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Overlapping Textualities:
From Literary Machine to Binary-born Texts

Edited by
Giovanna Di Rosario

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Practicing Online Travel Writing

How My Blogging and Australia Met

Stefano Calzati

University of Leeds (England)

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7358/ijtl-2016-0005-calz> stefanocalzati@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT – Travelling and writing, then, come to be two very complementary practices of discovery: cross-cultural (of the Other, encountered on the road) and gnoseological (of the Self, who takes the road). As a consequence, once we accept that travel writing stems from the interplay between travelling and writing as practices, then the pragmatic strength of this literary genre is brought to light. This article presents an intertwining between practice and theory by alternating passages (translated into English) from the blog with an analysis of these same passages.

KEYWORDS – Australia; blogging; online writing; travel writing.

*If you can't find what you need,
maybe what you need is just the quest itself.
The silliest questions are those we do not ask.*

1. INTRODUCTION

On a loose philosophical level travel is canonically associated with the ideas of “quest” – through the outside world as well as through one’s inner self – and of “loss”, or the need to rethink oneself and one’s life priorities once on the road. On a closer inspection these two ideas mirror each other, insofar as the desire to embark on a journey is often the reflection of an urge for change that finds an answer only when one is ready to get lost. Writer Pico Iyer (2000), for instance, reminds us that “we travel, initially, to lose ourselves, and we travel, next, to find ourselves. We travel to open our hearts and eyes. And we travel, in essence, to become young fools again – to slow time down and get taken in, and fall in love once more”. Travel is considered as a cathartic experience: one of abandonment of oneself and the world, and (re)encounter of a renewed self in a different world.

Similarly, it is quite interesting to note that writing has also been repeatedly charged with what could be called a (self)pedagogical value. In the writing and through the writing we project ourselves and redefine (or understand better) who we are. This is so because writing is an act, at once, of unavoidable inscription of the “I” on the page – regardless of being it in the first person – and of constant deferral of this same “I” to itself. Put differently, the gesture of writing is an always-subjective trace we emanate and into which we can eventually re-trace ourselves, by exploring our thoughts, ideas, attitudes, and beliefs.

Travelling and writing, then, come to be two very complementary practices of discovery: cross- cultural (of the Other, encountered on the road) and gnoseological (of the Self, who takes the road). As a consequence, once we accept that travel writing stems from the interplay between travelling and writing as practices, then the pragmatic strength of this literary genre is brought to light. In fact, travel writing not only, as a literary genre, is formally and historically determined in that it “changes, evolves, and decays” (Miller 1984, 13); but, as a practice, it is synchronically shaped by the interplay between discovering and reflecting, present and past, Self and Other; complementary dichotomies that constantly redefine the world we live in. The main issue, of course, is that such interplay also needs fixation, intended as a form of critical understanding. We cannot know ourselves (and the Other) by simply travelling or writing; not every journey and every writing bear the same relevance, depth, and awareness. We need time and space to put into focus, as György Lukács (1971, 70) argues with regard to the founding logics of the novel, “the distance separating the systematization from concrete life”. We need to perform, in other words, a mindful understanding of the experience, which not only allows us to enjoy the world, but also interrogates it. French philosopher Michel Butor ([1974] 2001, 70) is clear in this respect when he claims: “I travel in order to write because to travel, or at least to travel in a certain way, is to write (first of all because to travel is to read) and to write is to travel”. It is from this sentence that one needs to start for looking at the most pristine pragmatic aspects of travel writing.

A bare definition of “travel” is that of a displacement through space (or, more imaginatively, time). However, from the outset “to travel” means also something else, possibly something more. It signifies, indeed, to introduce oneself to the Other; to (be predisposed to) encounter the unfamiliar (Bourdieu 1990) by dramatizing the engagement between oneself and the world (Blanton 2002). Hence, travelling is as much a physically as a culturally

and psychologically connoted activity; once that writes us while simultaneously being written upon. Moreover, when it comes to Butor's statement that "to travel is to read" two interpretations are possible. The first one relates to the literal meaning of the act of reading. In this sense, by arguing that "to travel is to read" Butor hints at the accumulation of knowledge that travelers acquire before, during, and after the journey. In this case reading is a concrete act that enriches and transcends the travel experience *per se*. Yet "to read" can also have a more metaphorical meaning; insofar as the journey puts the Self in contact with an alterity – which, to be sure, can be found at all latitudes – travellers are asked to "negotiate" such encounter by making sense of it. To do so means to (be able to) "read" the Other, that is, recognize and understand it. Regardless of the interpretation of this sentence, it is evident that, according to Butor, reading constitutes the *conditio sine qua non* of travelling and writing, or at least of travelling and writing "in a certain way". As soon as we are unable to understand the Other (and implicitly ourselves) then travelling and writing lose their force as practices: they lack that "transforming power" which Butor mentions later on. This means that the pragmatic value of travel writing, as a genre, is fully deployed only when travelling, writing and reading, far from being reduced to commoditized acts (i.e. to plain acts of transcription and reception of the experience), lively recall each other, reinforce each other, question each other.

2. TRAVELLING (IN) AND WRITING (ABOUT) AUSTRALIA: BETWEEN PRACTICE AND THEORY

The main purpose of this article is to test such theoretical premises through practice. The analysis will focus on some pieces of online travel writing about Australia, i.e. the travel blog (Calzati 2010) that I personally kept for one year when working in Melbourne as a teacher of Italian and travelling around the continent as a backpacker during school breaks. The blog is largely written in Italian because this is my mother tongue. Nevertheless, the blog does include passages in English, attesting to the slow, persistent influence that this language has had on my way of thinking. (To discuss the effects of the mixing of the two languages falls out of the scope of this article, but it would certainly add a further layer of analysis to the complex intricacies binding travelling and writing.)

This article presents an intertwinement between practice and theory by alternating passages (translated into English) from the blog with an analysis of these same passages in light of the discussion conducted above. The goal is to bring to light the pragmatic strength of online travel writing through my own experience in (and of) Australia. As a consequence, this article is as much of a textual analysis as a self-analysis, a reason that compels me to define *a priori* my persona in order to account for potential (cultural) biases. I am an Italian-born, European-raised white male scholar, who studied in Paris, Amsterdam, and Leeds, among others. When I went to Australia in 2010 to teach Italian in a Melbourne primary school (the Italian community there is the biggest non-English expatriate community in the entire state of Victoria), I was 27 years old and I had already been travelling and living abroad both in Europe and the US. Yet, due to its duration and to the fact that for the first time I decided to write a blog, the experience in Australia was unique. In fact, with the passing of time my own Self absorbed Australia so that its culture and climate, its people and history, its spirit and ethos, were increasingly projected into my writing. In return, the blog testifies to the questioning of my own persona as well as of the broader concept of “Western culture” and the diversities and similarities between Europe – to which I feel I belong – and Australia. The blog brings these themes to the surface especially due to the fact that my year in Australia was as much a sedentary working experience as an itinerant one. On the one hand, I delivered Italian classes on a daily basis in Sandringham, a wealthy suburb area of Melbourne. Hence, my working duties defined me much more as a resident expat than a traveller. At best, I was a daily commuter between St Kilda in Melbourne’s city centre and Sandringham. On the other hand, I had the chance to go travelling during every semester break for roughly two weeks. And I exploited each second available. During this time I turned *de facto* into a backpacker and my wanderings fuelled and diversified the writing. I was lucky enough to manage to visit all Australian states: in the first trip I traversed the Australian desert from south to north aboard the Ghan train; in the second I rented a van with other fellows and drove from Brisbane to Cairns; on my third journey I visited Tasmania and later Perth from where I explored by car a few inches of map of Western Australia. During those months and experiences the updating of an online diary became a sort of ritual which served not only as a means to connect with friends and relatives, but also as a channel through which I gave voice to my reflections. With the passing of time the blog came to have a life of its own and it demanded of me an increasing dedication as both a literary

experiment – travel writing in the online world – and a means of personal and cultural understanding¹. The roles of both medium and language get under scrutiny here: the latter does not solely represent the experience, but embodies it; the former does not simply convey the idea of the journey but nurtures it. Butor ([1974] 2001, 84) is again illuminating when he points out that “the very form of the described trip cannot be completely separated from the form of its description or the effects it produces”. What he means is that how we travel influences how we write and the way in which we recount the journey shapes, in turn, our own experience.

This leads us back to the starting point (every journey implies some sorts of return, after all): the discussion about the interplay between writing and travelling. Most importantly, this issue is applied here to a realm – the blogosphere – that has been widely overlooked by studies on contemporary travel writing. At the centre of analysis, indeed, is the remediation process (Bolter and Grusin 1998; Calzati 2013) of the whole genre when it shifts from print to the Web. What happens, then, to the writing “I” when it lands online? What happens to the Other – Australia – of which a representation is provided through a more volatile channel? What happens to the journey and its reflected mediation through memory? In order to respond to these questions some references will be made to existing literature on blogs and to one of the most popular (printed) travel books recently written on Australia, *Down Under* (2000) by American writer Bill Bryson.

3. (MY) AUSTRALIA AND THE BLOGOSPHERE: DIGGING INTO PRACTICE BY MEANS OF THEORY

As their dates will show, the blog extracts presented here are largely in chronological order, thus reversing the prototypical temporal axis of blogs (Herring *et al.* 2007). The extracts cover the entire span of the blog’s life, which is also the time frame of my experience in Australia (I stopped updating the blog once I left the continent). In this respect, the stay in Australia constitutes the

¹ It is no surprise that the PhD that I started one and a half year later in the UK focuses on a comparison between printed and online travel writing (although the PhD explores China from both a Western and a Chinese perspective).

main motif of the blog and projects upon it an overarching thematic coherence. Beneath that, however, a kaleidoscopic and sometimes irreconcilable collection of episodes can be discovered. This is, indeed, the major feature of the blog (and of blogging in general): as Jill Walker-Rettberg (2008, 115) wisely notes, in blogs “each post makes sense in itself, but read together the posts tell a larger story. That story is usually partial and incomplete and does not form a narrative whole”. This means that blogs are characterized by a rhetorical (i.e. semantic and formal) spuriousness that does not make it easy to categorize them into pre-established forms; rather, they tend to cut across genres and canons. This is also true, to be sure, for more traditional forms of travel writing, such as journals or diaries (see Thompson 2011 on the difficulty to formally define the travel writing genre). Yet, as we will see, the medial specificity distinguishing travel books and blogs deeply affects the practices of writing and travelling in unique ways.

Along this line, two cases in point are the opening and the conclusion of my blog when compared to those of Bill Bryson’s printed travelogue. In the blog, the opening is reduced to a short and de-contextualized post: “-10 to the New World! (1st April 2010)”. The whole experience, then, begins *in media res* and... in the middle of nowhere. This is chiefly so because the writing attaches itself to an ongoing temporality that, however physically irreversible, is always contingent: words literally plunge into the everyday, they are soaked with life and, as such, they give voice – before giving a form – to the ordinary, which soon becomes the (unexplained) extraordinary. The experience regains, in this way, its inescapable unpredictability and the writing takes on a fleshy thickness that books can only metaphorically mimic through the assemblage of pages in the hundreds. As a term of comparison, the following is Bryson’s (2000, 1) opening of his book: “Flying into Australia, I realized with a sigh that I had forgotten again who the Prime Minister is. [...] But then Australia is such a difficult country to keep track of”. Leaving aside the recourse to irony, which can be ascribed to the postmodern reinvention of the genre (see Hulme 1986), in Bryson’s work the opening clearly coincides with the beginning of his adventure in Australia and contributes to frame the upcoming narrative in a well-defined context. On my blog, by contrast, the introductory post precedes the physical departure by ten days, while the subsequent post – “A new attitude is in the air, a quieter air; we claim back our own existential space, eventually we breath again. (18th April 2010)” – is written a week after my arrival to Australia, but it bears, again, no conative or referential marks (apart from the date, which however is external to the post

per se)². A similar contrast can also be found in the conclusions of the two texts. Here are Bryson's final remarks:

I drove in the gloomy state of mind that overtakes me at the end of every big trip. In another day or two I would be back to Hampshire and all these experiences would march off as in a Disney film to the dusty attic of my brain. [...] Life in Australia would go on and I would hear nothing because once you leave Australia, Australia ceases to be. (2000, 347)

Overlooking the tendency towards apocalyptic generalizations – which, rephrasing Lukács, reflect the attempt to systematize the objective word and the interior one by way of conventionality – it is interesting to remark how Bryson's travel narrative is neatly framed within a beginning and an end, which also mark the shift from his being a travel writer in (and about) Australia and a casual American citizen. By contrast, in the blog it is the writing that is subservient to life. In the following passage, for instance, I speak of the beginning and the imminent end of my own experience as crucial moments; nonetheless I soon reframe such moments into the magmatic and anonymous stream of ordinariness:

Of an adventure I mostly like the beginning and the end. The reason is that in these moments – centuries conflated in the breathlessness of days – time shrinks and thickens, conferring upon each small episode the apocalyptic gift of necessity. It's all about passing instants made of a warm and extremely fluid magma that asks to be surfed fearlessly before it crystalizes into the cold shape of memories, of what has been. Thoughts, then, go to the return and the departure, to those people who will be left behind and those who will be met again; to all the things that one will soon lose and all those that one will find again: it is just an endless play of opposites marked by crucial questions: *When? Where Why?* [*sic*] Questions that, however, cannot make one forget to ... live. Life is always a passing accident, after all. (28th November 2010)

To this it must be added one of the last posts of the whole blog, which further strengthens the feeling of indeterminacy affecting life and writing. This post not only sanctions the impossibility/unwillingness to continue to “read”

² The fluid indeterminacy of blogs' writing is independent from the span of time elapsed from the recounted episode or also from the care devoted to the editing of the posts. Elsewhere (Calzati 2016), I have discussed the extent to which the blogging presents recursive features such as sloppiness, informal language, and brevity, even when it is accomplished at a certain temporal and spatial distance from the experience narrated.

the city of Melbourne as the experience is about to end, but also works as a potential re-launching of the narrative – a promise then unattended – by referring to a new forthcoming journey (to Vietnam):

This city does not speak to me anymore. It cannot do that, after all, because I have nothing to ask her anymore; I no longer interrogate its roads, its monuments, its silences, its idiosyncrasies. There are no more answers (left). Will the relentlessness of the journey ahead awake curiosity again? Who knows ... (30th December 2010)

It is, therefore, the renewed encounter with the unknown which is demanded to fuel new writing. Beginning and end ultimately rejoin, but between books and blogs a crucial difference endures. While in travel books the narrative prefigures a circular return, restoring the traveller's condition before departure (however accrued with experience it may be), travel blogs produce a representation of the journey more as a spiral, to the extent that every conclusion always represents a new, different beginning. Blog's posts give shape to impressions and reflections that, by mirroring the irreversibility of life, repeatedly overflow the virtual limits of the page-screen. The writing runs boundlessly, fuelled by the urgency that both life and the medium (which expects to be constantly updated) impose upon it. At the same time this also means that the writing becomes more volatile and subject to the frisky changes of mood. Most of the time, the blogger does not have any hindsight: s/he can only amend the writing through further writing thus leading to a multi-layered piling up of ideas and thoughts, some of which will be eventually sharpened and clarified, while others will be smothered or even dismissed. It is possibly for this reason that the blog's structure only requires to scroll the page down in order to read the posts: life does not turn pages, after all, it simply flows. At the same time, the posts are conventionally tagged by resorting to anchor-words precisely because of the need to categorize them and contain (meta-textually) their magmatic nature. This, however, is only an exogenous gesture: internally, the narrative remains heterogeneous and fragmented ³.

³ The possibility to comment the posts represents, in theory, a further challenge to the narrative. Yet, some studies have shown (see Herring *et al.* 2007) that blogs tend to be single-authored texts with very little interactions between blogger and readers (and my blog is no exception in this regard). In my PhD I argue that this pertains chiefly to an early-stage of blogging and to blogs hosted on platforms (rather than independently built by the blogger).

The following excerpts exemplify well the restless nature of my online travel narrative and the intrinsic temporariness of the reflections it contains:

By now, I have been in Australia – in Melbourne – for two months. During this time, a certainty has slowly grown in my mind: Australia is a country at level zero of stratification: a cultural, architectonic, historical, psychological, and existential stratification. To be sure, my perspective is biased, it's a Eurocentric point of view and, as such, I don't pretend it to be truer than others, or to be accepted by everyone. Moreover, it has to do, as it always happens with what I write here on the blog, with little more than transient sensations, impressionistic impressions, thoughts that are extrapolated almost rhapsodically from the conscience's stream. (I just try to listen to myself). Above all, the idea that Australia appears to me as being at level zero of stratification does not necessarily bring a negative evaluation. *What do I really mean?* [sic] Take architecture, for example: with the exception of Melbourne's city centre, once you look at the architecture and planning of the suburbs, you can see that there aren't many buildings higher than three-four storeys: the trajectory of development of the metropolis keeps low; paths rediscover here their intrinsic longitudinal way; time unfolds and stretches again according to a more human duration and it returns to be, at last, the time of waiting (you have to accept to wait for public transports 15-20-25 minutes). Time reconverts into an anthropocentric rhythm, which is also, I suppose, why sometimes I find people *weird* [sic] and almost irritating in their slow, steady procession (but let's also concede that they appear rather unorganised when compared to the frantic western rationalization of life). (7th June 2010)

... And I will never fully understand Australians. I don't give up – not yet – but I must confess that they appear to me optimistically unreachable in their disarming simplicity. Sometimes I smile at this and I really appreciate the carefreeness of the people, who are still able to put the human being at the centre of time; sometimes, instead, I am honestly puzzled. Above all, I perceive a distance between Australians and myself: a distance that looks increasingly unbridgeable. Meanwhile, what's going on in Italy? When will we understand that it's impossible to awake people who don't want to be disturbed? *No surprises* [sic]. (25th July 2010)

In the first passage, which I wrote after two months from my arrival, I provide a reflection on Melbourne and its people. This is the first post in the blog that transcends the flow of everyday life and attempts to offer a “distanced” discussion about the reality in which I was immersed. The post contains balancing opinions: the enthusiasm for the encounter with the “New World” – which characterises the first period of my stay – merges with the appearance of some

side effects; aspects that I literally cannot understand and that I (try to) circumscribe into a self-imposed cultural relativism. In this regard, while the post shows a certain degree of reflexivity, its status remains congenitally provisional: the post pretends to be thoughtful, but its conclusions cannot but be uncertain (and impossible to be generalized). The point is that my writing reflects as much my ideas as the precarious present condition out of which they stem. It is only by comparison with subsequent posts (which however were not there yet at that time) that one can attempt to sketch a broader picture.

In the second excerpt we still find a balanced account of positive and negative aspects about Australian life; yet, the negative ones are here further smoothed through the introduction of a third term of comparison: Italy. What is significant is that, although I can well define Italy as my home country, in the post I perceive and describe it as distant and unintelligible as Australia. Far from being a mere rhetorical strategy, such trilateral comparison attests to the dynamics of cultural adaptation in which I was caught. Any process of understanding is always, at any given moment, dictated by a variable sense of proximity – physical, cultural, ideological – to what is described. Epitomising is the fact that this post is closed by two questions that remain symbolically unanswered: after all, the knowledge of the Other – however familiar it might appear – can (or should) never reach a definitive conclusion.

Two subsequent extracts follow the same trajectory of adaptation, although here the confrontation between Australia and myself presents different traits.

To settle in Melbourne for a year (if not a full calendar year, surely a biological one) it is likely not the best way to get to know Australia, a huge continent that would require – by definition – to be traversed far and wide, high and low, in order to be really appreciated, if not understood. Unfortunately, however, nobody has introduced yet the wandering- school-system. At least, then, the knowledge that I am acquiring of the city and its people is deeper than the kind of understanding that I might get by touring aimlessly around this Huge Apple in the Pacific. [...] Sometimes I believe that the levity with which Australian people approach life is far from being natural: it is an artifice of the mind into which they let thoughts and preoccupations sink in order to forget. It's almost a complete suppression. I realized that here people hardly speak of their past and, when they do that, everybody seems to draw on the same hotchpotch of memories, as if one's own story was eventually meant to merge into a unique, collective mantra aimed at exorcising fears and sorrow. Most of the people who migrated to Australia – *at least [sic]* most of those I have met – came here with the precise

intent to neatly break up with the past... And here, now, among them, among us, there is a shared, sympathetic acceptance of oblivion. (27th August 2010)

Northern Queensland is just amazing [sic]. Here I've got in contact with that continent and those people that many of those I had met before the departure and who have lived around here [sic] for a while, had described to me. Here I encountered the proverbial kindness of Australians. An endemic and congenital kindness, which is light and never zealous, which is not pretentious and does not ask anything back, and which, ultimately, leaves in the person who is not used to it a pleasing sense of uneasiness. [...] Silent and undiscovered beaches, white and flour-taste sands, green waters and amazing underwater creatures. The Barrier Reef is simply "another world" [sic]: wet, upside-down, and incredibly varied. If Oceania is considered down-under with respect to Europe, the Barrier Reef has to be considered down-under with respect to Oceania... and all the rest, of course. It's all about perspectives [sic]. (29th September 2010)

To emerge in the first of the two passages is a sense of fair acquaintance with Australian life: an acquaintance that comes, indeed, after having met, talked, and worked with locals for quite some time. Differences and similarities are still there – the understanding of Australia is still a contested one – however, because of (or maybe despite) my gradual immersion into the country, my impressions are no longer anchored to any external, familiar terms of reference, which could help to make sense of the unfamiliar (Pagden 1993). Indeed, what I did in this post – for the first time in the whole blog – is to affiliate my own persona with Australians. I no longer perceive Australian people as the Other, rather I express the feeling to be like them, at least as far as the need to forget is concerned. Although I could not draw upon the same cultural/historical background as Australians, such need did come to constitute a primary connection beneath the surface of ordinariness; a connection of which, interestingly enough, I became aware only when I re-read the blog after several months (thus attesting, if anything, of a certain propaedeutic function of blogging).

As for the last passage quoted above, it offers an ultimate example of the thickening of my perception and representation of Australia. Not surprisingly, it is through one of the journeys I accomplished around the continent that the country's multi-facetedness revealed itself most clearly. Notably, the trip to Queensland, which took place after six months, is the chance for me to acknowledge the diversity within the Diverse, that is, the diversities between Melbournians and Queenslanders. While such realization could be quite granted for anyone deeply acquainted with Australia, here it testifies my

own accustomization – however temporary – to the hosting country. In other words, the *mise en abyme* of the *Diverse* stands for the indirect reassertion of the extent to which the Melbournian way of life and its people were by then familiar to me, so that it was the Queenslanders who came to take up the role of Novelty, i.e. the Other-term of comparison.

On a broader level, it is remarkable how each post tends to build a self-standing, micro-representation of both Australia and myself; a representation, above all, that is not necessarily coherent with what precedes and follows. Each post refers to an episode that has a precise, almost unique, gno-seological and cross-cultural signification and is usually characterised by a balanced domestication of polarized views. The re-collection of a broader representational frame can only be a tentative effort. By contrast, in printed travelogues, where the book as a physical artefact contributes to the framing of an all-encompassing narrative, the representation of Self and Other tends to be more linear and neater. In Bryson's book, for instance, such polarization is mainly created by the juxtaposition of different episodes. A case in point is the author's perception of the outback: during his journey by train from Sidney to Perth, in one occasion he points out with disillusionment that "We wanted proper outback: a place where men were men and sheep were nervous. Here there were cafés and a bookstore". Then, some pages and miles later he comments, at the end of a long train stop, that "After the heat and dust of the outback, I was glad to be back in the clean, regulated world of the train". It is clear that Bryson is at ease, here, with the role of the self-ironic tourist. Nevertheless, for the present discussion it is important to highlight how the text shows a trajectory – largely missing in blogs – in which each episode finds its own (motivated) place, page after page, chapter after chapter: the book, indeed, bears the mark of a teleology that can only be constructed by looking at the experience in retrospection.

4. CONCLUSION

The analysis of the blog's excerpts brought to light the self-determination battle in which I found myself during my one-year experience in Australia. Specifically, it became clearer the extent to which writing and travelling bore for me a transforming power by entering into a mutual and sometimes conflicting dialogue.

The analysis showed, on the one hand, how the writing documented and, in turn, shaped my own acquaintance with Australia, interrogating the everyday, as well as my assumptions about the country and myself; on the other hand, it testified how travels allowed me to adjust, at each time, my own perceptions of the Other, passing from exclusion to inclusion, understanding to cluelessness, exaltation to deception. And vice versa, of course (borders, physical or conceptual, are made to be crossed). This is the main point, indeed: the interplay between writing and travelling – between blogging and life – is never a smooth nor linear one: if one thing emerged above all from the analysis is the irreducibility of life, which cannot be encapsulated into any rigid form and from which, inevitably, the unpredictability of blogging follows. My blog was the seismograph of the experience and through it I was literally – and maybe literarily – fostering my own Self and my life in Australia. It is only *ex post*, then, by rewinding the blog, that one could possibly glimpse a development of my own self and my understanding of Australia (if any).

In print, instead, the writing is pushed forward by an internal teleological necessity. Books are already written (or re-written) from the privileged standpoint of the aftermath: the travel writer who edits his/her notes for publication is always an omniscient narrator; a director more than a compositor. Hence, with the passing of travelling and writing from the print realm to the online world, we also get a radical reworking of the relation bidding these two practices: while in travel books the writing gives shape to (recollected) life, in travel blogs it is life – the journey – that gives the writing its *raison d'être*. The blog is a mosaic, a polyhedric drawing that does not necessarily have a coherent, univocal meaning and in which the writer is always in transit; the book, instead, is a fresco, a work created by an outstanding master who follows a dutifully planned sketch.

As a consequence, to be radically challenged in the blog are also dualistic concepts such as traveller and resident, expats and foreigner, home and away. Sure, Melbourne is the place where I resided for a whole year; yet, at the beginning this was only a physical dwelling and it was only over time, and not without difficulty, that it came to be charged with personal significance. And the blog testifies that. Moreover, while it is true that I mainly lived in Melbourne, I also widely travelled around the continent and, to be sure, I did so to a greater extent than any Australian I met during those months. The excerpts analysed attest precisely to this: for the metamorphosis of Melbourne as my (temporary) home – in opposition both to Europe and the other areas of the continent – travels played a major role. It was by journeying

periodically that I was able to deconstructed Australia and my own persona, wearing many masks – expat resident, seasonal backpacker, teacher, travel blogger – and building a composite, diversified representation of the country. The metropolis and the surrounding; the cities and the outback; neighbourhoods, colleagues, friends, and foreigners; silenced memories and outspoken expectations; the continent and the whole world: when it comes to define who we are it all depends, in the end, on the geographical, temporal, and human perspectives that we decide to favour in the reading of ourselves in front of the Other. What we know is always a matter of scales, of grades; any cultural affiliation, any sense of belonging, is not given but constantly and mutually forged by the many actors and many factors at stake in any situation.

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