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2014

Untitled

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Recommended Citation

Kelly, Elaine, *Untitled*, *Law Text Culture*, 17, 2013, 273-277.

Available at: <http://ro.uow.edu.au/ltc/vol17/iss1/13>

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Abstract

The function of a title, as Jacques Derrida tells us, circumscribes, borders, orients, locates, and contains; it becomes 'a code of legibility' (Derrida 1986: 197). When we give something a title, we attempt to centre the capacity of the author to determine meaning in the content. In a word – 'anchored', 'unanchored', 'home', 'bounded', 'horizons' – the author (I) can ease the reader into a text, give them a sense of meaning and purpose. 'A title takes place only on the border of a work: were it only to let itself be incorporated in the corpus it entitles, were it only to be a part, like one of its internal elements or one of its pieces, it would no longer play the role of having title-value. Were it completely outside, detached and separated from the body by a distance greater than that which the law, right, and code ordain, there would be no more title' (Derrida 1986, 197).

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I Title-Value

The function of a title, as Jacques Derrida tells us, circumscribes, borders, orients, locates, and contains; it becomes ‘a code of legibility’ (Derrida 1986: 197). When we give something a title, we attempt to centre the capacity of the author to determine meaning in the content. In a word – ‘anchored’, ‘unanchored’, ‘home’, ‘bounded’, ‘horizons’ – the author (I) can ease the reader into a text, give them a sense of meaning and purpose.

A title takes place only on the border of a work: were it only to let itself be incorporated in the corpus it entitles, were it only to be a part, like one of its internal elements or one of its pieces, it would no longer play the role of having title-value. Were it completely outside, detached and separated from the body by a distance greater than that which the law, right, and code ordain, there would be no more title (Derrida 1986, 197).

What happens when we are disoriented, when our location in space is unfamiliar or disjointed? Or, put differently, the familiar becomes unfamiliar? Or the title becomes untitled? The oceans, the iconic beach, surf and sand – these are quintessentially places of entitled belonging for ‘settler Australians’ (another title). These are places where the stretched and suntanned bodies of ‘locals’ seemingly merge with the grains of sand (Schlunke 2002). For me – an Australian of

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Anglo-background from my mother's side and uncertain origins from my orphan father's (though Dad has certainly narrated his proper name as a 'Kelly'; recalling another orphaned child from Ireland with parents who died fighting) – the beach, the sand moving through my fingers, the repetition of the waves, became a place of refuge from a home which could not offer peace. I carry forth Dad's surname, this proper name which I have long suspected to be a counterfeit, a forgery (Derrida 1986: 200). Dad's name is a narrative I've been told time and again.

He arrived on a boat. He arrived from afar. He crossed the wild seas before he could understand what this meant; a small child, alone, of the 'forgotten generation'. His disrupted home was our disrupted home. And so, the beach offered solitude and shelter, but the ocean was a space to be approached with care and respect, even some fear. It is surely impossible to border the ocean, this force which can take us into its depths without warning.

Later, the beach as a personal place of refuge was re-signified when the seas became spaces so visibly and violently demarcated. Out of this sadness, and the moral blindness these militarised responses produced across our lands, and in the context of this forgery – a forgery of origins – an ethic of the border is desperately sought. 'That is the madness,' Derrida tells us:

that logos is mad, that the discourse of reason is unable to assure itself of its meaning, of the single meaning of the day and, if not of univocality, at least of totalisation of the remembering order, even of remembrance of the history of the polysemy of the day, of a day (1986: 211).

Emerging into the blinding light of the day, the panicked dance of orientating oneself in the sea undoes the promise of 'grounding'; of the 'proper name'. In this risky space, the traces of yesterday's events merge with and unsettle the 'present', unendingly, much like the way the waves leave their traces on the shoreline over and again.

II) Ethics

They've been turning the word over in their mouths, speaking of the

lost lives, lives swallowed by the seas on the way to Australia.

...Ethics...

They've bordered up ethics, reduced it to a cynical sound bite in a fortress-culture. Spoken, it is an empty signifier. Enacted, it is the enforcement of the border-as-refusal in the profoundly paradoxical absence of any border. For those arriving by boat, the mainland has been excised (for the purposes of immigration). Australia is now without a border. There can be no ethics, there is no border.

Heidegger recalls the Greek concept of *horismos*. On the one hand, the horizon brings into being the boundary or limit. Today's legal boundaries assert the supremacy of the border as exclusion OR inclusion. On the other hand, the Greek origins of the concept insist that a 'boundary is not that at which something stops but, as the Greeks recognised, the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing' (5/9).

Presencing is letting-be; it's the giving over of space for something to flourish. Derrida's deconstruction of presence reveals its unattainability. Presence is haunted by absence as trace. The horizon is a trace-structure.

The horizon as border is the border as trace, sand shifting and settling, shifting and resettling, over and again.

Is this an ethic of the border as a sort of borderlessness, or a borderlessness of sorts? A horizon without horizon. Can a trace on the shore be a 'borderless dissemination' (1986: 206); a hospitality unknown in advance, untitled? The impossible.

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