system is itself aesthetically pleasing and offers considerable scope for contributing to the visual and recreational amenity of any future adaptive reuse.

- Social significance: Yobarnie is held in high esteem by the state's (and indeed, the country's) agricultural community, evidenced by a nationwide poll conducted by Country Life magazine that placed PA Yeomans among the top 3 Australians who had contributed most to Australian agriculture.

- Research potential: Yobarnie shows evidence not found on any other property of Yeomans' early experiments.

- Rarity: Yobarnie is unique in preserving evidence of the early experimental stages in the development

of that system. Such evidence of the sustainable transformation of natural landscapes by human agendas is rare in NSW and in Australia.

- Representativeness: Yobarnie is of state heritage significance for its ability to demonstrate the interaction between topography and poor soil and the Keyline System, which created

from this challenging environment the prototype of a viable agricultural landscape now represented worldwide.

- Integrity/Intactness: Although the Keyline System at Yobarnie has been neglected since 1964, it has continued to operate passively to the extent possible without maintenance and the overall legibility of the system remains good.

Overall the listing not only recognises the property but also gives official recognition to the importance of P.A. Yeomans as an innovator and a figure of major cultural significance. The listing is itself a major achievement for the many Yeomans supporters who worked so hard to bring it about.

Heritage Council of New South Wales



State Heritage Register

Gazettal Date: 8 March 2013

0 100 200 400 600 800 Metres

Scale: 1:12,000

Produced by: Michelle Galea

Legend

- SHR Curtilage
- Land Parcels
- LGAs
- Suburbs

Heritage Council of NSW map of Yobarnie indicating 'state significant' area.

Opposite page: Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein *New chisel plow shank* 2011 offset lithograph print based on an enlarged page from the 1970s sales pamphlet for Yeomans plows advertising one of his specialised tynes.

Yeomans Project at the Art Gallery of NSW

28 November 2013 - 27 January 2014

Lucas Ihlein

Published: 6 November '13

Michael Brand, director, Art Gallery of New South Wales invites you to join the artists for the opening of

THE YEOMANS PROJECT

Opening
Wednesday 27 November 2013, 6–8pm

Level 2 Art Gallery of New South Wales
Art Gallery Road
The Domain Sydney 2000
artgallery.nsw.gov.au
No RSVP required

Exhibition
28 November 2013 – 27 January 2014

Artists in conversation
Contemporary Projects Space, FREE, 6pm

4 Dec Kirsten Bradley, Milkwood Permaculture
11 Dec Joanna Mendelssohn, Associate Professor, COFA
15 Jan Stuart Hill, Emeritus Professor of Social Ecology, UWS
22 Jan Wendy Yeomans, daughter of PA Yeomans; researcher at Institute for Sustainable Futures, UTS

Field trip
25 Jan Day-long field-trip to Yobarnie, North Richmond. FREE.
Bookings essential: artgallery.nsw.gov.au

Ian Milliss and Lucas Ihlein
New chisel plow shank 2011
offset lithograph based on an enlarged page from the 1970s sales pamphlet for PA 'Yeomans' plows advertising one of his specialised tynes. Print produced by Big Fag Press, Sydney.
© the artists

And so it has come to pass. After thirty eight years of wandering in the wilderness, the *Yeomans Project* is finally coming to rest at the Art Gallery of NSW.

Exhibition Dates: 28 November 2013 to 27 January 2014.

The exhibition, which is an updated and enlarged version of what we showed at ACCA in 2011, will include:

- display cases including books and artefacts lent by PA Yeomans' daughters
- videos showing Keyline design in action
- prints produced on the Big Fag Press
- a large chalk map of one of Yeomans' properties
- the original Art Gallery of New South Wales Trustees' Minutes book which shows the decision NOT to exhibit Ian Milliss's Yeomans exhibition back in 1976.
- a big old Yeomans Plow

The show will also be making links to some contemporary artists who demonstrate that things have come full circle since the Art Gallery of NSW rejected the original Yeomans exhibition. In other words, unlike back in 1976, it's now totally acceptable for the works of an artist (or art collective) to consist almost entirely of agricultural, botanical and permacultural processes. (Artists featured include Taranaki Farm, Milkwood Permaculture, Diego Bonetto

and collaborators, f(ROUTE) and Artist as Family.)

PLUS:

...we'll be hosting some discussions with the following luminaries, touching on different aspects of Yeomans' life and work:

- Kirsten Bradley of Milkwood Permaculture (on the impact of Yeomans on contemporary permaculture practices)

- Joanna Mendelssohn, College of Fine Arts (on the history of the AGNSW Trustees and their very "hands-on" approach to exhibition planning in the 1970s)

- Stuart Hill, Professor of Social Ecology at UWS (on the usefulness of Yeomans' work for the philosophy of Social Ecology)

- Wendy Yeomans, PA Yeomans' daughter and a researcher at the Institute of Sustainable Futures at UTS (on her father's life and work, and her own).

And if that wasn't enough, we also invite you to hop on a bus for our Field Trip to an early Yeomans experimental farm outside of Sydney (free, but bookings required).

Check out more exhibition details and related events at:

<<http://www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au/exhibitions/ian-milliss-lucas-ihlein/related-events/>>

THE YEOMANS PROJECT
IAN MILLISS & LUCAS IHLEIN

AGNSW
CONTEMPORARY PROJECTS
#4.13

Ian Milliss thanks Daniel Thomas, Frances Lindsay and Peter Laverty of the AGNSW and Rebecca Meier for their support in the development of the 1975 exhibition proposal; Lucas Ihlein and Big Fag Press for collaboration, ideas, support and friendship; Hannah Mathews for the exhibition's resurrection at ACCA Melbourne in 2011; and Wendy Carlson for rescuing him in time to make it all possible.

Ian and Lucas thank Allan Yeomans and Trevor Carter of Yeomans Plow Company Pty Ltd; Wendy Yeomans and Julie McGrath for dialogue and archival materials; Ben Falloon of Taranaki Farm; Kirsten Bradley and Nick Ritar of Milkwood Permaculture; Diego Bonetto; Andrea Lane of (f)route; Zero, Meg Ulman, Patrick Jones, Woody and Zephyr of Artist As Family; Darren Doherty; Louise Kate Anderson for her superb organising and design skills; Mickie Quick for excellent pre-press and printing on Big Fag Press; Michael Brown and the install crew at the AGNSW for custom paint work; and Joel Mu and Anneke Jaspers for making sure that this time it really happened.

Lucas Ihlein thanks Lizzie Muller for support and advice; Sue Muller for taking care of us all during the install period; The School of Creative Arts at University of Wollongong for research funding; and Nick and Kirsten from Milkwood for the introduction to Yeomans.

Videos in the exhibition were kindly supplied by: Gary Caganoff from Lysis Films; Jill Cloutier and Carol Hirashima from Sustainable World Media; Mark Russell & Nate Mitchell from Adventure Artists; and Geoffrey Booth from Keyline Archive.

The Modern Yeomans Plow

The plow which is the centre piece of the *Yeomans Project* exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW is a Yeomans Plow Company GP39-8 with five (5) OCS22C - 22" shanks and five (5) MDCC-16 - 16" Pasture Coulters and Depth Control Wheels. This plow is the most recent version of the plow which won the 1974 Prince Phillip Design Award, gaining international recognition for PA Yeomans design achievements.

