Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature: ......................................................

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11-11-2015
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ABSTRACT

This exegesis *The Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape* primarily responds to my life experience of beach and the dangers which are embedded in its image of scenic beauty. I portray the beach as a site that has a twofold function; one of pleasure and the other of terror rather than the historical view in Australian art which defines beach as a democratic playground and as a symbol of our national identity. Instead, I have used my creative practice of video to explore negative phenomenology of the coastal landscape through a series of observational acts which include walking, swimming, floating, paddling, sitting and diving under water.

My theoretical inquiry examines *The Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape* through a framework of lived experience, historical precedents and theoretical discussion which exposes our uncertain relationship with the beach, its malevolent character, the disfunction of beautiful landscape, inherent terror and gothic representation. I create a visual awareness of the beach that demonstrates two basic characteristics, one of beauty which incorporates images of pleasure, seduction and deception and the other of malevolence that is connected to violent stimulants, mortality and hidden terrors.

The coexistence of beauty and malevolence exposes a series of anomalies which operate as unexpected patterns of movement within specific zones of the beach. Within these functions of the beach we can experience the aesthetic character of coastal terror that can cause a marriage of beauty and death in the same instance.
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Preface

My early perceptions of the beach were originally derived from the bay side beaches of Melbourne. In summer, a hot northerly wind would prevail and force residents from their uninsulated urban dwellings to seek refuge at the beach. Melbourne beaches were composed of coarse yellow sand and the water was cloudy and green with stagnant wave movement. My memories of the beach reveal little malevolence only occasions of relief from the heat and hours of water play. In the later part of my childhood, my family and I would holiday further afield at the ocean beaches beyond Melbourne, where we learnt how to body surf and dive under crashing waves. The exciting new venture of wave surfing was accompanied with a warning from my father; “be wary of the undertow, it can drag you underwater and out to sea.” Comprehending the idea of danger as a child is difficult. An undertow is a mysterious underwater force that is felt but not visualised. The pull of the undertow envelopes your body and tries to disengage your anchored feet from the sand bottom. On more than one occasion my father saved me from being swept away. My time spent at the beach as a child represented an initiation period into honing techniques that would enable my survival as I actively pursued the delights of Australian beach culture. In hindsight, the experience of the undertow as a child exposed my innocence to danger and revealed the beach as a site of duality, interwoven with the binary opposites of beauty and malevolence.

My first impressions of a Western Australian coastline contrasted to anything I had experienced in the state of Victoria. The beaches were pristine, with pure fine white sand, radiant light, clear blue skies and transparent seawater. At the same time, we were introduced to life threatening rips, sandblasting from the sea breeze, hot desert easterly winds, powerful waves and often warned about the notorious Blue Hole\(^1\) at Triggs Beach. Sharks were occasionally sighted but the lifeguards either chased them away or sounded a siren to clear the water. During my formative years the concept of beach was in constant flux and underpinned by the threat of drowning and shark attacks. These negative aspects were an accepted part of Australian beach culture, however they never fully prepared me for the wildness of southwest beaches that were to present risks far beyond my urban experiences. If the beach was compared to human traits, a Jekyll and Hyde personality would be a more appropriate description for its dramatic mood.

\(^1\) Triggs Beach has an infamous reputation that revolves around a pool of still water called the ‘Blue Hole’, which is located behind a protecting reef line at the northern end of the beach. Several people have perished in the still waters of the Blue Hole due to an underlying current flowing out through the reef seawards.
oscillations. Between 2010 and 2013 a series of defining moments shaped the practical component of my creative practice and together with an accompanying exegesis, exposes events in my contemporary past which changed the beach from being seen purely as a scenic landscape to be now viewed as a site of tragedy generating suspicion and fear in one’s mind.

The serial killing of white male surfers by white pointer sharks from 2010 marked a dark period in Western Australia that lasted for more than three and a half years. These events and images of malice transformed the beach into a “nightmare landscape” (Dutton, Woodgate, Featherstone, 2000; V), changing the landscape of the beach forever, to an atmosphere in what people felt a loss of confidence in entering the water. The beachscape which had previously given them years of innocent pleasure was now exhibiting events of terror.

On one particular day at the Margaret River Mouth car park, I was discussing with a friend the unfortunate way a surfer died from shark attack and how his death has prevented a number of people returning to the water. A young surfer close by started screaming at us; “Shut up! Shut up! I don’t want to hear any more.” My friend and I stopped talking and there was a period of silence as we both looked at him. As he calmed down he said; “I was sitting on my surfboard next to him when the shark attacked. I saw a long dark shape moving beneath our feet and I had no idea it was a monstrous great white shark until he was dragged under water..... Moments later his corpse surfaced in a pool of blood dismembered from the pelvis down”, he then paused and apologised for his outburst and walked away muttering that he might need some counseling. Such contemporary events occurring around me began redefining the pristine image of the beach to be a site which was embedded with fear and an underlying darkness. Within this contemporary history, the beach began to reveal its dual character of malevolent beauty, where animal predation, life threatening currents, monstrous waves and fragile morphology have all taken people’s lives.
Introduction

Like many other West Australians I have grown up with beach culture and have a developed knowledge of its dangers without it having a detrimental affect on my love of the beach. I have surfed offshore reefs and beach breaks for forty years in the Cape to Cape Region of the Southwest and it is only in the last few years that I have become fearful of entering the water due to shark predation. The harsh reality of recent years has tempered my relationship with the beach making me more cautious and observant of its dangers, which is in direct contrast to notions of beach in Australian art history. The beach in art is frequently depicted as a democratic playground where Australians define their identity in a theatre of physical exposition. In this exegesis I will argue how the concept of beach represented in popular culture and art history has defined Australian beach culture as a utopian lifestyle. This representation outweigh portrayals of natural menace and instead I argue that the beach has a twofold function as a site of both pleasure and wretchedness.

Australian painting until the mid twentieth century defined beach through idealism, social commentary and cultural identity until artists and writers in the later stages of the twentieth century began to explore the beach’s duality of beauty and terror. The beach I am going to refer to, has two basic characteristics, one of beauty which incorporates images of pleasure, seduction and deception; the other of malevolence that is connected to violent stimulants, mortality and hidden terrors. The coexistence of beauty and malevolence at the beach exposes an anomaly which exists within the perfect image of scenic beauty. What I mean by an anomaly in this sense is something which is active but concealed by a beautiful surface, for instance, unexpected surface patterns signify underlying water movement that function within a specific zone of the beachscape. My examination of aesthetic observations of nature form a theoretical framework that will clarify my investigations into coastal malevolence and the omnipresence of terror.
The first chapter, Our Uncertain Relationship with the Beach examines the beach shown in Australian art history and asks; why has the image of the beach been largely ignored as a site of malevolence? Australian’s affair with the beach is based on the concept of coastal recreation which influences people to play out a lifestyle of pleasure and is described by artist Brett Whitely as a site where we “release inhibitions” (Dutton, Woodside and Featherstone, 2000; v). In Dutton, Woodside and Featherstone’s video documentary Beach (2000), chronicles the Australian beach as a site of social change - from the beach landings of the first fleet interpreted by indigenous Australians as a foreign incursion, to the “defining experience” of young Australians into adulthood (Dutton, Woodside and Featherstone, 2000; v).

Images of Australian beach culture began to emerge in the late nineteenth century with artists such as Charles Condor in his 1888 painting A holiday at Mentone and photographic images such as Bondi Beach (1900). As bathing restrictions were removed in the early stages of the twentieth century, a classic period of Australian beach culture blossomed into the free spirit of the 1940s and 50s and re-created in artist, Charles Meere’s painting Australian beach pattern (1940). Nevertheless, Australian beaches lost their innocence during the 1960s due to human disappearances. Natural menace did not surface in Australian art until Paul Delpratt’s Shark Attack (1963), where his illusory depiction of blood overwhelms the imagery of the painting and brings to the surface a beach lover’s worst fear. Before this signatory work Australian art preferred to depict romantic and idealistic notions, and a sense of identity, rather than confront the subject matter of this nightmare.

In Chapter 2, Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape I examine the hostile forces of nature portrayed in European and Japanese marine art of the eighteenth and nineteenth century where the aesthetics of coastal landscape vary according to the period in which the artwork is created. I discuss an oil painting by Claude-Joseph Vernet The Shipwreck, (1772), Katsushika Hokusai’s wood block print The Great Wave off Kanagawa (1826) and Joseph Mallord Turner’s oil painting
The Slave Ship, (1840). All three artworks share a common theme that demonstrate the volatile forces of nature threatening human mortality. Vernet’s painting illustrates passengers of a sailing ship coming to terms with the challenges of being shipwrecked on a rocky shore. Hokusai’s graphic print emphasises the immensity and power of large ocean waves threatening fishermen in their boats. Turner on the other hand uses dynamic brush work and vibrant colours to illustrate the chaotic conditions experienced by a slave ship in a typhoon.

This chapter also examines Phil Hasting’s video Steadfast (2009), in which I compare his work with marine painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth century to demonstrate that the content and implied movement depicted in seventeenth century painting is not to dissimilar to the moving image witnessed in this twenty-first century video. Hasting portray’s the violence of a tempest in extreme slow motion, which magnify’s the “devastating power that uncontrolled water can have” as it crosses a lake causing waves to smash into the shoreline (Hastings, 2009; 1). I also discuss in the same context, my video The falling sea, which examines the physical transformation of coastal energy and the power it exerts over the observer. My discussion analyses the spectator’s position in the landscape and their aesthetic evaluation of malevolence determined by their proximity to danger, including people being overwhelmed by the forces of nature. Proximity to natural danger, either reduces or eliminates aesthetic appreciation and engages a persons senses into survival mode.

Arnold Berleant, in The aesthetics of art and nature (1993) comments on our integration in to such a situation and claims; “one cannot distance oneself from such events: in fact part of the aesthetic power of such occasions lies in our vulnerability” (Berleant, 1993; 237). Writer Tim Winton in his book Breath, explores the virtual elimination of aesthetic appreciation by surfers who try to survive the vortex of giant breaking waves after wiping out. Central to Winton’s theme is how he captures the elemental human emotion which fluctuates between pure excitement and pure terror when surfing a malevolent wave.
In addition, I intentionally include a comprehensive narrative describing a bizarre weather event in which I was the perceiver of a menacing thunder cloud on a calm day at Redgate Beach which challenged all my previous perceptions of beach.

Chapter 3, The Power of Beauty examines the aesthetics of the beach environment and analyses in art whether the seductive image of a beautiful seascape can lead people towards error. In this chapter, I elaborate further the discussion exploring the power of beauty and begin with the landscape paintings of Casper David Friedrich and William Mallord Turner. My analysis of Friedrich’s and Turner’s paintings illustrate beauty in a reduced depth of field and are employed as visual stepping stones to discuss my video *Passing through beauty* (2014); which represents an underwater world in which sunlight illuminates an intimate labyrinth of kelp. Also included in my discussion is the experience of beauty discovered in the natural environment where the viewers perception is truncated by atmospheric intervention or immersion in water. Romantic landscape artists, Casper David Friedrich and Joseph Mallord Turner, capture the illusion of atmospheric intervention and a reduced depth of field in their paintings. For instance Friedrich’s, *Winter Landscape with Church* (1811) and Turner’s *Norham Castle Sunrise* (1845) diminish scenic vastness into spaces which are more enclosed and intimate. It is conceivable, that when Friedrich and Turner positioned themselves in the landscape to paint they were surrounded by mist in the forrest and lake environments which truncated their observations of the landscape. The locations indicate the intimacy and enclosure of Friedrich’s painting and the penetration and overwhelming presence of sunlight in Turner’s work as sign posts which provide an insight into the enclosed underwater environment of seaweed.

In my video *Passing through beauty* (2014), I visually explore the woven and structured environment of kelp which facilitates the warm colours of sunlight to project through its membrane and create a narrative which explores a narrative of beauty and death. In addition, I examine the aesthetics of a beautiful seascape to
consider whether beauty represents a subterfuge for deception and analyse whether the seductive image of a beautiful scenery can lead people towards incorrect judgements. Elaine Scarry in On Beauty and Being Just (1999) ties beauty with our ability to make mistakes when confronted by beauty in nature, because it demands human attention and rewards it with visual pleasure (14). This twofold action of beauty means it can be interpreted as an agent which interrupts our perception of a landscape and leads us into danger, therefore making the simple act of observing beauty a precarious activity.

Chapter four Landscape and Terror, examines terror in nature experienced within the coastal landscape of South Western Australia. My initial discussion focuses on Romantic notions of terror illustrated in the maritime paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century in an endeavour to connect the concept of terror in art from these periods to events of coastal terror experienced in the Margaret River Region of Western Australia from 1996 to 2013. Mark Worrell in Terror argues that historical denotations of terror can be interpreted “through time” (Worrell, 2013; 5) and alludes to historical periods influencing our understanding of terror such as the French Revolution and the terrorist attack on the twin towers.

I also discuss artist Salvator Rosa’s vision of the landscape stemmed from romantic\(^2\) notions of the landscape defined as sublime terror; the sublime being what Marilyn Stokstad refers to as; “an aesthetic category beloved of some Romantic artists” (Stokstad, 2008; 1002), generated by emotion and imagination. Thus making the Romantic landscape a place which communicates the artists feelings and suggests a range of emotional responses from euphoria to terror. These responses are closely related to sublime meanings of awe which imply that awe in nature can be a positive and negative experience. Edmund Burke in On the Sublime and Beautiful, believes the human mind has difficulty in

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\(^2\) Marilyn Stokstad in Art History explains that; “Romanticism is chiefly concerned with imagination and the emotions, and it is often understood as a reaction against the Enlightenment focus on rationality. Romanticism celebrates the individual and the subjective rather than the universal and the objective” (Stokstad, 2008; 956).
comprehending the sea as a near infinite mass of heaving matter, but the wildlife which live in the sea should be “considered as objects of terror” (Burke, 2010: 42). Alternatively, Richard Butts in *The analogical mere: Landscape and terror in Beowulf* (2008) discusses the volatility of a landscape influencing the human consciousness and argues; “the very source of terror lies within the literal and the psychological domains of men” (Butts, 2008; 114). Included in my discussion of terror, I focus on two actions which occur in the coastal landscape; the concept of falling and predation within the landscape of the beach. Both ideas have a relationship with the coast and are connected to recent histories and people I have known in the Margaret River Region. I also examine the tragic aftermath from the Gracetown cliff collapse 1996 and the profound effect terrifying shark attacks have had on coastal communities, with the result being that many people now view the landscape of the beach with fear and suspicion.

In Chapter five, *The Coastal Gothic* I explore notions of the gothic which are derived from European maritime paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the gothic novel of the nineteenth century. I have included the Australian gothic and highlight its evolution in Australian art, literature and contemporary cinema. I employ the term ‘coastal gothic’ throughout this chapter to interpret the presence of coastal darkness, the uncanny and the abject threats to human mortality that counterpoint beautiful and sublime beachcapes. In addition, I expose the Great White Shark as Western Australia’s gothic monster which haunts the coastline and imposes a sense of fear and mystery to an already volatile beach environment. In particular, I examine the notion that Redgate Beach and its surrounding coastline have gothic associations which are antithetical to their unique scenic beauty. Hence it is through this notion of gothic darkness that I have reinterpreted images of Redgate Beach in my creative production. I also position the “coastal gothic” in the same context as the Australian Gothic, even though it is geographically distinct from the interior and “the abject space of rural horror” (Scott & Biron, 2010; 314). In this sense, I consider the Margaret River coastline exhibits a wider range of gothic terrors which confronts people with visual threats, violent stimulants and animal
predation which present as apprehensive and fearful confrontations. The premise of the gothic whether it is real or fictionalised is just as relevant now, as it was in previous incarnations throughout history and should be recognised in our visual and written language, especially when articulating the darker side of the beach.
Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape

Chapter 1, Our Uncertain Relationship with the Beach

In this chapter I will investigate our relationship with the beach that is shown in Australian art history and examine why the image of the beach has been largely ignored as a site of malevolence. My discussion explores binary processes which function within the image of the beach, including a photographic analysis of Redgate Beach that expose some of the hidden dangers operating beyond the shoreline. I also provide a transcript from an interview with a Margaret River mother whose visit to a coastal beauty location is interrupted by unexpected terror, that rises from the ocean to threaten her family’s life. Her narrative is a profound example of fear and desperation that she experienced when saving her son from the perils of the ocean. I use it to highlight the extreme dangers omnipresent in the beachscape when the conditions appear calm and safe, there is still the unpredictable nature of the beach which can produce rogue waves,
sharks and dangerous currents. American artist Winslow Homer transcends time and location in his painting *Undertow* (1876). The painting depicts the wild threat the beach imposes on people by closely identifying the harsh realities and complexities of a malevolent beachscape. *Undertow* (1876) features two men of heroic stature saving drowning women from the surf.

The image Winslow Homer *Undertow* (1876) oil painting can instead be accessed via [www.winslow-homer.com/Undertow.html](http://www.winslow-homer.com/Undertow.html)

Homer demonstrates an intimate understanding of the wild forces of nature by illustrating the textures of sea water in constant motion. He illustrates a sense of wildness and suspense in his rendering of whitewater before it crashes into the lifesavers and the distressed women. The breaking wave represents uncertainty and malevolence which not only threatens the women but also challenges the lifesaver’s security. Homer’s male figures symbolise pillars of strength which were required to withstand the power of the waves. Art historian, Robert Hughes, in his publication *American Visions*, describes Homer as an artist who had significant knowledge of the beach because; “he understood the structure of waves, currents, surges, loops of foam; the sheer power of water, its relentlessness and its strange fickle, maternal beauty (Hughes, 1997; 311).

Homer has captured the undignified rescue of both women who appear to be unceremoniously dragged by their hair and clothing. In doing so he reveals that time was a matter of importance in transporting them safely to the beach. Homer clearly illustrates to the viewer the tension between life and death as the power of a wave approaches to force them apart. Hughes supports this by commenting on Homer’s coastal paintings; “The moment you step from the social path, whose security is an illusion, all becomes wild and strange, and the sea in Homer’s paintings was a metaphor of this perception” (Hughes, 1997; 313).

Homer’s painting *Undertow* provides the viewer with a timeless sense of drama that could be acted out in the present day. The act of drowning is not an attractive sight. It is a series of moments when the sea humiliates and exposes the
vulnerability of its victims to the possibility of death. The subject’s only chance of survival was bought about by the intervention of the lifesavers who exercised any means available to them to successfully rescue the exhausted women from a merciless ocean. The painting clearly demonstrates to the viewer an aesthetic of coastal malevolence signifying how our relationship with the beach can swiftly materialise into an uncertain reality. It is this concern I will expose within the image of Australian beach culture.

Australian beach culture:
Australian’s relationship with the beach began thousands of years before white Australians discovered the beach as a recreational site. Writer Robert Drewe in his *Book of the Beach* states, “historical and archaeological evidence proves that the beach was equally significant in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (Drewe, 1993; 6-7). Indigenous Australians used the beach as a meeting place and as a site for gathering food. In the Southwest region, local elders have shown members of the Margaret River community evidence of shell middens and the presence of a symmetrical basin constructed in the granite rocks at Redgate Beach. For contemporary Australians, our relationship with the beach has evolved into beach culture which is open to people belonging to a plethora of sub groups defined by activity and identify themselves as surfers, fishers, wind surfers, paddle boarders, lifeguards, swimmers and family groups. Author Tim Winton, describes contemporary Australians in *Land’s Edge* as a “coastal people content on the edge of things” (Winton, 1993; 34). He alludes to our preoccupation with a “vista that moves, rolls, surges, twists, rears up and changes from minute to minute” (Winton, 1993; 34). Furthermore, he identifies in *Breath* (2008) and *The Turning* (2004) elemental aspects of Australian beach culture where people play out a hedonistic lifestyle of pleasure and adventure; but at the same time, are

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3 In Tom Roberts painting *Slumbering Sea, Mentone,* (1887), there is visual evidence of an aboriginal shell midden in a bank on the beach. “The scatters of shell remains exposed in the bank indicate that this was the location of meals eaten by the Boonerwrung people on the site” (NGV, 2015; 2).
either aware, or have no awareness, of its inherent risks. Writer Robert Drewe in *Shark Net* also expresses his concerns relating to our beach culture by stating that; “where else but the white sand could there be prospects for pleasure and danger” (Drewe, 1993; 42). The dual presence of human experience is again emphasised and embedded in the landscape of the beach.

In the following discussion I consider how the beach has been portrayed in Australian art history and identify reasons why the beach’s dark under belly rarely appears in our art until more recent times. Art historian Christopher Allen in *Art in Australia* comments on early Australian artists who “tended to concentrate on the detail of topography or botany” (Allen, 1997; 38) and for the first century and a half early Australian artists focused on the landscape of the “coastal plains and the mountain barrier beyond” (38). These colonial artists mainly began their artistic lives as convicts who were more interested in the landscape surrounding Sydney and the interior than its coastal periphery. Artist Joseph Lycett’s water colour drawing, *East View of Sydney* (1819) was painted from the lighthouse at South Head. He interprets the Australian landscape through European eyes and as a stylized panorama that is civilised not unlike the English countryside. Convict artists also illustrated Australia’s botanical heritage, native animals, indigenous peoples and their artifacts.

In the latter part of the nineteenth century, the beginnings of an Australian beach culture began to emerge. From the 1880s onwards, people began using the beach as a recreational site due to the extension of public transport systems which enabled them to travel to the bay side beaches of Melbourne and the ocean beaches of Sydney. Public transport also allowed artists such as Tom Roberts and Charles Condor to travel to beaches such as Coogee in Sydney and Mentone in Melbourne. Roberts, for example painted *Holiday sketch at Coogee* (1888) in the company of Condor who also painted *Coogee Bay* (1888) on the same day. Roberts and Condor worked within the style of Australian Impressionism, which was influenced by the “intensity and clarity of Australian light” (NGV, 2015; 1);
and were well practiced in nineteenth century plein-air painting technique derived from the French and working in the outdoors.


Roberts focuses on the effects that Australian sunlight has on the land and ocean by painting “the sun’s glare on the bright blue sea, bleached white sand, dry grass and spindly seaside vegetation” (AGNSW, 2015; 1). He portrays people as gestures in the environment in comparison to the immensity of the coastal landscape.


Even though positioned from a similar viewing point, Condor in contrast captures a landscape which has “an emphasis on the decorative qualities of colour and form” (AGNSW, 2015; 1). His palette of pastel colours creates a landscape which is soft and whimsical, with figures which are imposed on the landscape. Both artists illustrate the beach as peaceful and tranquil settings, unknowing of the dangers lurking behind the shoreline. Condor also painted *A holiday at Mentone* (1888), at a bay side beach of Melbourne. This painting portrays people elegantly attired, as they enjoy their holiday discreetly promenading along the beach.
The point of difference between this work and his Coogee painting is Condor’s observation focus is on the beach itself. Condor’s experience of the beach is much the same as everyone else when under the influence of highly radiated and reflected sunlight on the beach. Virtually all shadow is eliminated, having a profound affect on the colour palette chosen in his painting. It is clear in Condor’s and Roberts’ paintings of Australian beaches of the 1880s that visiting the beach was becoming a popular pastime. The recreational beach users in their paintings appear more inclined to walk along the beach than cross the threshold of the shoreline.
The image, Bondi Beach (1900) photograph can instead be accessed via

The photograph *Bondi Beach* (1900) portrays visitors from Sydney promenading along the sand of an undeveloped Bondi Beach. The photograph is significant as far as it represents an image where people from the city discover the exciting new experience of the beach environment due to the extension of public transport. In the middle ground there is evidence of a few people playing in the surf along the shoreline, whilst the majority of the visitors mingle on the beach fully clothed wearing their Sunday bests. One reason why people refrained from venturing into the ocean during this period, is because sea bathing was prohibited by law in Australia during the day light hours of 6am and 6pm. Secondly few city people would have had any experience of ocean beaches and therefore less likely to venture into an environment they were not familiar with. The Bondi Beach photograph also illustrates the beach as a site of ambiguity, where the shoreline defines a boundary between urban culture and the untamed sea. It also represents a conceptual boundary between the land based activities of the visitors and the mystery zone of the surf.

![Surf Bathing at Manly Beach, New South Wales (1900) photograph](image_url)
After this early period of Australian beach culture, urban beaches were developed and moral codes of behavior were relaxed. An alternative photograph *Surf Bathing at Manly Beach New South Wales* (1900) exposes the contrasts of how people interacted with the beaches of Bondi and Manly. Manly on the northern side of Sydney Harbour is populated by people who appear more advanced in beach culture than their counterparts at Bondi. The Manly Beach photograph provides visual evidence of a substantial crowd actively engaging in surf bathing and relaxing in deck chairs which is in direct contrast to human behaviour exhibited in the Bondi photograph of the same year. Author Penny Olsen in *Cayley and Son*, discusses Neville William Cayley’s connection to the early beginnings of Australian beach culture. Caley became a prominent bird artist, who followed in the footsteps of his father. His other passion in life as a young man was surfing at Cronulla Beach. Cayley had concerns regarding the increasing number of people who required rescuing from the surf and the need for “a humanitarian service” (Olsen, 2013; 104). As surf bathing became more popular after 1900 there was also a rapid increase in the number of swimmers and bathers who met their deaths at the beach.

Charles Meere’s painting *Australian beach pattern* (1940) demonstrates significant cultural change some forty years after the Victorian era as people were free to engage with the beach on a interactive level. The concept of beach depicted in Charles Meere’s painting *Australian beach pattern* could be interpreted as Australia’s iconic image of beach culture. Meere’s image is devoid of indigenous and ethnic content and embodies the racial archetype of a white Australia.

Art curator Linda Slutzkin states; “No other beach painting expresses the spirit of Australia before the Second World War as succinctly as this painting, with its combination of 'national types' and neo-classical composition” (Slutzkin, 1988; 176). During this period Australian national fervor was high and Meere exposes this public attitude by creating an image that includes idealistic and heroic notions of the Australian stereotype (176). Meere’s painting also clearly demonstrates a perfect image of healthy and robust Australians who at play are oblivious to any form of natural malice. Freda Robertshaw, an art student of Meere’s painted *Australian Beach Scene* (1940). Her work, heavily influenced by Meere’s style of painting, represents a conceptual shift in the definition of the beach. According to Art historian Philip McCouat (2015) in “The Origins of an Australian Art Icon”, states that Robertshaw goes one step further by including a negative aspects of the beach which states; ‘Caution Bathe Between Flags’, acknowledging the real existence of danger (1). It is noteworthy that Meere in contrast chose to keep his sign blank. McCourt also alludes to Robertshaw portraying other negative experiences at the beach by illustrating a mother in the foreground of the painting who appears to be depressed and barely holding on to her lifeless child, whilst people around her are ambivalent to her situation (1).

The image Freda Robertshaw *Australian Beach Scene* (1940) can instead be accessed via [https://juliaritson.com/2013/03/11/beach-patterns/](https://juliaritson.com/2013/03/11/beach-patterns/)

Anne Zahalka’s photograph *The Bathers from Bondi: Playground of the Pacific series* (1989) is a depiction of the beach appropriated from Meere’s painting. She critiques Meere’s painting by including people of ethnic origin to illustrate post war migration and the demographic change towards multiculturalism in Australia. The people who modeled for Zahalka’s photograph are far less athletic and robust in comparison to the idealised Australian, Meere illustrated in his painting. McCouat (2015) explains that; “her work highlights the gap between reality and myth by the use of photography - traditionally regarded as revealing the “real” position - coupled with the obvious staginess of the work” (1).
Zahalka’s fictionalised image of Australian beach culture although pertinent to the emergence of a multicultural Australia, still avoids any form of recognition towards a malevolent beachscape.

**The image Long Weekend 1970s, postage stamp Australia can instead be accessed via** [http://stampboards.net/viewtopic](http://stampboards.net/viewtopic)

The publication of Australian postage stamp *Long Weekend 1970s* (1970) reflects a stereotypical group of white Anglo Australians seeking the hedonistic pleasure of a surfing long weekend. The stamp symbolically represents a shift in Australian beach culture with increased mobility and changes in surfboard design from the single fin to the radical design of shorter and lighter fiberglass surfboards that meant surfers of any stature could ride waves. The stamp portrays all the trappings of a 1970s beach culture that includes a two tone Volkswagen Kombi van on the sand, figures of young people wearing seventies style swim wear and a collection of surfboards at an isolated surf beach.

Culture analysts John Fiske, Bob Hodge, and Graeme Turner, (1987) in *Myths of Oz* comment on the early beginnings of surf culture. They argue that, “the surf beach develops a ‘fundamentalist’ youth subculture of its own with its own codes and practices that oppose the conventions of a more normal society” (Fiske, et al. 1987). This is evident in the two male surfers in the foreground of the stamp who epitomize the new hero’s of Australian beach culture. They are striding across the beach as warriors carrying their newest weapons after conquering the surf. The artist provides us with a clear image of 1970s surf culture that becomes dominated by young males and the importance of their surf riding equipment. Why else would surfboards outnumber people on the beach and be highlighted as free standing symbols of their surf culture? Another interpretation is that the surfboards vertical positioning in the sand creates the appearance of tombstones to signify the surfboards duality; as an object of pleasure and apprehension.
The image of two young women sitting on the beach appear to have less importance than any other object on the beach. Not only do the male surfers assume central importance but the red and white Kombi van and the vertical positioned surfboards dominate the beach scene. Surfers attitude to young women in 1970s beach culture meant that it was assumed of them to play a background role of being seen as an attractive accessory who served their boyfriends every need. In this sense I can remember surfers of this period condescendingly describe young women on the beach, as ‘beach bunnies’ as if they were an ornamental accessory to their hedonistic pursuit of surfing.

On a personal level the image of the 1970s stamp has created for me a feeling of nostalgia. It was during the early 1970s as a fifteen year old, that I first became involved in the Western Australian surfing scene. Many young people from my generation engaged in the new popular cultural activity of surfing which was invading Perth’s metropolitan beaches. Crowded conditions at urban beaches encouraged surfers to travel to remote surfing locations beyond the metropolitan area. The Southwest region was undeveloped during this period but was known for its beautiful uncrowded beaches and large challenging waves. A trip down south for a group of young urban surfers helped develop their identity and personal growth as surfers. Sleeping in cars with the crashing sound of the surf in the background and camping under the peppermint trees became a long weekend ritual. These surf trips led to a generation of surfers seeking beautiful uncrowded surf beaches along the Western Australian coastline.

Australian artists continued to engage symbolic representation of beach as a platform for social and cultural commentary, but also began to identify it as a place of uncertainty and apprehension. Tracy Moffat’s video *Heaven* (1977) contextualises the beach as a place of voyeurism through her development of an interactive exchange between videographer and her subject matter of surfers undressing out of their wetsuits in a beach side car park. The significance of her video is understood when the semi naked surfers realise they are being filmed.
and pretend to be not affected. Art historian Tania Lusty (2004) comments on Moffat’s work; “As objects of her gaze, Moffat’s subjects are caught in a moment of powerlessness, whereby their strutting performances and attempts at bravado disclose a deeper unease about the exposure of their naked bodies before the camera” (Lusty, 2004; 1).

It wasn’t until the 1960s, that the perception of the Australian beach was questioned when three children disappeared from an Adelaide beach and have never been found. Journalist Liz Gooch writing about the mysterious disappearance of the three Beaumont children states; “from an Adelaide beach on that hot summer’s day changed the way children were raised. No longer was it considered safe for children to play outside alone” (Gooch, 2005; 1). Julia Enberg remarked that; “the beach has become a site of sinisterness” and then further said; “the beach is full of danger not just natural danger” (Dutton, Woodgate, Featherstone, 2000; V). These authors highlight the occurrence of darker elements of animal and human predation coexisting within Australian beach-life. Until the 1960s images of natural danger in Australian art history were rare, but the 1965 painting Shark Attack by Paul Delpratt presents a disturbing depiction of a person bleeding out after a horrific shark attack. The narration from the video Beach states that; “Paul Delprat has allowed a nightmare to surface” (Dutton, et al. 2000), emphasising the primal fear of sharks and their effect on the Australian psyche. Delpratt paints a shocking reminder than our beautiful beaches are highly dangerous, which is in direct opposition to earlier depictions of beach in Australian art history.

The Australian perception of beach depicted in the video Beach are based on historical precedents at a time when natural threats were infrequent and therefore rarely represented in art history. This point is reinforced in the video which also states; “There really has been few shark attacks at Australian beaches in the last eighty years since swimming became popular” (Dutton, et al. 2000). Nevertheless, the mortality rate from shark deaths alone in Australia from 1900 -
2000 “coincides with an increasing human population” (West, 2011; 744). As I have explained previously, the idea of an uncertain relationship with the beach emerged in Australian art from the 1960s onward. These less favourable ideas of beach whether experienced physically or imagined by artists were influenced by what Kathryn Burns (2007) alludes to as a site of binary processes, where the combination of beauty and wilderness represents a kind of earthly heaven. She points out that embedded in this utopian environment is a power that challenges our perception of it; the vast expanse of the sea (25). It is the subliminal power of the sea which forces us to be on guard from its unexpected malevolence; “the very real danger of death” (Burns, 2007; 25). The coexistence of beauty and malevolence at the beach exposes an anomaly which binds them together and operates simultaneously. What I mean by an anomaly in this sense is something which unexpectedly interrupts or threatens a person’s position in the landscape. It is defined by unexpected patterns of movement operating within a specific zone of the beach, where we may experience an exchange of energy as it collides with the coastline. The beach represents the continental fringe and symbolises in nature a place of beginning and land ending. This is not a fixed dividing line in the true sense of the word, but a space in its own right composed of dual characters that form zones of liminality. Fiske, et al. (1987) define the duality of the Australian beach by stating its meaning can be interpreted as a series of opposites such as, “urban and natural, civilised and primitive, spiritual and physical, culture and nature” (55). These opposites infer separation of meaning, but what I am proposing is some meanings of the beach which appear opposite could also be interpreted as an interplay of surfaces. When the tide is out the land is in direct opposition to the sea, but when the tide returns and becomes full the land is lying beneath the water. This implies that the duality of the beach is layered, lying underneath and not always in opposition. Fiske, et al. (1987) elaborate on this notion by saying:

The beach is neither land nor sea, but has some characteristics of both. It therefore carries the meaning of both and is thus ‘overloaded’ with potential meanings. It is, as structured anthropologists call it
an ‘anomalous’ category, in the middle of the basic oppositions of the culture from which we construct our meanings - ‘them’ and ‘us’, ‘good’ and ‘bad’ the land and sea (59).

Therefore the beach becomes a site which consistently exists as a place of transition, where one zone bleeds over the other, confusing and blurring inter-zonal delineation, making some sites safe one minute then dangerous the next. (Fiske, et al. 1987) expand on the shifting zones of the beach which are unfixed and fluid, “The zones are vague, the boundaries ill-marked, if not marked, and consequently the categories and their meanings leak into one another” (60). The interplay of meanings can also refer to the dynamic forces of one zone overpowering the other, creating a transition between the concrete and fluid states that physically question human perception of beach and its inherent power. Australians haven’t always had an innate connection to the beach; our experience and knowledge of beach was gathered over time, fostered by our urbanisation of the coastline. Resulting in the mythology of the bush being over written by the emerging mythology of the beach. Fiske, et al. (1987) comment on the change in cultural identity by stating; “so as the bushman became less relevant to modern Australia, the ideology which once mythologized him, valuing his harmony with the natural environment and his tough physicality, now supports the beach” (54). They also compare aspects of the Australian interior to the surf beach:

Like the outback, the surf challenges the user and does so more vigorously than do the harbour beaches of Sydney or the bay beaches of Adelaide, Brisbane, Melbourne; the surf is ultimately of the Australian beach (Fiske, et al. 1987; 55).

In my examination of my relationship with the beach I shot a series of photographs at Redgate Beach to provide evidence of the beach’s dual function of beauty and malevolence. Australia Day 2012, provided the perfect opportunity to critique the idealised image of Charles Meere’s painting Australian Beach
Scene as being seen as pure fiction. In a photographic narrative I demonstrate the real presence of natural malice defined in the image of a beautiful beachscape. This course of action was influenced by an interview I had with former professional lifeguard, Fred Annersley, who worked on beaches in Perth and Margaret River for most of his working life. He alludes to a beach exhibiting beautiful conditions is not always safe; “You can turn up in quite calm conditions and the set of the day comes through and alters the conditions” he told me (Annersley, 2012; 8). A safe beach can be turned into a dangerous beach within moments as confirmed by Fred; “if you are standing on a sandbank bodysurfing in waist deep water and suddenly the biggest wave of the day comes, it changes the situation and takes people out of their depth in a rip” (Annersley, 2012; 8).

The beach conditions on Australia Day met my criteria of light offshore winds, warm air temperatures, clear water and small surf; all the natural ingredients which would encourage families to spend time at the beach. *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 1* (fig.4), depicts a young family who have recently arrived on the beach with all their surf equipment. The image also illustrates parents in the middle ground of the photograph stationed along the shoreline being vigilant, by redirecting their children to safer zones of the beach.

(fig.4) Michael Wise, *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 1* (2012) digital photograph
Redgate Beach has a known reputation for being beautiful as well as hazardous and has a history of human mortality due to rip currents. *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 2* (fig.5), is a view of the beachscape, shot from the northern end of the beach with a focus on the surf zone. The photograph provides a classic image of an Australian beach in which people are pleasure seeking in near perfect surfing conditions. Nevertheless, this playful image of beach doesn’t entirely narrate the truth. There were a few dangerous situations occurring either side of the timeframe from when the image was shot.

For instance, in *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 2* the surfer with a pink surfboard in the left foreground of the photograph is in the process of walking towards the safety of the middle of the beach. Beforehand she had battled a powerful rip for several minutes while trying to paddle her surfboard away from the seaward flowing current. Fortunately a large set wave propelled her back to safety. In *A family fighting a rip current* (fig.6), features a father and his two children being challenged by a life and death situation as they battle a rip which was flowing rapidly out to sea. Without the surfboard the father would have found it near impossible to save both children. Even though there are clues to the
beach’s duality in the first and second images, it is clear in *A family fighting a rip current* (fig.6), that the beach exhibits dual purposes because one zone of the beach is safe and the other is life threatening. 

(fig.6) Michael Wise, *A family fighting a rip current* (2012) digital photograph

The image depicts in the foreground of the photograph a disturbance in texture and discolouration of seawater which signifies danger caused by the rip current flowing rapidly seaward. However, in the background of the photograph, the surf zone is more settled and has a smoother texture and a darker definition of colour. For an experienced beach user, the beach’s duality visually represented in this photograph inform the viewer that danger is operating near the shoreline and that safer zones of the beach are located in the middle of the beach and further out from the shoreline. These visual clues identify concealed malevolence in seawater and acknowledges the presence of mysterious forces which can operate unseen to the observer.

Typically inshore zones of water create a surface illusion which deceives the spectator’s senses and perceptions and seduces inexperienced visitors into believing calm water is safe and broken water is dangerous. This could not be
further from the truth. The natural processes of Regate Beach redirects incoming wave energy from the middle of the beach and then flows parallel along the shoreline towards the peripheries and central sections of the beach and back out to sea. Scientist Dr. Rob Brander suggests, that breaking waves are a dynamic force of energy, and “some of this energy ends up as noise” (Brander 2010; 119). He adds that energy is locked between two boundaries, “trapped in the water between the waves and the shoreline where it sloshes around unseen” until this energy escapes as rip currents which flow seaward (119).

This is confirmed by a personal account of my own when I was captured by the Redgate rip:

Several years ago I had the unique experience of being trapped in the infamous Redgate rip. My first reaction was to panic the moment I felt my body being pulled seaward by the force of the rip. As I regained composure I swam for the safety of the beach and the rocks thirty metres away. I knew from experience to swim horizontally across a rip and headed towards the rocks and not directly towards the beach. Frustratingly, I was within a body length of safety when the force of the rip pulled me away from the rocks and rapidly out to sea. My first thought was to fight it but my experience reassured me to swim with the current to save energy because now I was in a life threatening situation stranded 200 metres offshore. Fortunately the current and large waves carried me to the safety of the sandbank. In similar circumstances a swimmer who was caught by the rip at Redgate Beach in 2012 was found drowned on the sandbank in the middle of the beach. (Wise, 2012; Diary).

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4 Evidence suggests the Redgate rip has the tendency to cycle back towards the middle of the beach and if a person remains afloat has a chance of survival. Dr. Rob Brander’s research has revealed that some rips cycle back to the beach and says, “On student field trips we throw oranges into rips to see how fast and far the rip is flowing. Often the oranges flow in a large circle and come back to the beach in five to ten minutes” (Brander, 2010; 122).
My relationship with the beach has been tempered by a series of lived experiences over time which have fortunately prepared me with enough knowledge to escape many life threatening situations. Even the most experienced water person, however, can have unexpected occurrences which transport them out of their comfort zone into a near death experience. Margaret River resident Helen, a mother of two, is a survivor of the beach’s duality of beauty and terror. During the summer of 2010 she visited a known beauty spot, a coastal bathing location near Indjinup Beach and discovered the horror of being dragged out to sea with her son by three king waves. I have intentionally provided the full transcript of her interview in this chapter, because it is a comprehensive narrative that exposes the dual nature of a beach environment. This is a site which can be beautiful and safe one minute, but unexpectedly transform into a sinister and horrifying landscape moments later. In Helen’s words you can sense her fears and desperation in trying save her child and herself from drowning at a well known coastal beauty site, generally thought to be safe in calm conditions.

Excerpt from Helen’s interview: Tuesday 30th October 2012.

Q: What is the most terrifying event you have experienced at the beach?

_HD:_ I have had a few incidents at the beach, with the most terrifying I’ve had, would be at Indjinyup, at a place that is popularly known as Mermaid Rocks. I had been surfing at Honey Combs surf beach that morning with my children, so it was a really small swell because my children were learning to surf and I don’t really go out in big surf. So it was ‘um’, a beautiful morning lots of children surfing. We were actually on our way home on Caves Road when my son Harry, who was seven, said; “Mum can we please go to Mermaid Rocks and swim in the rock pools?” It is a really special spot that I have been to quite a few times, so ‘um’, when there is a low swell, or no swell, so I felt it was a safe place to go to.

5 The term ‘King waves’ is a coastal terminology that is mainly used in Western Australia. A King wave would normally be referred as a rogue or freak wave. The arrival of King waves on the Western Australian coastline have no pattern, they are totally unexpected forces of nature, unlike the set waves surfers experience, that arrive in a sequential manner every ten to twenty minutes depending on the surf conditions.
We climbed up on the boulders and got to a rock pool and occasionally, you know a wave would come over. A lot of people go there to swim in the rock pools and when a little wave comes over it creates a little waterfall, a natural spa effect.

So me knowing that there was a small swell and having my children there, I actually did stand on top of the rock and watched the ocean for half an hour before I entered the rock pool. My daughter, who was nine at the time and who is very intuitive, and I obviously wasn’t listening to her said; “No I don’t think you should get in there Mum.” And I said; “No, its fine, we haven’t even had a wave come over.” So we had watched for half an hour and there wasn’t even one wave to create a waterfall effect. So it was very still, and when you actually stood in the rock pool, it was only waist or hip high on me. So I talked to my son to come in to the rock pool with me and we would have been in there five minutes.

My daughter was sitting up there behind us and chose not to come in (Helen pauses with an emotional sigh)...........and she said;

“Mum there is a really big wave coming.”

And I said; “Oh really how big?”

Her daughter said; “Really really big, I think you should hold on.”

(Helens voice is now full of emotion)

So to me a child saying that, my daughter.......I thought that it was a little set coming in or a wave that was going to create that little waterfall, so I did listen to her and put my back to a rock and grabbed Harry around the waist and I said;

“Hold on there is a tsunami coming!”

That statement taught me to be really careful of what you put out there, because the words came back to haunt me. Thinking back, I guess those waves are the ones you hear about that kill fishermen. They come out of nowhere....... 

It was.... it was.... a very big wave,
A set of three King waves that come in.

And basically, when the wave.....

The first wave came over, we were engulfed underwater.

So when I thought the wave was coming over, I thought the water level would rise to here (Helen indicates just under chest high), but it rose above our heads.

While I had one foot against one rock,

I had nothing for my other foot to really hold on to.

So when the waves did come over we were under water.

And it, it, it, was like a channel,

This pool you know starts here and goes out to the ocean.

And its just rocks covered in barnacles.

So um, I actually did not let go of my son, as I went head first into some rocks.

I felt we were cornered, and doctors do say in that situation when you are saving someone's life and with a head injury, my adrenalin was the only reason we survived. Because um, the impact of my head against the rock could have easily knocked me out.

We both know, you know, we would have drowned.

I think what kept me going is that I had my son with me,

Knowing I couldn't let him go,

Before the second wave came,

We actually got to come up and take a breathe of fresh air,

The second wave hit us,
And again,

We were both submerged underwater and dragged across the rocks,

As if we were in rapids,

I could hear my daughter watching the whole thing,

She was screaming, and screaming.....

All she could see was me under water and her brother kicking,

With his legs in the air,

Um, so..... because I was holding him with my right arm against my body,

He was slightly above the water,

My whole left side was being smashed by the rocks,

So we, I did, collide head first into another rock,

Then the next moment, I felt like we were under water,

For about a minute,

‘Um’ and it....

I was really amazed at how my son held his breathe for that long.

‘Um’ then we were submerged again,

I realised we were now in the ocean,

In that time the third wave had come,

So it....So it.....was a massive washing machine,

I was struggling at that stage to stay above water,

In Harry’s panic he started to pull me under water,
I do remember feeling quite faint,

Then I saw my daughter who had climbed all the way down these boulders, sobbing and looking at us like she couldn’t believe we were there. You know we just popped up but we were so far away from her and safety. I didn’t know how I was going to get Harry and myself onto the rocks. And she said; “It looked like I had super powers”, and all of a sudden I just pushed him a couple of metres up onto the rock. Then made my way to the rock, um, I found it hard to get up on the rock because I was so cut up. It wasn’t a very nice sight for them because I was covered in blood......

But... I was so happy to be alive!

(Duke, 2012; Transcript from interview)

The analysis of Helen’s experience provided inspiration for how I explored human submersion in my video *Drifting towards extinction* (2014). Her attempts to reach the ocean surface for breath represents a basic requirement for life when submerged underwater. It is this context of human survival in a submarine landscape that informs my videography. The video’s narrative experiments with the notion that a group of young traveller’s at the beach are playfully unaware that they are swimming in a slow moving rip current which is transporting them beyond safety.

*Drifting towards extinction* (2014) is a fictional depiction which choreographs the traveller’s underwater gestures as they rise and fall to capture their breath. The imagery in this video is a shift from the fear and tension of forced immersion described in Helen’s transcript and instead it responds to
the notion of a beautiful death by drowning. My video suggests that fluidic zones of beauty can be just as life threatening as extreme zones of turbulence. In addition, the content of the video has an ephemeral quality created by compositing multiple layers of video to highlight the fluid energy which operates underwater.

Noel Castree and Derek Gregory writing in *David Harvey Critical Reader* (2006) suggest that it is important “to uncover some of the deeper transformations occurring beneath all surface turbulence and volatility” (Castree, Gregory, 14; 2006).

(fig.7) Michael Wise *Drifting towards extinction* (2014) multiple video stills

In this sense, I expose the fluid dynamics of a submarine landscape to reveal imagery which is normally concealed by surface agitation. I also depict human figures in motion who are going through a process of transformation as they adapt to the lethal vagaries of marine environment. Concealed from the observer, this zone of water is a geographical space which exists within the specific coordinates of the beach. It is contained by the liminal borders of ocean floor and surface, which are in constant transition causing displacement and change. This in turn affects how a person navigates their position within these underwater spaces. The sense of displacement and change within a submarine landscape can lead to experiences of disorientation and danger as indicated in Helen’s interview. In this video I am also trying to portray a place of beauty that has threatening undertones which are invisible, where the viewer has to make a
decision on the illusory nature of simply which way is up and which way is
down.

Australian’s uncertain relationship with the beach is often ignored and only
acknowledged when fatalities occur at their popular beach. It is only then our
anxieties and fear of the beach surface in our minds and we realise the
significance of the beach’s dangers. Nevertheless, beach terrors are only
temporary and eventually the memory of last year’s tragedy fade and the image
of the beautiful beach is restored in our minds. In contrast to this, it was evident
in my video documentation of Helen’s interview that two years after the
experience it hadn’t left her mind. The video exposes her fragility to the memory
as she narrated it in front of the camera. It was like a memory which does not
fade or leave, it just sits in the back of the mind waiting for a trigger to reactivate
it. In similar circumstances Australian art history has suppressed certain aspects
of the beach and focused on the pleasantries of an Australian beachscape and not
expose the dark side of a beach’s duality.

Chapter 2, Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape

In this chapter, I examine the characteristic significance of malevolence in art and literature, to illustrate the threat to human life natural phenomena poses in a coastal environment. Artists and writers have represented great waves as hostile and threatening manifestations, which can physically and mentally assault people within a beach landscape.

To recapitulate, I described the real life experience of a young family whose lives were placed in jeopardy by the unexpected arrival of three king waves at a coastal beauty spot in the southwest of Western Australia. King waves are unpredictable and life threatening to people who fish along rocky shorelines, where some of whom are killed every year from rogue waves. Now, I will investigate the hostile forces of nature portrayed in European and Japanese marine art of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, where the aesthetics of coastal landscape vary according to the period the artwork is created and its culture of origin.

I discuss an oil painting by Claude-Joseph Vernet *The Shipwreck* (1772), Katsushika Hokusai’s wood block print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1826) and Joseph Mallord Turner’s oil painting *The Slave Ship* (1840). All three artworks share a common theme that demonstrate the volatile forces of nature threatening human mortality. Vernet’s painting illustrates passengers of a sailing ship coming to terms with the challenges of being shipwrecked on a rocky shore. Hokusai’s graphic print emphasises the immensity and power of large ocean waves threatening fishermen in their boats, and Turner facilitates dynamic brushwork and vibrant colour organisation to illustrate the chaotic conditions experienced by a slave ship in a typhoon.
This chapter also examines Phil Hasting’s video *Steadfast* (2009), in which I compare his work with marine painting of the seventeenth and eighteenth century to demonstrate that aesthetics of malevolence depicted in seventeenth century painting is not dissimilar to the moving images portrayed in his twenty first century video. Hasting illustrates the violence of a tempest in extreme slow motion, which magnifies the “devastating power that uncontrolled water can have” as it crosses a lake causing waves to smash into the shoreline (Hastings, 2009; 1). In my video *The falling sea*, I evoke the physical transformation of wave energy morphing into disorganised patterns of power as the waves collide with the coastal architecture of the shoreline. My theoretical discussion analyses the spectators’ position in the landscape and their aesthetic evaluation of malevolence determined by their proximity to danger: including people being overwhelmed by the forces of nature. I argue that proximity to natural danger, either reduces or eliminates aesthetic appreciation and engages a person’s senses into survival mode. Arnold Berleant, in *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* (1993) comments on “The aesthetics of art and nature” and our integration into such a situation and claims; “one cannot distance oneself from such events: in fact, part of the aesthetic power of such occasions lies in our vulnerability” (Berleant, 1993; 237). Writer Tim Winton in his book *Breath*, explores the virtual elimination of aesthetic appreciation by surfers who try to survive the vortex of giant breaking waves after wiping out. Central to Winton’s theme is how he captures the elemental human emotion which fluctuates between pure excitement and terror when surfing an ocean wave.
Aesthetics of Malevolence

The aesthetics of a malevolent wave is clearly illustrated in Katsushika Hokusai print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* (1826-1833). The iconic nineteenth century Japanese print incorporates a number of visual signifiers which define this force of nature. Hokusai illustrates a monumental wave towering over fishing boats that appears to defy gravity, juxtaposed in front of the snow covered volcano of Mt Fuji. Mt Fuji is central to the print’s composition but is minimized in size in relation to the ‘great wave’ creating an illusion of distance. By using this perspective technique, Hokusai emphasises the immense power of the ocean challenging the symbolic power of the volcano in the Japanese landscape.

Hokusai’s graphic style of contrasting white and darker tones reveals to the viewer that the manifestation of white in a sea environment represents danger, as well as a symbol of intimidation and fear. Art historians Kliener and Mamiya (2005) emphasise this point by stating, that the finger like appearances on the white crest of the wave increases the threatening nature of the great wave (791). Hokusai’s utilisation of white visually connects the sea with the land and creates the illusion that the white water of the wave is not only intimidating the fishermen in their boats but also threatening the land itself. Hokusai’s print also resonates into the present day. The scene prompts memories of the catastrophic tsunami which invaded the Japanese coastal landscape in 2011, when one of the most powerful forces of nature exposed and confronted human vulnerability to something which was beyond comprehension. When the sea traverses a shoreline it highlights the immensity of a tsunami and the omnipresent power which exists in the ocean environment. This force not only challenges one’s mind but the very idea of feeling safe in a land based environment.

Tsunamis are one of nature’s greatest disasters which are responsible for countless deaths throughout human history. Journalist Yoho Kubota in the *National Post* (2012), reports on the first anniversary of the 2011 Japanese

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6 White in Japanese culture is associated with purity and divinity and symbolises death and mourning.
tsunami. He explains that twelve months after an undersea earthquake it created a massive tsunami which swept over Japan’s northeastern coastline and caused significant loss of life, the region is still coming to terms with the economic welfare of its citizens (1).

The image Joseph Mallord William Turner’s painting The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming on) (1840) can instead be accessed via https://www.mfa.org/collections/object/slave-ship-slavers-throwing-overboard-the-dead-and-dying-typhoon-coming-on-31102

A violent ocean storm is well defined in Joseph Mallord William Turner’s (1775 - 1851) painting The Slave Ship (Slavers Throwing Overboard the Dead and Dying, Typhoon Coming on) (1840). The painting was based on a well known story of a slave ship caught in a typhoon in 1783 and is derived from an historical account Turner had read in1839. His painting signifies a foreboding sense of despair which emphasizes humanity’s vulnerability to the forces of nature because it depicts a chaotic scene of a slave ship ploughing through heaving seas in the distance and a multitude of slaves drowning in the seawater. Turner further illustrates the slave’s fate by including fish and birds feeding on their corpses, as if they were discarded offal from the ship’s gallery. Turner’s painting technique charges the work with energy which mirrors the violence of the typhoon and is enhanced by the dramatic mood of his colour palette. Fred Kleiner and Christian Mamiya (2005) describe his work;

Turner’s frenzied emotional depiction of this act matches its barbaric nature. The sun is transformed into an incandescent comet amid flying scarlet clouds. The slave ship moves into the distance, leaving in its wake a turbulent sea choked with bodies of slaves sinking to their deaths (840).

The central characters of the painting, the ship and slaves, are engulfed by Turner’s vigorous paint application, a technique which mirrors the explosion of energy in a typhoon. Kliener and Mamiya (2005) reinforce this by claiming that “the passion and energy of Turner’s works not only reveal the Romantic
sensibility that was the foundation for his art but also clearly illustrates Edmund Burke’s concept of the sublime, a mixture of awe and terror” (840). I agree with Kliener and Mamiya’s comments that Turner’s painting has ‘Romantic sensibilities’ that provokes human emotion, although it is a work which represents our worst nightmare where the sublime seascape could be interpreted as hell on earth. In addition, Turner extends his imagination to portray the sublime in its most violent form as “an aesthetic of power” (Scarry, 2001; 85). His depiction of natural power emphasises the profound effect the sublime has on the human mind by creating a scene which requires contemplation to fully understand its content. In other words, Emund Burke’s concept of a sublime seascape is bound together with human emotion and the time invested in discerning its image. Burke (1990) clarifies this idea by stating; “The tossing of the sea remains after the storm; and when this remain of horror has entirely subsided, all the passion which the accident raised, subsides along with it; and the mind returns to its usual state of indifference” (32).

The image Joseph Mallord William Turner’s Waves Breaking against the Wind c.(1840) can instead be accessed via www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-waves-breaking-against-the-wind-n02881

Absent of any form of human presence Turner’s painting, Waves Breaking against the Wind presents an image which precedes abstract painting of the twentieth century. His highly energized method of painting was an attempt to capture the forces of wind and waves as they collide from opposite directions; forcing the combined energy to erupt in vertical direction. Turner’s position on the beach suggests the direction of the wind and wave energy was traveling horizontally to the shoreline and not directly on to the beach. His study of the unusual sea conditions provide a visual understanding of the forces which generate a disorganised and turbulent sea. Richard Johns (2013), writing about Turner’s interest in coastal studies explains that, except for a few examples late in his career, Turner focuses on the dominating theme of the wave (1). Turner’s capacity to capture the form and menace of the wave in his marine painting was
based on countless studies of beach scenes incorporating the wave. Johns confirms that Turner’s “reputation in the early 1800s as a painter of the sublime sea, the visible action of the wind and tide was the driving force behind a series of seascapes that effectively reinvented the genre” (1). In summary, Turner’s paintings are emotional and chaotic studies of the sea which feature disturbed wave patterns generated by the invisible force of the wind. 

(fig.8) Phil Hastings’ *Steadfast* (2009) video still, image courtesy of Phil Hastings

The dynamics of a tempest is visualised in Phil Hastings’ video *Steadfast* (2009) because he has documented the violent force and the “devastating power that uncontrolled water can have” (1) of a winter storm in North America as it crosses a lake causing waves to smash into the shoreline. Videographer Phil Hastings describes how he shot the video in freezing conditions “the wind was gusting to 60 MPH and chunks of ice the size of small cars were rolling and advancing on the frozen build-up of the shore” (1). Hastings positions his camera at ground level to capture the surface turbulence of the lake which magnifies the exploding waves polluted with organic matter. There is no pristine whiteness of sea spray; the lake water resembles an organic soup comprised of leaf matter and lumps of ice. He records an inhospitable environment for human occupation, although a house in the distance offers refuge and is withstanding the onslaught of the wind,
waves and ice buildup on the shoreline. The subdued tones of *Steadfast* (2009) allude to Gothic painting of the late eighteen and nineteen century in which artists used darker tones of paint as connotations towards gloom, mystery and the afterlife. These paintings also depicted decaying architecture, darkness, the grotesque and supernatural entities.

Cameron Dodworth (2013) points out in his Ph.D thesis *Illuminating the Darkness: The Naturalistic Evolution of Gothicism in the Nineteenth Century British Novel and Visual Art*, that the Gothic in literature and art was “primarily concerned with the fear of the Other” (3). In other words, Gothic meanings which relate to the coastal landscape are connected to our apprehension of the mysterious and natural processes which operate seen and unseen, that may inflict fright or endanger life. Hastings’ video demonstrates threatening and violent water patterns on the edge of a lake, black cliffs, overhanging trees and a ghostly white house. Gerald McMaster (2012) describes this work suggesting that it; “tears at the mind” (319), by metaphorically describing a frightening image of nature’s violence on the edge of a Canadian lake. He elaborates, “floating seagulls are oblivious to the terror below” and further “the lonely scene of a single house in the distance in steadfast is psychologically frightening” (McMaster, 2012; 319). I do not entirely agree with McMaster’s comments concerning the house in the distance. In contrast, I believe that the house symbolises the only evidence of reassurance along a shoreline which is under attack from the forces of nature. Although ghost like in appearance the house still represents a place of refuge from the storm.

Author Tim Winton in *Breath*, engages the reader in a narrative which explores the fear of the unknown in an ocean environment. His narrative in part explores how an experienced surfer by the name of ‘Sando’ encourages two young men in their mid teens to face their fears and surf a giant wave out at sea. This particular wave only breaks when a giant swell is generated from an approaching storm.
Winton, (2008) describes the sound effects and visual power of the newly arrived swell:

When we hauled past the Point the bay was awash with foam and shrouded with vapour. The surge of the shore break overran the ramparts of the bar and spewed into the estuary. The ocean sounded like a battlefield; the unceasing roar was audible even above the sound of the Volkswagen (88).

Winton also defines a breaking wave out at sea as a ‘bommie’ which is likely derived from the early surfing terminology of Bombora which identifies a large breaking wave on an outside reef. It refers to the explosion of white water a spectator on the beach may see when viewing the feathering of a large breaking wave out at sea. Winton (2008) describes its appearance: “And then a mile out I saw the sudden white flare. A plume of spray lifted off the bommie” (88). Winton’s narrative also represents the shoreline as a malevolent obstacle the characters had to overcome before they entered the water. The surfers had to climb down a cliff face and wait on a rock ledge for the incoming surge from a wave to reach its full height before they could enter the sea. A mistimed exit from the rocks would have proved fatal unless the surfers remained focused and selected the biggest surge. If they had chosen to do otherwise, they would have been left stranded and been at the mercy of the next wave smashing their fragile bodies into rocks (90). Winton highlights the vulnerability of the inexperienced surfers who venture into the unknown realm of open ocean surfing. He creates an atmosphere of tension and potential disaster for the young surfers who risk their lives to surf the giant sea bommie. Winton (2008) bestows the bommie with the title of “Old Smokey” and describes the young surfer’s first emotional reaction of seeing it close at hand; “I hadn’t understood the scale of what I was seeing, but the sight of the thing pitching out across the bommie drove a blade of fear right through me” (90). He elaborates; “just the sound of spray hissing back off the crest inspired terror; it was the sound of sheet metal shearing itself to pieces” (91). Winton (2008) translates to the reader the immense size and power of the wave, by suggesting that when the wave breaks on the reef it sounds like a
cannon firing. Instead of a shot being propelled, the wave creates its own pressurised wind gust that howls across the surface of the water. He also describes of an approaching set of monstrous waves from one of the young surfers’ perspective. This character gives a detailed account of the wave distorting and transforming itself into a great height causing a change in surface tension; “You could feel the whole skin of the ocean being drawn outward to meet them” (92). Winton (2008) informs the reader of a surfer’s dire experience when he suffers a wipeout on a large wave and is dragged across the bottom of the reef and driven into deep water. The surfer becomes aware of the importance of not resisting against the powerful under water turbulence until it ceases, otherwise his efforts would have been futile. Winton reinforces this idea by stating; “I knew not to fight it, but I was nearly gone when the sea let me go” (96). The significance of his writing is that it divulges an insight to an offshore zone of the beachscape that few people ever experience and highlights the immense power of a great wave. Central to Winton’s theme is how he captures human emotion which fluctuates between pure excitement and pure terror when surfing a malevolent wave.

The existence of sublime malevolence in a coastal environment manifests in many forms each with its own aesthetic evaluation and power over the mind. Edmund Burke (1990) interprets the effect of an overpowering image on our mind, which can continue to impact our emotional wellbeing well beyond the initial cause of the suffering (32). In other words, Burke is reinforcing the idea that the human mind responds to the aftermath of any destructive conflict by replaying it within one’s mind until emotions calm down, whether the source of the transgression is physical or psychological.

In Philip Shaw’s introduction to his publication *The Sublime*, he isolates Edmund Burke’s unifying idea, which consistently appears in his work, “A Philosophical Enquiry into the origin of our ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful; as “the threat of violation” (Shaw, 2006; intro 6). Shaw explains that any form of natural
menace can be diminished by fleeing from its source of terror - such as an active volcano. Alternatively, observing a volcanic eruption from a distant location could induce feelings of safety and pleasure (6).

As a consequence distance provides the necessary comfort for aesthetic consideration of the sublime and eliminates the threat of danger. On the other hand, if the spectator is in range of an act of sublime malevolence, then the critical moments of contemplation are likely to place the spectator in danger and subject them to its physicality. Then again, if the spectator provides a safe distance between themselves and a threatening force of nature, it could still impart a psychological effect on the spectator’s mind. Arnold Berleant (1993) comments on our integration into such a situation and suggests that it is virtually impossible to disengage oneself from such an occurrence, because one of the key elements of “aesthetic power” lies in our susceptibility to its influence (237). Human vulnerability to sublime malevolence is subject to the spectators’ willingness to recognise the seriousness of their situation by retreating and seeking safety. Berleant takes this idea further by stating, “survival and safety clearly supersede the aesthetic dimension when actual danger threatens, but our personal involvement adds to the perceptual intensity of such situations” (237). When sublime malevolence engulfs the spectator, it attacks the senses, replacing clear aesthetic judgement with mental confusion and the fear of dying. The difference between aesthetic appreciation of real beach terror and a terrifying image depicted in art, lies in how the real image and the created image is perceived by the beholder. There are a number of factors which may influence the observer’s initial reaction to both real and imagined images. First, if I were to witness a giant wave approaching me at the beach, my initial reaction would be one of visual terror, because I would be in fear of my life. The second wave of terror would be the physical experience of the breaker striking my body as I fight for survival. The third act of terror however is more subversive, it leaves a residual effect on memory which remains in the subconscious mind.
Memory, therefore will influence and compromise aesthetic appreciation of an imagined artwork which is composed of terrifying elements from a previous experience. The imagined artwork represents an illusion of reality that triggers apprehension in our imagination.

Philosopher Terry Eagleton expands on this notion by commenting on the meaning of aesthetics which do not operate “between art and life but between the material and the immaterial: between things and thoughts, sensations and ideas, what is bound up with our creaturely life of perceptions as opposed to what belongs to the mind” (Eagleton, 1988; 1). In other words aesthetics of malevolence in a beach environment are connected with sublime concepts which are defined by visual and physical confrontations which assault our senses and minds. Berleant (1993) defines the sublime as a idea which can only exist in the human mind and is absent from nature, interpreted through our ability to comprehend, “the subjective construction of judgements that we establish the cognitive order of purposiveness” (235). I argue, however, that the sublime’s existence could be reasoned through other human senses such as hearing, taste, touch and smell. Edmund Burke (1990), for example supports this notion by stating; “The eye is not the only organ of sensation, which a sublime passion may be produced. Sounds have a great power in these as in most other passions” (Burke, 1990; 75). Burke’s assertion means the sublime can be experienced through other sensory perceptions and defines excessive noise caused by thunder storms, violent winds or giant waves, are natural occurrences which could overwhelm a persons sense of hearing and claims that it causes disturbance within the imagination (75). Alternatively, the spectator of an inland landscape decodes a different set of visual signifiers, because one landscape is in constant motion, whilst the other is permanently still. John Roberts in The Art of Interruption discusses the role of a spectator in the landscape by claiming that our editorial position whilst recording by camera or visual sense is “linked to

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7 I have been sitting on my surfboard outside the surf line, when I have heard the booming sound of a large wave striking Isaac rock; the sound is deep and ominous signifying a rise in swell or a set wave coming my way.
associations of the image” (Roberts, 1998; 154). Roberts (1998) elaborates by suggesting that a judicious process of elucidation (163), creates a considered awareness of the image unfolding in front of our eyes.

For instance, the image of the sea is a landscape in constant animation that actively engages human senses in a form of natural entertainment. It can hypnotise us with its visual language which can either provoke pleasure or fear within short periods of time, therefore making the fluidity of the beach an aesthetic value which engages coastal malevolence.

(fig.9) Michael Wise *The falling sea* (2012) video still

To video the aesthetics of a malevolent coastline I have imitated some of the actions painters of the eighteen and nineteenth century as well as twenty-first century videographers have used; to capture the sublime malevolence of a storm ravished seascape. During winter 2012, I waited for a powerful low pressure system to move onto the Southwest coastline which resulted in Redgate Beach coming under the influence of high winds and large powerful waves.
My journal notes (22/08/2012)

The storm displayed wind gusts which travelled up to seventy-five knots and produced waves of close to twenty feet in height. I sat in my rocking car at Redgate Beach as a powerful wind and rain storm swept across the car park and wondered whether I should venture out of my safe cocoon. Hand held documentation and wedging myself between granite boulders was the best protection I could hope for in conditions where rain, salt spray and sea foam were blowing horizontally. Visibility was reduced to several metres so I waited for the rain storm to pass and a change in light saw a window of opportunity present itself. The safety of the beach was compromised with lines of whitewater smashing into the base of the sand hills. The ocean waves were frightening in their power and immensity. This is the only time in my life I have been genuinely afraid of recording a natural event unfolding in front me.

Riding and Llewellyn (2013) discuss the maritime artist’s technique of enhancing the viewing experience between their artwork and the viewer (9). Many maritime artists achieved the visual effects in their paintings by imagining themselves in the midst of a seascape or centrally positioning themselves in the midst of a storm ravished landscape. Riding and Llewellyn (2013) also state that;

In The Shipwreck, for example, Turner has chosen a viewpoint that removed the shoreline from which the viewer could ‘safely’ contemplate the storm, to immerse them, as it were, in the raging sea immediately alongside those struggling for survival (9).

Steven Levine in his publication, Seascapes of the Sublime: Vernet, Monet, and the Oceanic Feeling, describes the heroic act of artist Joseph Vernet (1714 - 89) who had himself lashed to the mast of a ship during a squall at sea to witness it close at hand. He endeavored to capture the sublime act of nature through experience and memory. Levine writes; “This topos of fear-lessness in pursuit of the fleeting phenomena of the storm at sea is also featured in the biographies of
Turner as well as the marine painters of seventeenth century Holland” (Levine, 1985; 381). There is a well known story that William Turner lashed himself to the mast of a steam ship in a snow storm as a method of gathering visual data for his paintings. James Hall writing about an exhibition for the Tate Gallery titled - *A sublime roller coaster ride through art history*, makes a comment on Turner’s story and states; “it was a heroic method of observing extreme meteorological effects at close quarters, and confirmation of Turner’s credentials as the supreme artistic observer of nature” (Hall, 2009; 1) even though as Hall\(^8\) (2009) also suggests Turner likely fabricated this very story to enhance his own standing amongst his peers (1).

In my video *The falling sea* (2014), I highlight the aesthetics of a malevolent beachscape during a major winter storm at Redgate Beach in 2012. The video documents extreme conditions and the physical transformation of coastal energy colliding with the concrete morphology of the shoreline. The video also captures the unlimited power of the ocean overwhelming protruding pillars of granite rock. The rock pillars are symbolised as objects of darkness that represent eroded shadows of their original forms, contrasted by exploding shrouds of white water that soften their immovable appearance. I have made a number of editorial decisions which have influenced the imagery of the video. First, I use slow motion to emphasise the sea’s natural chaos and magnify its power. Second, I condense and stretch the imagery of the video to re-define the architectural presence of the stone monolith’s, which are under constant assault from monstrous waves. Furthermore, I have intentionally created an ominous seascape which has the dark undertones of the coastal gothic; a site inhospitable to human presence that challenges our senses and mortality.

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\(^8\) Whether Hall is correct or not in his assumption that Turner was too old to survive being tied to the mast of a steamer during a snow storm. The reality is, historical accounts and more recently the film *Mr Turner* (2014) perpetuates the story of Turner’s action until proven otherwise.
Up to this point in my exegesis, I have solely focused on the aesthetics of wave malevolence in the ocean and beach environment illustrated in historical painting and contemporary video. Aesthetics of malevolence at the beach, however, is not only restricted to the sea but can manifest in clouds from the sky. The images of clouds are normally perceived in the landscape as ephemeral manifestations of mist which defy gravity and drift across the sky. Jeremy Gilbert Rolfe writes about the elusive structure of a cloud by stating: “A cloud is a formless form in as much as it is a molecular structure that does not clearly have an outside or a periphery but rather trails off into what it is not” (Gilbert-Rolfe, 2011; 34). He is alluding to the cloud’s ephemeral structure and the illusion of its form that can quickly disappear when energy which holds its molecules together evaporates into nothingness. Nevertheless, all clouds are not the same. Invisible energy which is present in the water molecules of clouds is composed of a very different nature to that found in the water molecules of the sea. The molecular structure of clouds have the potential to attract static electricity from the atmosphere and it is within this electrically charged environment a cloud can exhibit destructive violence.

I have intentionally included a comprehensive narrative describing a bizarre weather event in which I was the perceiver of a menacing cloud on a calm day at Redgate Beach. Whilst surfing, I witnessed the ominous appearance of a dark grey cloud breaking away from an incoming low pressure weather system located on the horizon. The cloud moved rapidly towards the beach even though there was no wind and the ocean surface was smooth and calm. By the time the cloud was within striking distance of the shoreline it had changed the atmosphere of the beach from being still and safe one minute, into a sinister and horrifying landscape which placed everyone present in danger. The unique strangeness of the cloud captivated my attention mainly because it was a sublime experience beyond comprehension. Berleant (1993) writes about the difficulties people face when confronted with natural adversity beyond their comprehension, he suggests; “we cannot distance the natural world from ourselves in order to
measure and judge it with complete objectivity” (236). The cloud had an entrancing and ominous beauty composed of greys, greens and purple colours with brief flashes of yellow; it was elongated in shape and had several triangular forms hanging from its underside. Due to my fascination with the cloud I hadn’t realised the extent of the danger it posed and within moments large hailstones were erupting in the water all around me. It was during this initial onslaught when I left the water in fear and sought shelter from the granite rocks on the beach. Burke (1990) in *The passion caused by the sublime*, outlines his sentiments when faced with a sublime moment in nature. “The passion caused by the great and sublime in nature when those causes operate most powerfully, is Astonishment; and astonishment is that state of the soul, in which all its motions we suspend with some degree of horror” (53).

My fears escalated when a powerful wind began to circle around me, as well as lightening and the terrifying sound of thunderclaps overhead. The limestone pathway that connected the beach to the car park became a raging torrent of water which prevented anyone trapped on the beach from reaching the safety of their cars. After the storm passed the beach returned to stillness. I interviewed former lifeguard, Fred Annersley who had been surfing with me on that particular day. He believed; “that it was a series of small tornadoes wrapped into one” (Annersley, 2012; transcript). He provides in his own words a specific account of what he witnessed during this extraordinary weather event;

*The difference between that little front coming through was that this front was touching the water; it was at water level, it wasn’t like a big dark cloud in the sky coming through and we were going to get rain and hail and a bit of lightening. This actual front was at ground level, or water level, and I said to you: “Hey get out of the water this is going to get dangerous, this is going to get serious”, so I got out of the water and ran up the beach and spoke to two or three families and said: “Get out of here! Hell’s going to break loose”. With this front because it wasn’t a high one, when you look up and see a big, big, bit of weather, this was at water level coming across the ocean. It had lightening and hail and it brought down trees. I got in the car and drove home, and I was lucky to get home because there were trees down on the road (Annersley, 2012; transcript).*
My observation of this grotesque cloud formation was instrumental in how the experience informed my creative practice. In hindsight, I would describe the thunder cloud as a sublime manifestation of terror which stimulated my imagination to believe that the cloud was more mythological beast than an atmospheric disturbance. An occurrence of terror in the natural environment which inspires the imagination is an emotion which Kant in *Critique of Judgement* (2007) would describe, as something which is provoked by human reason. Kant believes that a release of energy in nature becomes a force so powerful that it affects our imagination (Kant, 2007; 245). He explains that not only are we “attracted by the object, but is alternatively repelled thereby, the delights in the sublime does not so much involve positive pleasure as admiration or respective merits the name of negative pleasure” (Kant, 2007; 245). Kant’s contradiction of pleasure is not too dissimilar from what people experience when seeking fright from a horror movie at the cinema except, when people are confronted by terrifying phenomena in the natural environment, feelings of wonder are tempered by knowledge that their life could be in peril.

(fig.10) Michael Wise, Ephemeral formations of lightness and darkness (2015) digital photograph
The photograph *Ephemeral formations of lightness and darkness* (2015) exhibits similar characteristics to those I witnessed in a thunder cloud at Redgate Beach several years ago. The image depicts clouds in the background under the influence of a powerful setting sun; but at the same time the foreground of the image is being invaded by several linear thunder clouds, which signify a change in weather that could have serious consequences. The image of the cloudscape is visually separated from the horizon line to demonstrate its significance as an atmospheric disturbance. It also highlights the creative direction I undertook during this research project by exploring distinct fields within landscape such as, sand patterns and submarine views rather than panoramic views of a seascape that have a fixed point of reference which incorporates a horizon line. I discovered that by removing the horizon line from imagery within the landscape the viewer is relocated from a fixed position and pushed towards an immersive experience. Such a shift in perspective introduces human imagination thus creating an alternative interpretation of landscape. For example, the atmospheric conditions interpreted in Casper David Friedrich’s marine painting *Fog* (1807) portrays an atmosphere of muted tones which cloak the horizon line. Friedrich provides clarity in the foreground of the painting but then reduces the ship and boat to shadows lurking behind a blanket of fog. His thoughts imbued in this painting translate a psychological connection between his mind and the landscape where he conveys a morbid obsession with human mortality. In a twenty-first century interpretation of landscape, Gerald McMaster in the 18th Biennale of Sydney catalogue comments on a non existing horizon line in Jess MacNeil’s video *The Shape of Between* (2006). McMaster explains that the video was filmed on the Ganges River in an atmosphere of smoke haze caused by the burning of religious offerings. He states that; “The lack of a horizon line renders it psychologically disturbing and gives the formless expanse of water an identity of cultural and religious experience” (McMaster, 2012; 321). Both these works by Friedrich and MacNeil, and my observational experiences share a common themes of sublimity, imagination and psychological disturbance that have informed my work.
My experience of beach on this particular day was far removed from the pleasantries of a warm summer’s day. A winter beachescape is subject to a wide range of environmental factors that are generated by natural processes which produce powerful winds, giant waves, dangerous currents and mysterious thunder clouds. All these characteristic values of coastal malevolence can be defined through human perception as sublime moments which generate awe, fear and apprehension. One other characteristic of malevolence I have yet to examine is malevolent beauty, when the perceiver is enraptured by the majesty and power of a dangerous natural phenomenon. The power of this beauty is explored in the following chapter.
Chapter 3, The Power of Beauty

In this chapter, I elaborate further the discussion exploring the power of beauty and begin with the landscape paintings of Casper David Friedrich and William Mallord Turner. My analysis of Friedrich’s and Turner’s paintings illustrate beauty in a reduced depth of field and are employed as visual stepping stones to discuss my video *Passing through beauty* (2014); which represents an underwater world in which sunlight illuminates an intimate labyrinth of kelp and visually narrates a marriage between beauty and death. In addition, I examine the aesthetics of a beautiful seascape to consider whether beauty represents a subterfuge for deception and analyse whether the seductive image of a beautiful scenery can lead people towards incorrect judgements. I discuss Elaine Scarry’s thoughts in *On Beauty and Being Just* (1999), in which she connects beauty with our ability to make mistakes when confronted by its image in nature. She argues that human perception of beauty coexists with our ability for error, but at the same time rewards us with visual pleasure (14). This twofold function of beauty means it can be interpreted as an agent which corrupts our perception of landscape and lead us into danger, therefore making beauty a distraction which
can cause the simple act of human observation in a coastal environment to become a precarious activity. Donald Crawford in *Landscape, natural beauty and the arts* analyses beauty in objects and anything which appears remarkable by stating that; “Natural beauty is perfection, whether found in an individual organism, a product of living things, an atmospheric phenomenon, or a natural site” (Crawford, 1993; 186). I do agree with Crawford’s concept of natural beauty as being defined as a consummate object or scenic landscape, but on the other hand, images of natural beauty could also have flaws which are undetectable or have negative aspects, which either camouflages or assimilates negativity in its overall image. For instance, seawater has the capacity to conceal a plethora of potential threats to human life, such as a dangerous current flowing beneath the surface or a great wave approaching just beyond the horizon line. In other words, beauty has the capacity to cloak its negative aspects from the observer.

Philosopher Umberto Eco also defines representations of beauty as something which provides us with a pleasant outcome as he argues; “it seems that what is beautiful is the same as what is good (Eco, 2004, 10). My first reaction is to follow Eco’s notion of defining beauty as being good, except beauty has a few other considerations which are clearly negative when associated with an animated landscape. The sea is a highly active environment which conspires against what is generally perceived as good. I would go as far as to say that natural beauty witnessed in a beachscape has an appearance that could be considered ‘good’ but in reality, its active environment exposes people to high risks and difficult situations and in this instance beauty should be defined as negative. Kant in *Critique of Judgement* (2007), discusses our means of distinguishing good as an aesthetic understanding of beauty, in things, that provides us with feelings of “pleasure or displeasure” (35). Kant (2007) argues these discernments of taste are influenced by our comprehension of good and that we must have a clear idea of an object’s form and function (29). If I were to apply Kant’s understanding of good towards a beautiful beachscape I would have to acknowledge that the beach is not a good and safe environment, as it is a
consistent mystery and sometimes beyond my comprehension. In other words, if we are unable to fully comprehend the visual essence of beauty in a coastal environment, it means it has the propensity to affect our judgement in deciding whether beauty is good or the bad, thereby causing doubt. Nevertheless, I would prefer to say that an image of beauty at the beach incorporates both characters of good and bad and should be considered untrustworthy; because beauty in a coastal landscape is corrupted by deception and the concealment of danger. This means coastal beauty should be discussed within a negative sense of malevolent beauty. The artist’s observation of beauty in a coastal landscape is governed by a number of environmental factors that influence their decision making in creating art. These are factors such as the quality of sunlight, sea mist from breaking waves, motion of the sea, the density of fog or rain and the terrain; all of which determine the artist’s editorial position within the landscape and their interpretation of beauty. It is within the parameters of defining beauty in landscape I examine the nineteenth century paintings of Casper David Friedrich and William Mallord Turner.

The image Casper David Friedrich Winter Landscape with Church (1811) oil painting can instead be accessed via https://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/paintings/research/winter-landscape

According to Kleiner and Mamiya (2005) the Romantic landscape painters of the nineteenth century had a common interest in nature and spiritualism in which they aspired to impart the landscape with a sense of belonging. The artists communicated their connection with the landscape from a spiritual and emotional point of view. “No longer were they painters of mere things but instead were translators of nature’s transcendent meanings, arrived at through the feelings that the landscape inspired” (Kleiner, Mamiya, 2005; 838).
Casper David Friedrich’s painting, Winter Landscape with Church (1811) illustrates a quiet and still landscape that seems pure and uncorrupted until the viewer notices that in the foreground there are discarded crutches lying in the
snow. Friedrich represents a man lying against a rock praying to a crucifix as an insignificant element in this winter landscape. It is not difficult to understand Friedrich’s narrative in which a crippled man is seeking salvation from his affliction by praying in an environment created by God. The power of beauty in this painting is not only generated by its spiritual narrative but also by Friedrich’s ability to paint sunlight illuminating the pure white snow in the foreground to contrast with the dark haze in the background. The painting demonstrates a truncated depth of field highlighted by the clarity and light of the foreground. The haze in the background represents a still and ephemeral environment which reinforces Friedrich’s concept of the landscape as a site of transition between heaven and earth. Kleiner and Mamiya describe the stillness depicted in Friedrich’s paintings as ‘a form of devotion to god’ because “the reverential mood of his works demands from the viewer the silence appropriate to sacred places filled with divine presence” (Kleiner, Mamiya, 2005; 838).

Friedrich’s narrative is a scene of visual beauty enhanced by the aesthetics of atmospheric perspective which blankets the landscape and creates a sense of mystery of the sacred. William Turner’s painting *Norham Castle Sunrise* (1845) illustrates beauty in nature through the process in which he created transparent layers of colour which bleed into each other. Turner presents the castle as a blue abstract form partially concealed behind a shroud of fog with the yellow sunrise permeating and filtering through the entire composition. Turner’s blurring and hazing of the landscape is a different approach to the foreground clarity and detail in Friedrich’s *Winter Landscape with Church* which is grounded in its solid depiction of rocks, trees and snow field. Rather Turner’s painting has an ephemeral quality which reduces the concrete form of the castle to a ghostly presence of its former self. The power of beauty is manifested within the atmospheric depiction of the haze. K. E. Sullivan discusses Turner’s early morning ritual of seeing the sunrise and states “He had claimed proudly throughout his life that he had never missed a sunrise. For Turner, the Sun was God, not just a source of light or a useful motif” (Sullivan, 1996; 77).

In contrast, Friedrich’s painting has a source of sunlight that illuminates the white snow and separates the foreground from the approaching curtain of darkness; a symbolic image representing the conflict between good and evil. Turner on the other hand paints his impression of an early morning sunrise that permeates the entire composition, alluding to a divine presence in sunlight.

In another painting *Sunrise with a Boat between Headlands* (1845), he replicates the effects of an early morning sunrise that could be described in abstract terms. Together, Friedrich’s and Turner’s paintings illustrate atmospheric conditions, which interrupt the aesthetics of distance and transport the viewer closer to beauty within the landscape. It is these aspects of their work which leads to my discussion of my video, *Passing through Beauty* (2014) in which sunlight and a limited depth of field play a crucial role in defining the power of beauty.

In my video *Passing through beauty* (2014), the power of beauty is interpreted in the aesthetics of filtered light, motion and architecture of the weed which together combine to create a narrative of abstraction and organic fantasy. This is a composition designed to expose the duality of a harmonious environment whereby a site of beauty and malevolence can coexist. This is a site which is invisible to the spectator from the beach; a site where the concept of landscape vanishes and is substituted by the intimacy of a structured labyrinth woven together by the movement of seawater. Within this floating mound of seaweed, the viewer is subjected to a sensory experience of vibrant colours, realised as vivid reds, oranges and yellows that are generated by sunlight passing through water molecules and kelp membrane. The video’s narrative, begins with a kaleidoscope of abstract shapes, forms and colours under the influence of moving seawater. The rhythmic beauty of the video imagery however, portrays a dark conclusion which alludes to the presence of a human body being integrated
within a floating mound of seaweed, thus exposing the potential marriage between beauty and death in a coastal landscape.

I have experienced three defining moments with seaweed.

(1) In my early teens I lived at the coastal location of Quinns Rocks, (located north of Perth) where I witnessed a number of powerful storms. One storm deposited huge amounts of seaweed on the beach and even larger mounds up to three metres high were thrown over the limestone rock formations at the southern end of the beach. The day after a storm, my brother and I noticed a very large mound of seaweed half way up the limestone rock face. Our investigation included jumping all over it until we noticed a hollow sound from beneath our feet. On closer investigation we discovered a missing cray fishing boat buried under the weed.

(2) My father also instructed us not to jump on mounds of seaweed after major northwest storms, because deadly sea snakes have been known to follow the warm currents south and become trapped in the seaweed after a storm. We ignored his advice until our family dog began barking at an object lying in the seaweed. Within metres of our playful antics we discovered a live sea snake.

(3) On more than one occasion I have been seduced into surfing perfect waves breaking across floating seaweed islands, except every time I have tried, I have the unpleasant experience of falling off my surfboard and becoming entangled in a heavy conglomeration of weed. The combined weight and movement of the weed has made it difficult to escape. Fortunately the water was waist deep and I was able to stand up\(^9\) through the weed creating the appearance of a sea monster.

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\(^9\) Rescue organisations have noted that some people found drowned in lakes, estuaries and seawater could have stood up and saved themselves in waist deep water.
To overcome my aversion to seaweed, I experimented with lying on my back by floating on top of a seaweed island several metres from shore. In a short space of time I felt assimilated into the heaving body of kelp and recognised the power of its mass as it moved in harmony with the motion of the sea. It was during this cathartic experience that I discovered images of beauty hidden beneath the surface. Jennifer McMahon, in her article *the romantic spirit* comments on the core idea of Romanticism in the arts and states; “the aesthetic experience of nature can reveal a truth that penetrates beyond the surface of appearance” (McMahon, 2008; 1). Romantic concerns are also pertinent to my video artwork *Passing through beauty* (2014), in which I incorporate visual concerns of the imagination, infused with the emotional sounds of the melancholic. McMahon’s comments confirm my central argument in this exegesis that aesthetics of malevolence are encapsulated in images of beauty at the beach, which have the power to deceive human perception and endanger life.

I mentioned beforehand that my underwater world is invisible to the spectator on the beach and that visually disruptive phenomena of sunlight (reflection, glare, shimmer) normally prevent us from viewing beneath its surface. The point I am trying to make is that the surface appearance of seawater matters, because it represents a visual barrier which prevents the spectator from becoming a witness to its mysterious environment; unless they immerse themselves in seawater and venture beneath its surface. The surface of seawater, therefore, becomes an agent for concealment whether its is visually concealing images of beauty or malevolence. It is within the concept of concealment that I would like to make comparisons between other surfaces which act as visual barriers hiding positive and negative appearances. For instance, the surface of seawater acts as a visual barrier for the spectator which prevents them from seeing anything sinister lurking beneath its outward impression. Other landscapes such as bushland’s and forests conceal negative aspects which are either camouflaged or covered up by superficial appearances of nature. David Batchelor in *Chromophobia* (2000), analyses superficial appearance in the context of the cosmetic which enhances
the skin to conceal any form of imperfection. Alternatively, the applied cosmetic layer is not only a surface in its own right; it conceals skin and its imperfections from being seen by others. Batchelor discusses the idea of surface by stating; “If surface veils depth, if appearance masks essence, then make-up masks a mask, veils a veil, disguises a disguise. It is not simply a deception, it is a double deception” (Batchelor, 2000; 54). Batchelor’s ideas of the cosmetic mirror the function of the seas surface. When I apply the shimmer and glare of sunlight to the surface of seawater, it not only disguises and masks the waters surface, it also makes it near impossible for the spectator to visualise beauty or danger beneath the surface.

The particular day I shot the video *Passing through beauty* (2014), the sea was calm and smooth, except there was still enough resident energy to move the seaweed island in a rhythmic motion. The weight and movement of the kelp island was immense and beyond my comprehension and I realised the unseen power which moved this mass of seaweed could entrap the unwary.
Passing through beauty (fig.12), represents a snapshot of time and motion which could be interpreted as a kind of ‘essence of beauty’ existing in an ephemeral and formless state. The image is a detached representation from the moving image I witnessed in nature and the video timeline and is an image in its own right separate from the original narrative of the video. Rex Butler in “Beauty Sublime and Time” (2011) comments on one of the inherent traits of beauty as it portrays a kind of irresponsibility by being impervious to the very thing it is associated with (150). The cause of this visual disassociation in Passing through beauty (fig.12), is a direct result of how movement in the ocean has stretched thousands of air particles into flurries of whiteness impregnated by ribbons of brown attempting to overwhelm formations of yellow. The near proximity of the camera to the object (kelp) has created an image which blurs reality towards pure abstraction, but at the same time demonstrates that the power of beauty exists in the transition of objects in a fluid space.

(fig.13) Michael Wise Passing through beauty, (2014) video still
Gilles Deleuze discusses the movement of water in *Cinema 1: The movement image* by stating that, “water is the most perfect environment in which movement can be extracted from the thing moved, or mobility itself” (Deleuze, 2005; 80). In a video graphic sense, the still image I extracted from the video recording could be interpreted as an image of beauty which has had its power of movement corrupted and transformed into a lesser image of its former self.

Alternatively, in *Passing through beauty* (fig.13), aesthetics of beauty in the kelp are visually defined in how space is redefined through the forward and reverse movement of seawater. In one moment, the spaces between the kelp open up and the viewer is able to explore a labyrinth of architectural voids that become filled with sunlight. When the water recedes, the light filled spaces between the kelp disappear and the image transforms into a dark heaving mass of seaweed. The beauty of a beachcape has the capacity to stimulate human emotion by its capacity to define the uniformity of swell lines in the ocean; sunlight filtering through seawater; waves fragmenting into whitewater; wind forced migration of white caps, floating clouds in the sky and so on. All these things represent the power of beauty in their own specific environment which provokes a positive effect on human emotion. Although, in some instances our observations of something beautiful in a coastal environment can also have a negative influence on the mind, because it is a place where beauty and fear are bound together.

Kathryn Burns in her thesis *This other Eden; Exploring a sense of place in twentieth century reconstructions of Australian childhoods*, examines the beach as a site of childhood experience with its good and negative aspects. Burns describes the beach as “a world that is beautiful but not perfect, where death is acknowledged a part of the scheme of life” (Burns, 2007; 28). Her sentiments not only reinforce the dual character of the beach representing positive experiences, but also as a site which is interwoven with life threatening ones. Her ideas allude to the imperfect nature of the beach producing an environment which can draw the spectator into lapses of judgement. Ronald Hepburn (1993) in *Landscape*...
Natural Beauty and the Arts also considers ‘Beauty’ as rewarding experience for the spectator which invokes a wide “range of emotional qualities” without necessarily being pleasurable or lovable, or suggestive of some ideal” (66). Hepburn is inferring that interpreting visual representations of beauty are far more complex than our initial observations which induce pleasure and that it has the power to disappoint the mind.

Philip Shaw (2006) analyses Burke’s distinctions between beauty and the sublime and states that beauty is comparable to the sublime in as far as they both adopt power as a form of a fraudulent and ambiguous mannerism (61). This suggests that the power of beauty in a coastal landscape should be confronted with caution and even viewed with suspicion; rather than thoughtless admiration. Elaine Scarry (1999) on the other hand discusses early notions of beauty and explains that descriptions of beauty from a historical perspective, suggest that it is the spectator who is endangered when overwhelmed by an object or scene that is recognised as beautiful (73). Shaw (2006) expands on the notion that the observer is fully aware of a sublime threat of nature but is easily deceived by beauty. He explains that “although the sublime inspires us with fear of death, the beautiful leads us towards death without our awareness” (61). This is interpreted as the power of beauty in the seascape has the capacity to place a person in danger whether we are attentive or not; mainly caused by the sea’s capability to distract us through its influence of drawing pleasure. Scarry (1999) elaborates by explaining that beauty not only distracts our thoughts but rather attracts attention in a positive sense and states; “It is though beautiful things have been placed here and there throughout the world to serve us as small wake up calls to perception, spurring lapsed alertness back to its most acute level” (81). Scarry (1999) also defines a beautiful object or scene which causes the spectator to forget their conscience thoughts and guides them into a form of momentary dream state (29). The day dream in Scarry’s (1999) words is described as “suspend all thought” and it is in these moments of vulnerability we develop a personal capacity for creating mistakes (31).
The spectators’ inability to recognise endangerment in a beautiful seascape is mainly caused by their inexperience of a coastal landscape and their lack of attention. This notion begets one of the golden rules of survival at an ocean beach and that is to be vigilant and never turn your back on the sea. There are rules of survival which should be adhered to, such as familiarising yourself with beach conditions and reading any available signage before entering the water because a lapse in observation may result in an unexpected death. There is another rule which governs all the others and that is respecting the inherent power of the ocean environment. This is because power is present in all things beautiful at the beach whether witnessed as a benign scenic image or as a sublime manifestation of nature. The sea has the potential to tempt the spectator into activities which are either beyond their experience, or they are unable to read the signifiers of danger that are present within its image. The spectator is therefore drawn into making mistakes caused by images of deception, or human mis-judgement. Scarry (1999) explains; “The experience of ‘being in error’ so inevitable accompanies the perception of beauty that it begins to be seen one of its abiding structural features” (28). As I have explained beforehand human error when confronted by beauty is caused by a number of factors, such as, a lack of awareness, distraction, inexperience and in most instances the unfamiliar. The spectator who is prepared to take risks in an unfamiliar beach environment is liable to make mistakes and experience any number of life threatening events. This is because the beach is a dynamic environment where errors are not always recognisable by the observer, which either leads to a painful experience or death caused by erroneous judgements. A person’s misjudgment can be influenced by a beautiful scene that portrays an image of safety, but is loaded with deception. A beautiful zone of water can create a surface illusion which deceives the spectator’s senses and perceptions; seducing inexperienced visitors into believing calm water is safe and broken water is dangerous.

Bill Viola in his lecture *The movement in the moving image* (2009) not only discusses the issue of a beautiful image of water having the potential for deception, but demonstrates that the act of deception in his video *Fire Women* (2005) could easily be misread by the spectator and lead them into error. In his lecture he describes a scene in *Fire Woman* where a woman is standing in front of an inferno. It wasn’t until she dived into a pool of water in front of the inferno and disrupted the water surface that the viewer realises the camera was videoing a reflected image. “The image of an image disturbing self reflection” (Viola, 2011; 1). He reinforces this deception; “Things are not what they seem”. He further adds, “do not forget this, it could be the difference between your life and death one day” (1). Batchelor also discusses the potential for false images materialising in art and nature and states; “How things appear is one thing; how things appear to appear is another” (Batchelor, 2000; 54). This is an example of human perception challenged by the inherent qualities of shifting surface and changes in colour, because “colour is a double illusion, a double deception” (Batchelor, 2000; 54). In understanding colour’s contribution to a painting and nature, one must realise that colour is a “superficial” element, as the viewing quality of a painting or the landscape is not necessarily diminished by the absence of colour. In other words, Batchelor alludes to surface and colour as being interactive ingredients that present as a disguise, changing the viewer’s awareness of what they are really seeing. At the beach the power of beauty is present in all the things you are looking at; the rocks, the water, the sand, and yet are not always what they appear to be. The viewer is never entirely sure of what they are seeing. Your perception of the beach doesn’t always reveal its hidden secrets to the viewer until it is too late. Images lie and don’t always tell the truth. A person’s safety may be threatened by beautiful images in nature that depict surface beauty as a visual truth; but as with all objects of beauty, its image can be deceiving. Interpretation of an image is governed by our perception; if we
believe the object we are viewing is real then our visual interpretation remains the same. Thus surface beauty becomes an agent for concealment; hiding an object’s (landscape) true identity. In another way, the seascape shares similar sequences of concealment; waves break and white water obscures the surface of water and sand. These processes of power concealed in beauty represent false images. This means our vulnerability to representations of beauty can over ride aesthetic judgement and push us towards the threat of danger and the experience of terror within the landscape of the beach.

In this chapter, I ascertain that a beautiful landscape has the power to deceive the human mind and lead people into mistakes, and in this sense representations of beauty are erroneous. This is because a beautiful beachscape is governed by nature and therefore is subject to the many facets of its incarnation, such as malevolent beauty, seductive beauty, objects of beauty and its ability to falsely represent images of beauty. In other words, the observer at the beach should be vigilant and not be distracted or seduced by these beautiful manifestations; otherwise they will find themselves consumed by a landscape that is occupied with resident terrors.
Chapter 4, Landscape and Terror

In this chapter, I expand the discussion by exploring terror experienced in the coastal landscape of South Western Australia. The kind of terror I am investigating is directly linked to patterns of human recreation being disturbed by violent actions of nature within the landscape of the beach. In this context, I discuss two variations of terror in the natural environment; the first being the terror of landscape itself, such as an erupting volcano, a mountain avalanche or a tsunami. It is with this notion of an active landscape that I include fragile and eroded coastal morphology which over time succumbs to the forces of nature and collapse into the sea. The second variation of terror is the shark attack which injures or kills a person recreating at the beach. Shark attacks are a direct assault on Australian beach culture and represents a symbolic image of terror which transforms public perception of the beach from being thought of as a pleasant recreational site into a seascape which incubates terror.

Terror in the landscape has as much relevance now as when European artists of the seventeenth and eighteenth century depicted terror in their landscape paintings. These artists portrayed the landscape as sites of terror in waiting for the unsuspecting traveller and reinterpreted the landscape as places of abjection and hostility. Artist Salvator Rosa provides evidence that the landscapes he translated in paint were pictorial warnings for the adventurer to be vigilant against the potential dangers manifest in nature. Rosa’s view of the landscape demonstrates a wide range of natural phenomena that have threatening and terrifying consequences which is both unmanageable and uncivilized. His concept of landscape in his paintings portray a kind of earthly purgatory where
people are obliged to suffer for their sins before they can move on to the afterlife.

It is within the context of ‘landscape and terror’ that I begin with Romantic notions of terror depicted in the landscape paintings of Salvator Rosa, Nicolas Poussin, and John Copley in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and endeavour to connect the concept of terror in art from these periods to events of coastal terror experienced in the Southwest region of Western Australia from 1996 to 2013. In addition, my evaluation of their paintings and Steven Spielberg’s film *Jaws*, reveal that when tranquil scenes of beauty are corrupted by terror, they create a sense of human catastrophe which change our historical perceptions of landscape forever.

The word “terror” is derived from the “Latin *terrere* for frighten” (Worrell, 2013; 2). Mark Worrell in *Terror* (2013) suggests that historical denotations of terror can be interpreted “through time” (5) and alludes to historical periods influencing our understanding of terror such as the French Revolution and the terrorist attack on the twin towers (5). For example Worrell (2013) explains that ‘The Terror’ or the ‘Reign of Terror’ (5) refer to phases of the French Revolution which has been considered politically and socially, “a progressive event even though tens of thousands died under the guillotine” (6). In other words terror caused by the French Revolution was historically considered as a good outcome which changed peoples lives for the better. If I were to appropriate the description “Reign of Terror” it could easily describe the period from 2010 to 2013 when several people lost their lives to sharks along the Western Australian coast.
Claire Freeman in *The Awakening* (2010) analyses representations of terror in the seascape and suggests that the ocean has the immensity to generate terror through its source of power, magnitude and fluidity. She highlights the danger seawater presents to people who haven’t had any previous knowledge of water immersion and states that our initial attempts at swimming provides us with a clear understanding that the sea can be deadly (14). This means the balance of life and death within the landscape of the beach is dependent on a person’s ability to negotiate an alien environment that has no breathable air.

A basic requirement for people to survive an encounter with seawater is to float and remain water tight or otherwise they will drown. The terror caused by inhaling a lung full of seawater is kindred to swallowing a mouthful of poison; life expectancy becomes limited to approximately four minutes. The experience of drowning is far more common than death from shark bite, but the impact of shark terror on the human psyche is far greater because a fatal shark attack will alter our perception of a beach site and corrupt a coastline’s reputation. Juliet Eilperin acknowledges the dangers of human interaction with the beachscape, where people should develop an awareness of its terrifying consequences and explains that; “Every wild ecosystem operates on a cycle of life and death, and it’s naive to assume that one can enter it without, on occasion, falling prey to those forces” (Eilperin, 2011; 196).

Susan Cokal writes about two variations of terror, in her discussion of Patrick Suskind’s novel *Perfume*, where terror is something that appears normal but also represents some form of abnormality. In other words, terror is present and visible but not clearly defined. Cokal writes; “both experiences feed on fear: in one case the fear of something half recognised and not quite right, and in the other the overwhelming terror of an encounter with an awesome power” (Cokal, 2010; 187). Cokal’s second variation of terror could be interpreted as a confrontation with an overwhelming force that is associated with a number of manifestations.

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10 After several deaths by shark bite in Western Australia over a period of three years, Western Australian beaches have developed a reputation nationally and internationally of having significant occurrences of coastal terror.
within nature, such as a storm or the unexpected threat from king waves. Her first variation of horror is a little more complex because it is based on the appearance and assumption of something which is ordinary but at the same time it exhibits tell tale signs of irregularity which alerts the human sense of fear. This type of fear is generated by recognition that something is not quite right. The nearest example within the landscape of the beach, are underwater shadows which make people fearful because undefined objects could represent something with sinister intentions.

Richard Butts in *The analogical mere: Landscape and Terror in Beowulf* discusses the volatility of a landscape influencing the human consciousness by igniting a kind of mental apprehension before there is time to decipher any form of rational explanation. Butts (2008) explains that:

> When the mind is turned inward to focus on, a psychological mood as an object of knowledge, the mind must perceive it more intimately and less through the medium of sense; the process is more intuitive than it is empirical (114).

Butts (2008) also adds that a person’s experience of terror originates from within forms which are educated portrayals and the subconscious workings of the mind (117) and reinforces the notion that the duality of terror which occurs in the seascape is not only connected to the actual event of terror, but its aftermath the corpse, the grieving, and the hysteria (117). A shark fatality is a distressing event, because the terror it invokes infects our beach culture and encourages people to stay away. Edmund Burke in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (1990), refers to a person’s emotional state when confronted by danger: the threat of danger making the source of terror even more powerful. He also describes human perception of dangerous animals as; “objects of terror” (Burke, 1990; 53). The most dominant body of terror in the coastal landscape is the shark. In comparison to humans, the shark is far superior in all facets of their physical composition; based on size, speed and ferocity and above all their ability to kill and injure their prey. The shark’s presence in the oceanic environment creates implications for people who
venture into seawater, as they might become a random food source for predation:
In turn the concept of beach becomes a little more terrifying.

The first variation of terror in landscape - falling

According to historian Simon Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, the artist Salvator Rosa painted isolated landscapes as dark and inhospitable places and emphasised the harshness of nature. He describes Rosa’s work as a “brutal, rocky wildernesses” (Schama, 1995; 456). Rosa’s paintings are also based on the reality that the landscape was an enigmatic wilderness, which was desolate, often concealing pitfalls and unexpected dangers. Schama (1995) also explains that Rosa’s paintings were romanticised interpretations of the landscape influenced by the harsh terrain he experienced in childhood and the poor company he kept in the mountains. He also stated that Rosa was accustomed to the public life of the city but chose to seek out the solitude of the wilderness (456), which provided a fertile environment for Rosa to imagine a terrifying and hostile narrative within his romantic landscape paintings. This suggests that his emotional responses derived from viewing his native landscape ranged from the euphoria of viewing a cascading waterfall to imagined terror inspired by the possibility of falling from the highest mountain peaks. The darkness portrayed in Rosa’s paintings were not always reliant on the deformed and rugged nature of the trees, the imposing presence of the terrain or even the threat from human kind preying on unwary travelers. His paintings represented apocalyptic wildernesses, which also included the terror from predatory beasts which occupy it. Rosa’s painting *Prometheus* (1635) depicts a dead and broken Prometheus on a coastal cliff ledge, demonstrating that the effect of gravity on the human body when we fall has a lethal outcome when we are bought back to earth. Richard Wallace analyses Rosa’s painting *Prometheus* as a sublime portrayal that depicts human catastrophe and provides the viewer with a sense of hopelessness (Wallace, 1979; 5). Rosa presents nature as a predator, a menacing black eagle tearing out Prometheus’s intestines as his body contorts in death after his fall. His painting demonstrates that nature is wild and unforgiving and will take
advantage of any form of human vulnerability. In addition, Arnold Berleant (1993) refers to the human presence in nature as one of “assimilation” (236) rather than remaining a separate entity. This suggests that the moment people venture onto the natural environment they are absorbed into the surrounds of nature and have to adapt to survive its uncultured state. In this sense, a person’s integration into the landscape reverts them towards a primeval state where they are subject to the same basic laws of nature of any animal; the survival of the fittest.

The terror of people falling in landscape is a reoccurring concept illustrated as myth in Salvator Rosa’s drawing *Empedocles Throwing Himself into Mount Etna*. Schama (1995) discusses the terrifying idea of falling in the landscape by stating that in Rosa’s latter years he was “brilliant and influential in promoting the cult of agreeable terror” (456). Rosa’s drawing illustrates a delusional Empedocles throwing himself into a volcano in an attempt to not only defy immortality, but to give himself a god like status. Rosa’s depiction of Empedocles in downward flight influenced other artists to paint falling people in a similar style. In exactly the same manner later generations of Alpine illustrators would represent the unfortunate victims of falls (456).

Terror of landscape itself exists within the actual morphology of most southwest beaches. It is evident to the observer that cliff faces at a number of beach sites visually demonstrate sections of the coastline which have fallen over time and still represent a potential threat to human life. The region’s coastline has significant limestone formations, which are fragile and dangerous for people to stand near or under eroded overhangs. The limestone cliff at Huzza’s Beach could be considered the most dangerous landscape in Western Australia, due to the cliff collapsing and killing nine people during an interschool surfing carnival in 1996. Author Sue - Lynn Adrian - Moyle (2014) writes about the disaster; alluding to the aftermath of the tragedy by inferring that the

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11 Huzzas is a surfing terminology or slang, most surfing beaches in the Cape to Cape Region were discovered and named by surfers from the 1960s onwards and have become permanent beach site titles along the Southwest coast.
disaster still imposes a dark pall over the small coastal community (153). The cliff collapse also changed how people viewed coastal landscapes in Western Australia. Sites with limestone overhangs and caves were immediately considered dangerous to the public and were sign posted to that effect. Furthermore, geologists were employed to survey cliffs at popular southwest beaches and, if found unsafe, the overhangs were collapsed creating a systematic alteration to the coastal landscape. My former perceptions of inactive coastal morphology were altered to the point that I regularly view the steep rock formations behind the beach with suspicion. Before the tragedy, the safety of the beach was paramount. I always assumed danger in the seascape came from sea and not the fragile landscape behind the beach. The cliff fall and loss of life changed my belief systems, making the landscape a potential threat and placing it in the same category of other dangers at the beach; violent shark attacks, drownings and king waves.

*I remember the limestone overhang at Huzza’s Beach, it was big enough for several people to shelter under from the wind and rain, when cold southerly winds were at their worst. The overhang gave the spectator a wonderful view of Huzza’s surf break, but you had to walk down to the beach from the car park and negotiate the slippery granite rocks for a few hundred metres before you arrived at its sanctuary. I always had an uneasy feeling about the overhang and rarely ventured under it and my wife wouldn’t allow my children to play near it, because of the shifting surface of the cliff face. One theory put forward by local geologists was that the winter of 1996 was a particularly wet season and the porous limestone cliffs became saturated with water weakening its integrity, causing the cliff to collapse. The fall happened on a Friday afternoon. Mobile phones and the internet were in their infancy, so the sad news of the disaster took a few hours to spread through the community. I will never forget the sad memorial services performed one day after the other. Nearly everyone in the Margaret River and Cowaramup communities were connected in some way, whether it was through family, friends, the schools or through the surfing*
fraternity. One of the services was performed as a “memorial paddle out at Gracetown” at Huzza’s surf break. Surfers formed two symbolic rings by holding hands; the inner ring composed of family from the deceased as up to five thousand people looked on from the beach. I have never forgotten the powerful experience of sitting on my surfboard holding hands in a giant circle with other surfers and participating in collective cheering which echoed off the cliffs. It wasn’t until I paddled out to form the memorial circle that I looked back at the fallen landscape for the first time with dread, an image which has left a permanent scar on the landscape and in my mind (Wise, Journal, 2012).

Falling as an aspect of terror within the seascape is further explored in my video The falling sea (2014), which records giant waves transforming into white water after colliding with vertical stone morphology. The standing stone which dominates the seascape has a symbolic presence which punctures the horizon as a dark protruding disturbance, but it also creates a visual link between the natural systems of land, sea and sky. These elements are not the only ideas which inform this work. I also consider the rising and falling waves and their production of white energy which can physically and mentally assault the mind. Rob Brander in Dr. Rip’s Essential Beach Book describes white water as energy being released from a breaking wave. He explains that the peak of a wave will begin to curve and cause “wave refraction” whenever it strikes a shallow submarine surface. (Brander, 2010; 60).
The concept of white and all its associations and meanings have impacted my understanding of the beach. The existence of whiteness within the beachescape is represented in waves transcending from one medium to another to create white water. White phenomena which occur in the oceanic environment have a number of meanings, for example the fear of white water and its potential to suffocate, camouflage or conceal. Whiteness also belongs to a host of other whites that are considered pure, clean and innocent but also have negative connotations such as wind blown white caps, great white sharks, white whales, and white clouds of sea mist. In *The falling sea* (2014) the whiteness of fragmenting waves signifies their ability to override the symbolic power of the black stones, as illustrated in my video when the dark vertical stones are shrouded by white water. Furthermore the black monolith is exposed to a process that abdicates power to whiteness and in so doing a ghostly narrative is created.

David Batchelor in *Chromophobia* (2000), examines the mythology of white and explains “white as a myth, as an aesthetic fantasy, a fantasy so strong that it summons up negative hallucinations, so intense that it produces a blindness to colour, even when colour is literally in front of your face” (Batchelor, 2000; 47). There is little evidence of colour in my video *The falling sea* (2014), to reflect how the storm generated white water that had the capacity to erase and conceal
most visual clues within the landscape of the beach. The ability of white water to camouflage objects of colour in the oceanic environment could be understood in a similar context to how an artist can conceal colour by applying layers of white paint.

Herman Melville in *Moby Dick* (1851) examines the concept of white in the oceanic environment and describes the human fear of whiteness in animals such as the white whale. Melville explains that this kind of anxiety is generated by the fear of the albino and its difference (184). The whiteness of Melville’s whale meant its appearance signified supernatural powers that inspired terror because it was beyond human comprehension. The white whale and the great white shark share a commonality, which invoke ideas that these animals have derived invincible powers from the spirit world. Melville also explains that the seemingly peaceful hue of white and -

> all these accumulated associations, with whatever is sweet, and honorable, and sublime, there yet lurks an elusive something in the innermost idea of this hue, which strikes more of panic to the soul than that redness which affrights in blood (182).

Nineteenth century seafarers were always vigilant to the appearance of white luminescence on the horizon, which signified potential danger and the realisation that their ship was approaching a coastline (186). The mariner’s fear of white breakers and whiteness that naturally occurs in the ocean, also stems from their superstitions surrounding the afterlife. Melville provides an example of their fear of white phenomena manifesting in the ocean -

> let him be called from his hammock to view his ship sailing through a midnight sea of milky whiteness-as if from encircling headlands shoals of combined white bears were swimming round him, then he feels a silent, superstitious dread; the shrouded phantom of the whitened waters is horrible to him as a real ghost (Melville, 1851; 186).
My investigation into white phenomena as a result of giant falling waves has revealed that occurrences of whiteness within the beachscape often inspire imaginary narratives which can cause anxiety and fear. Although the experience of whiteness is not just restricted to white water, the glare of white light from a white sandy surface has a blinding affect on our vision. The white shimmer from sunlight reflecting off the ocean not indicates a particular time of day but it also creates a pathway of light towards the horizon line. Such instances highlight how white phenomena occurring in the landscape of the beach has the capacity to influence how a spectator perceives the seascape itself, and potentially, the terror embedded in its whiteness.

**The second variation of terror in landscape - predation**

It is in the same parameters of landscape and terror I investigate the predatory threat from animals. Two paintings, one from the seventeenth century and another from the eighteen century, demonstrate the terror of animal predation in the environment. Nicolas Poussin’s painting, *Landscape with Cadmus and the Snake* (1648) and John Copley’s painting *Watson and the Shark* (1788) both depict terror in the landscape even though they are separated by well over a hundred years and work within different styles of painting.

Poussin, an early developer of landscape painting, created artworks in the style of the French Baroque movement. He lived in Rome for most of his life and came under the influence of Greek and Roman classical art. Timothy Clark (2006) in *The Sight of Death* describes Poussin’s earlier work as a style depicting classical composition and incorporating several zones of distinction (28). He portrays a tranquil scene of beauty, corrupted by the grotesque image of a giant snake wrapping around a limp white corpse, which is highlighted in the foreground of his painting. Poussin paints the characters in his painting as people who are involved in the every day activities of the seventeenth century; washing clothes, fishing and walking along the stream, until a manifestation of terror intrudes as a deadly snake. Clark (2006) alludes to human interaction with nature in his discussion of Poussin’s painting *Landscape with Cadmus and the Snake*.
and states; “most of Poussin’s landscapes and many of his mythologies - are about the human world in relation to the animal one” (46). Poussin developed his idea for his painting after traveling through the town of Fondi (near Rome) whose inhabitants were under the influence of a menacing plague of snakes that had left the local wetlands (46). Poussin’s painting exposes that the conjunction of landscape and terror can exist close to a domestic or urban environment but also reveals human vulnerability to not only predatory animals in a landscape but to the terror these animals generate.

In the following century Copley worked within the guidelines of the Romantic art movement of the eighteenth century and dramatised the story of a young Brooke Watson who was attacked by a shark. Copley illustrates a gothic monster rising from the deep, intent on destroying the symbolic white innocence of youth. The different approach used by Copley, provides a romanticised depiction of heroic proportions derived from an embellished narrative from Brook Watson himself. Watson’s story was published by the London Newspaper at the same time the painting was being exhibited in London in 1788.

The image John Singleton Copley, *Watson and the Shark*, (1788) oil painting can instead be accessed via www.mfa.org/collections/object/watson-and-the-shark-30998

Dean Crawford in *Shark* writes that Watson, “spares its readers none of the gory details - rather it thrills them” (Crawford, 2010; 92) and describes Watson’s ordeal in the sea while swimming in Havana Bay. In Copley’s painting the figures symbolically dominate the seascape and could be likened to actors playing out a scene from a historical action movie. Copley’s unrealistic study of the shark adds to its grotesque appearance. Crawford remarks on Copley’s depiction of the shark as “one of the least anatomically accurate sharks in
art” (92) thus making the image of the shark\textsuperscript{12} an imaginative and humanised monstrosity. His misinterpretation of the shark enhances it as a powerful image of terror attempting to devour human prey.

I stated previously that manifestations of terror in the landscape provoke a powerful influence on the human mind, thus making terror an experience of abjection. In other words, abjection has connotations which can be associated with evil intent, harm and a disassociation with what is good. Aspects of terror within the landscape become a negative and painful experience. Again, I refer to Poussin’s painting \textit{Landscape with Cadmus and the Snake} (1648) and discover the depiction of a dead person is far more abject than Copley’s larger than life Watson. A very much alive Watson challenges the viewer to his fate, but a lifeless corpse engages feelings of rejection.

Julia Kristeva in \textit{Powers of Horror} (1982) confirms this notion and explains; “yet it is the human corpse that occasions the greatest concentration of abjection and fascination” (149). The image of a dead person is no different to artist Damien Hirst’s shark installation, \textit{The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living} (1991), it is an inanimate object that has lost all movement and brain function and is reduced to decaying flesh. Nevertheless, the power of Hirst’s 4.3 metre tiger shark suspended in formaldehyde solution, symbolically represents an animal which is considered a terrifying maneater; as such Hirst’s artwork becomes an object of abjection. Winslow Homer’s painting \textit{The Gulf Stream} (1899) represents a more realistic view of sharks occupying the seascape, although the sharks in the foreground of his painting exhibit unnatural behaviour and little purpose as they move aimlessly on the surface. Homer illustrates a large shark in wait for the demise of its human prey with its jaw wide open exposing its teeth, demonstrating that the shark is a wild and

\textsuperscript{12} The shark was originally described by nineteenth century whalers as a dog fish because of the hundreds of sharks which followed whaling ships and fed off discarded whale offal thrown overboard. Crawford explains that; “the sailors had reason to resent them as they worked to butcher the whales from small boats or stood on top of the slippery carcasses with the sharks feeding below. If a whale carcass was left for a day undefended, sharks were capable of stripping it to the bones beneath the waterline” (Crawford, 2010, 72).
The image Winslow Homer *The Gulf Stream* (1899) oil painting can instead be accessed via [www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11122](http://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/11122)

dangerous animal in the ocean environment. Homer also symbolically represents the Negro sailor as someone who has achieved his own freedom but is still enslaved by the forces of nature and the wild animals which surround him. Robert Hughes (1977) in *American Visions* points out that Homer alludes to a notion of despair in a hostile environment (314). Hughes expands on his thoughts on human catastrophe in the seascape and says that Homer’s ideas and composition was influenced by “separate elements of real life” and art history that includes Turner’s *Slave Ship* and Gericault’s *Raft of the Medusa*; “images of total pessimism” (314).

The effect of terror portrayed in popular culture was highlighted in the later part of the twentieth century when American cinema produced the terrifying image of a monstrous shark in the film *Jaws*, which impacted on a whole generation of recreational beach users world wide. In terms of cinematic imagery, the film *Jaws* depicts a great white shark rising from the deep to devour a female swimmer and is one of the most provocative images of horror created for popular culture. Terror in popular culture has been exploited to the point that people now interpret it as pure entertainment. This is problematic because a person’s emotional response to horror in the safe confines of the cinema is far different to someone having a terrifying experience in nature. Philip Nickel in *Horror and the idea of Everyday Life - On Skeptical Threats in Psycho and the Birds* (2010), suggests people are attracted to the horror in cinema because fear generated in a safe environment creates excitement. He also explains that “elements of horror such as dread and the sense of the uncanny add something to the artistry and interest of *Macbeth* for example” (15). Philip Tallon notes that the aesthetic experience of horror causes the human body to become reactive to external assaults on our senses and that it is far more shocking if it is an occurrence that is foreign to common understanding (Tallon, 2010; 184). This suggests that the
familiar represents a friendly person, place, or object that we feel comfortable with, until some averse change in the pattern of things alerts our senses to an act of terror.

In the previous chapter I explained how the ocean’s surface acts as an agent of concealment for the spectator on the beach. The opposite occurs when people are recreating on the surface of the ocean, because overhead sunlight visually exposes the human body as a dark graphic image to anything which is lurking unseen below the surface. Juliet Eilperin in *Demon Fish* (2011) states “sharks power over us has always stemmed from the fact that they are largely unseen. They can strike at any time and disappear just as easily as they arrive at the surface” (Eilperin, 2011; xx). Michael Bright (2002) in *Sharks* discusses why sharks attack humans: “The motivation for an unprovoked shark attack is not always clear, but often as not the aggressor appears to have made a tragic error - the attack has been a simple case of mistaken identity” (97). The concept of a horrifying attack on the familiar is exploited in Peter Benchley’s book *Jaws*, including Steven Spielberg’s film which was adapted from the book. Both Benchley and Spielberg play on human vulnerability, by penetrating the human psyche and exposing us to our primeval fear of being devoured by a wild animal even though the most frightening scenes in the film were created by the implied violence\(^\text{13}\) of the shark and the ominous soundtrack. Juliet Eilperin in *Demon Fish* explains why people suffer from shark terror, whether they come in contact with sharks or not, is because they aware of the life threatening injuries a shark can cause. She states that, “sometimes a shark can deliver a devastating blow by severing an artery, while other times it may inflict a manageable flesh wound” (Eilperin, 211; 51). The representation of the shark also queries one species capability to overpower the other for the sole purpose of consumption. David Quammen in *Monsters of God* (2004) relates one species of animal consuming another as a form of cannibalism and adds to this notion by inferring

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\(^{13}\) Spielberg was forced into creating scenes of implied terror due to ongoing technical problems with his mechanical shark.
that people would rather die first and be eaten, than be eaten whilst we are still living (132).

The reality of shark terror manifesting in a beach environment is not only due to the shark’s presence but rather it has just as much to do with our perceptions of their highly efficient teeth. Their razor sharp teeth represent implements of terror which can swiftly threaten our mortality. Vivian Westbrook (2013) in her lecture *The Wrong Kind of Excitement*: Vivienne Westbrook on the Shark as Art, argues she would like the representation of the shark defined between two categories “real sharks and the cultural shark”; the first meaning denoting environmental significance and the other sensationally depicted in art, news media, you tube, and television which all provide a negative response. These two different notions of shark would encourage a change in perception and foster environmental accountability (Burnett, 2013; 3). Westbrook provides a sound argument in trying to change the public perception of the shark; from the terrifying monster which lurks at all our favorite beaches, to the environmentally endangered animal which facilitates a balanced eco system. Nevertheless, her ideas compete with the disturbing and sensationalised image of Greg Pickering’s disfigured face appearing on the front page of the *West Australian* newspaper. Pickering had the horrifying experience of a great white shark locking its jaws over his head and shoulders while abalone diving on the South coast of Western Australia in 2013. The teeth of the great white shark sliced the soft flesh of his face and ground across the bone of his skull. Pickering’s ordeal was an extraordinary act of survival, but the image of his horrific injuries presents powerful visual evidence that terror exists within the landscape of the beach.

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14 Benjamin Marcus in his book *Extreme Surf* elaborates on human shark fear and states: The Great Mr. White is the stuff of nightmares, the monster under the bed, the ghost in the closet. A ton of trouble. A mini-submarine with teeth. You have a better chance of being hit by lightning but still the spectre of shark attack is on the minds of every surfer who enters salt water (Marcus, 2011; 73).
Author Robert Drewe in *The Shark Net* (2000) writes a fictionalised account about the concealed presence of sharks in the coastal landscape and their effect on the human psyche; bemoaning the lack of visual evidence at Perth’s suburban beaches. Drewe writes; “All this coastal experience and I’d never seen a man-eating shark in its natural habitat” (Drewe, 2000; 299). He questions why the thought of sharks enters his mind every time he goes swimming at the beach and wonders whether shark sightings consistently being reported in news media created the “underlying anxiety of my life” (299). Drewe (2000) arrives at the conclusion that sharks are a subliminal part of his entire mind and tries to erase them from his thoughts (300). As the shark operates in the shadows of the sea, people visiting the beach rarely have a visual encounter but this doesn’t mean they escape the terror of the shark. In the following descriptions I provide three personal experiences of shark so that I can shed further light on the shark’s influence on a person’s psyche. The experiences are all quite distinct. The first description involves the terror of coming face to face with a giant tiger shark and having no opportunity for escape. The second was my emotional response to viewing Damien Hirst’s *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, a couple of months after a series of shark related deaths at Margaret River beaches. Thirdly, I describe the collective fear of a group of surfers who evacuated the water at Redgate Beach after a five metre Great White Shark cruised past their position in the surf.

(1) *When I was a young man I shared the experience of terror and extreme panic with a group of surfers while surfing an outside reef off Lancelin Beach. The seawater was smooth and translucent with infrequent breaking waves. It was during a lull between waves when I observed an extremely large shark beneath the surface of the water swimming towards the group. Within moments of the warning the playful atmosphere changed to terrifying moments of group panic. We all knew we were isolated from safety being a kilometer off shore, with the safety of the beach not in the equation. The collective experience of terror resulted in surfers instinctively clustering their surfboards together to form an*
island, and on this surfboard island panic ensued with people climbing over each other until the shark had passed. Most of the surfers paddled back to shore as a group, fearing if they didn’t, the giant shark would pick them off one by one.

(2) I had the opportunity to view Damian Hirst’s retrospective in the Tate Gallery London in 2012 and made a beeline for his famous shark installation, The Physical Impossibility of Death in Mind of Someone Living (1991). Coming face to face with a preserved fourteen foot tiger shark unnerved me because I had just left Western Australia which was under a cloud of shark hysteria, where a number of Great White Shark fatalities were on the rise. At first I viewed the shark from a distance until I felt comfortable enough to examine the installation closely. I was probably Damien Hirst’s ideal viewer, somebody who had travelled from a coastal region that was under siege from shark fear and found viewing his installation a challenge on a number of levels. First, I had to get over my preconceived dread of sharks whether they are dead or alive. Furthermore Hirst’s Tiger Shark bought back the memory of sheer terror from a previous experience and after a while all I saw was a dead carcass and felt regret for a once powerful animal slowly decaying in formaldehyde.

(3) On one particular visit to Redgate Beach shark fear penetrated my psyche without any form of visual contact after I had listened to people talking about their own shark fear. Surfers were standing around in their wetsuits relieved to be out of the water because of a large shark sighting. A ranger informed me of the beach closure due to a five metre great white shark seen swimming along the surf line, which caused a rapid evacuation of the surf. The atmosphere at the beach was tense, everyone was fearful and frustrated as they watched perfect surfing waves peel down the beach with no-one on them. During this period
shark fear in the surfing community was at an all time high; deaths from shark bite along the Western Australian coast was unprecedented, causing many surfers to experience feelings of dread and anxiety whenever they entered the water.

The tragic aftermath of terror in the coastal landscape

In the Margaret River Region events of terror have mainly occurred near or in Cowaramup Bay Gracetown. The first act of terror in this coastal landscape was the cliff collapse at Huzza’s Beach which caused significant loss of life and left a legacy where coastal cliffs and caves are now viewed with suspicion. The other acts of terror involved surfers who died from a shark bite illustrating that terror generated by wild animals is still a vivid reality in the twenty-first century landscape. After the last shark death in the Margaret River region, I overheard a surfer comment that he viewed the coastline differently now and that it had become more arrogant. The term “arrogance” is usually connected with a person’s personality trait and not associated with landscape. I can only assume the author’s words was based on his sense of loss, not only of a life, but his former perception of a coastal Eden.

Episodes of terror at Australian beaches have become more prevalent in the twenty-first century and the tragic aftermath of terror was highlighted in the recent television SBS program Insight (2015), which featured, Shark! The Lennox Head and Ballina Victims and Witness Story. The program examined the traumas experienced by people who live on the Northern New South Wales

15 Trevor Paddenburg, Fleur Bainger, Kara Vickery wrote in The Sunday Times newspaper under the heading Terror Stalks and said; “For the third time in the past decade the close-knit community of Gracetown, about 270 km south of Perth has been left reeling from the shock of a fatal shark attack” (Paddenburg, Bainger, Vickery, 2013; 4). Also on the next page The Sunday Times published a death list from fatal shark attacks in Western Australia between 2000 and 2013 came to number eleven. However in the four years between 2010 and 2013 seven deaths occurred.

16 The history of the Gracetown landscape is littered with human tragedy. Since the Gracetown cliff collapse in 1996 three people have been killed by sharks, a person drowned and another suffered permanent injury. The local indigenous people (Wardandi) speak about their oral history, which refers to the Gracetown site as a place which was cursed by their ancestors after white settlers killed a group of their people close to the town site.
coastline after a series of shark attacks. The story included graphic descriptions of their terrifying encounters with sharks resulting in a number of severe injuries and deaths, as well as the lingering fear of entering the water at the beach (SBS, 2015; 29-9), demonstrating that terror on Australian beaches have escalated.

(fig.15) Michael Wise *The jaws of a hungry child* (2014) video still

In my video *The jaws of a hungry child*, (2014) I analyses the potent relationship between innocence and terror. In most instances, people who have suffered from shark bite are innocent victims of the physical and terrifying trauma a shark imposes when in full attack mode. The video sequence (in constant loop) features the pointed structure of the sharks teeth composited over the sleeping child’s face. The ambiguous image of a child’ face and shark teeth creates a disturbing image of innocence and apprehension that questions symbolic connotations of terror.
In this chapter Landscape and Terror, I have exposed the beaches of the South West as a site of abjection where some Western Australians may experience some kind of terror or an untimely death whilst seeking leisure activities. I have highlighted several factors in seventeenth and eighteenth paintings which illustrate the corruptive presence of terror in the landscape. In addition, recent Australian history has exposed the shark as the most prevalent sources of terror in the coastal landscape and should be considered an essential component of our overall understanding of the beach. Manifestations of terror are not only restricted to the beach itself because once we have experienced terror it never leaves us, it occupies our memories suppressed in the recesses of our minds. These memories can be activated by a word, action or object; omnipresent yet unseen, something lurking in the shadows and only revealing itself in a dangerous form. It begs the question; does manifestations of terror within the coastal landscape effect our ongoing relationship with beach, or has it transformed our ignorance of a beautiful and wild coastline into a site of gothic imagination, making us more wary and vigilant of entering its realm? In the next chapter I will expand my discussion by examining notions of the gothic and suggest that gothic associations of gloom, inhospitable shorelines and abject threats to human mortality can be applied to the unique beauty of the Margaret River coastline.
Chapter 5, The Coastal Gothic

In this chapter, I explore notions of the coastal gothic which are derived from European maritime paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century and the gothic novel of the nineteenth century. I have included the Australian gothic and highlight its evolution in Australian art, literature and contemporary cinema. I employ the term ‘coastal gothic’ throughout this chapter to interpret the presence of coastal darkness, the uncanny and the abject threats to human mortality that counterpoint beautiful and sublime beachscapes. In addition, I expose the Great White Shark as Western Australia’s gothic monster which haunts the coastline and imposes a sense of fear and mystery to an already volatile beach environment. In particular, I examine the notion that Redgate Beach and its surrounding coastline have gothic associations which are antithetical to their unique scenic beauty.
The premise of the coastal gothic I use is based on reality and not fictionalised accounts of abject horror, occurring within the contemporary landscape of the Margaret River coastline. The difference between human imagination and nature’s reality is quite distinct, although fact and fiction share a common source and it is in this area of commonality where gothic fiction and gothic reality cross over. In fictionalised accounts, gothic horror plays on the human mind by not revealing its source until the end of the narrative; it is alluded to by a heightened sense of mystery which, “point to the realm of the supernatural” (Butts, 2008; 113). Scott and Biron (2010) explain that the dark forests of “European mythology and folklore” provide an apprehensive sense of landscape where people become disoriented and lost and expose us to the notion that these forests are inhabited by monsters (317). In addition Richard Butts suggests that when the supernatural is connected to the landscape, it evokes something that is alien to human knowledge (113). Gothic terror in the natural world, however, attacks people directly as a physically distressing confrontation, leaving a residue of terror that drifts across the landscape in ephemeral form - like a psychological pariah, a form of corruption which penetrates the human mind altering our idea of landscape.

The image Claude-Joseph Vernet, *The Shipwreck* (1772) oil painting can instead be accessed via [www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/features/.../claude-joseph-vernet-the-shipwreck.html](http://www.nga.gov/content/ngaweb/features/.../claude-joseph-vernet-the-shipwreck.html)

The coastal gothic has historical precedents in the marine paintings of the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when artists pursued risks to capture the dramatic effects of storms having an impact on the European coastline. The artists of this period developed a visual language of the coastline that was interpreted as sites of catastrophe and drama where people were subject to the perils of nature. Their paintings portrayed people suffering in wretched conditions under the influence of heavy seas, gloomy foreboding clouds and inhospitable shorelines. For example, Claude-Joseph Vernet’s eighteenth century
painting *The Shipwreck* (1772) harbors evidence of the sublime, but at the same time evokes a sense of the coastal gothic. He has illustrated the dark gothic tones of a coastal tempest, contrasted by the sublime flashes of lightning and large crashing waves on a rocky shoreline. Vernet depicts human suffering and paints a woman standing on a flat rock on the edge of the shore, appealing to a supernatural power as another woman attempts to console her. The cause of the woman’s despair is obvious: shipwrecked on an inhospitable coastline, she seeks deliverance from the hostile forces of nature. Vernet’s sublime seascape is dominated by an ominous craggy cliff, which evokes a sense of gothic architecture that dwarfs and intimidates the survivors on the beach, making them appear physically insignificant compared to the coastal wilderness. Vernet was not immune to the seduction of the sea, or using the sea as a metaphor for a beautiful death. Steven Levine writes about Vernet’s “attraction of the oceanic sublime” and his desire to be united with the sea and states: “Pleasure, joy, knowledge, and death: in French these phases resonate with the energy of a libidinous wish for self extinction in a watery embrace” (Levine, 1985; 389). It is evident in Levine’s writing that Vernet had an infatuation with the sea and he imagined his journey to the afterlife could be realised through the sublime comfort of drowning.

Here it is useful to define the differences and associations of the sublime and the gothic. Simply stated, sublime images inspire human emotion towards an elevated condition of awe and excitement. Alternatively, the gothic image imposes concepts of horror, darkness and the supernatural on the human imagination, making it a kind of depressing characterisation which challenges human comprehension. Dryden (2003) clarifies this idea and comments on early incarnations of the gothic “appealed to the emotions rather than the rational” (25), thus making a persons response to the gothic and the sublime is linked through emotion. This means, that even though the concept of the sublime and the gothic vary in meaning, they still can still work hand in hand and evoke a sense of apprehension in the spectator when confronted by revelations of the
gothic and the sublime. For instance, a sublime manifestation and a gothic image can share meanings which can inspire human emotion such as horror, a sense of mystery and awe. Natural occurrences which contains both characteristics of sublime and gothic can be interpreted as visual warning signs which provokes our imagination with impending actions of terror and death. Edmund Burke (2010) in *On the Sublime and beautiful*, explains that when we suffer emotionally from the onslaught of terror, that, in all instances it represents a principle which governs the sublime (42). As such, I argue that terror of the sublime and the horror of the gothic share a similar context and they influence the human mind in the same way; thus representing a conjunction between the two meanings.

The influence of European maritime art of the seventeenth and eighteen century was rarely considered in Australian art during this period. As I have stated previously, colonial artists were mainly preoccupied in documenting scenes of Australian settlement, its incomparable flora and fauna and the landscape of the interior. However, depictions of Australian beaches in the late nineteenth century were painted in the style of Australian impressionism, and these were antithetical to any gothic themes. Nevertheless, the uniqueness of the Australian in comparison to the European landscape required a visual and written language to comprehend its strangeness; resulting in artists and writers eventually describing the Australian landscape in the gothic tradition.

It is conceivable to assume that the coastal gothic was experienced in Australia well before Captain James Cook’s discovery of the East coast. The Dutch ship *Batavia* on route to the East Indies (now known as Indonesia) sailed off course and failed to navigate a reef off the Western Australian coastline in 1629. Hugh Edwards, in *Islands of Angry Ghosts*, (1996) explains the ships survivors not only had to adjust to a strange and alien landscape (a coral island), but were also subjected to an aftermath of unprecedented horror. This resulted in “125 men, women and children” being killed by mutineers by drowning, stabbing and having their throats cut (viii). It is also plausible that European contact with the
Western Australian coastline from 1606 onwards meant that indigenous Australians on the west coast were witnesses to gothic representations of the supernatural as white men in sailing ships.

The belief system of Indigenous Australians is an integral component of their country, unlike white European sentiments of an estranged landscape. Indigenous culture however, may be interpreted to have its own gothic denotations, for instance, the hue of white signifies the supernatural and the afterlife. In most cultures, white is a hue with a powerful significance and a wide range of meanings that provoke an emotional response. It symbolises purity and innocence but also refers to the supernatural, death, fear and ceremony. Marcia Langton in *First Australians*, (2008) mentions that Indigenous Australians who first witnessed white Europeans, originally thought they were reincarnated ancestors from the spirit world that had come back to visit them (3). They observed white sailing ships rising above the horizon line and white men disembarking on to the shore. Langton explains that the stories that were told to their children were of the coming to their homeland of white spirits. Langton further states: “One spoke of a story he had heard as a child of people who looked like ghosts coming in giant canoes with wings” (3). The association of the hue of white with the spirit world can mean there is a certain amount of fear connected with whiteness, where many cultures associate white with the gothic supernatural. The fear of whiteness and the supernatural became manifest and real for Indigenous Australians with the arrival of white people whose coming was described as: “Strange spirits are coming on the water!” (7).

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17 Herman Melville devotes an entire chapter to whiteness in his book *Moby Dick*, describing the reasons why the hue of white generated superstitious fear in people during the nineteenth century. He wrote, “hereditary experience of all mankind fail to bear witness to the supernaturalism of this hue. It cannot well be doubted, that the one visible quality in respect of the dead which most appeals the gazer, is the marbled pallor lingering there; as if indeed that pallor were as much like the badge of consternation” (Melville, 1851; 184).

18 While in post colonial and cultural studies the term ‘whiteness’ is connected with theories of race and identity politics that is not the concern of this chapter.
Linda Dryden in *The Modern Gothic and Literary Doubles* Stevenson, Wild and Wells (2003), explains that gothic meanings were originally related to literary works of imagination which were based on “history and geography” until a “new gothic mode emerged, a modern gothic whose narratives focused on the urban present” (19). It is within this sense of early and modern denotations of the gothic that I redefine southwest beaches as coastal gothic. Garry Gillard and David Thomas in *Threads of Resemblance in New Australian Gothic Cinema* (2003) state,

> In the seventeenth century the Gothic represented a primitive past. In its incarnations in the early twentieth century, the Gothic tale expresses cultural fear of a national enemy (39).

Gothic notions modify over time, develop interwoven narratives of fear that shift from one landscape to another, reincarnating in new environments. Dryden (2003) explains in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century, gothic notions shifted from the rural narrative to a modern context which considered contemporary urban culture (19). It is within the context of the urban gothic, that I connect suburban and country beaches used in the activities of coastal inhabitants. The Modern Gothic is directly linked to the familiarity of space, or for example; a frequently visited beach site where people have developed an intimate knowledge and feel safe and comfortable within their natural surroundings; such as the urban beach of Cottesloe or the popular rural beaches of the Margaret River region. Dryden (2003) explains that any frequented space, whether it is in the natural or built environment, can be interpreted as “a gothicized space” (20). Dryden also suggests that Gothic spaces whether fictionalised or real are “a place of enduring physical and emotional danger” (20) and play an active role in creating fear within a landscape.
The idea of the gothic, has been used by many authors, artists and scholars to define the Australian landscape since white settlement. Art historian Christopher Allen in *Art in Australia: From Colonization to Postmodernism* (1997) suggests that gothic connotations in Australian terms is quite distinct from the Arcadian landscapes of England and Europe. Allen describes reasons for this difference and provides an example in William Strutt’s painting *Black Thursday* (1862-64), which illustrates the “periodic disasters that are typical of the continent: a massive bushfire which destroyed many farms and homes near Melbourne” (31).

Allen refers to author, Marcus Clarke’s writing on the Australian landscape as having a “weird melancholy” (31), and explains that Clarke’s concept of the outback was derived from an early colonial view where the peculiarity of the countryside appeared “resistant to familiarisation” (31).

Art curator Suzette Wearne highlights the gothic language used in Australian art in an exhibition titled, *Weird melancholy: The Australian Gothic* at The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne (2015). In Wearne’s foreword, she describes Australia’s gothic tradition as one which associates the landscape with “alienation, violence, and a powerful, if imaginary oppressor”. She explains that this appealed to nineteenth century Australian writers who wanted “to convey their experience of the new world” (Wearne, 2015, 1). Wearne also comments that the University’s collection of early Australian landscape paintings demonstrates that artists “were not free of anxieties about the natural environment and the ghosts that haunt it” (1). Journalist Liza Powell (2015) in her article *Weird melancholy: exhibition probes fear of the heart of the Australian landscape*, also comments on Suzette Wearne’s idea that the emergence of gothic fiction in England corresponded with the colonisation and settlement of Australia. She explains that the early colonists found the landscape to be “dark and disorienting, stricken with heat, bush fires and floods” (1). In other words, the Australian bush was so estranged from the European experience, that creative observations in literature and art required a gothic discourse to communicate their perceptions of the Australian bush.
The Gothic is well represented in rural depictions of contemporary Australian cinema. The reputation of the interior as a forbidding place has plagued the Australian psyche since colonization because our survival in a wretched wilderness was deemed a marginal existence as a result of natural events such as drought, fire, famine or flood. As a result over time most Australians were persuaded to eventually cling to the coastline. There is a certain amount of irony incorporated in the apparent shift from bush to beach. Tim Winton in *Land's Edge* (1993) alludes to people in Western Australia who were defeated by a harsh wilderness of the desert are now hemmed in by an even greater wilderness: the ocean (35).

John Scott and Dean Biron in *Wolf Creek, rurality and the Australian gothic* (2010) analyse the Australian horror film *Wolf Creek*, which draws heavily on the Australian landscape to deliver its narrative of fear, reinforcing our urban belief systems of a dangerous and uncivilised outback. They explain; “The outback of *Wolf Creek* is a space of abjection - a post-productivist terrain which consumes those who venture into it” (308). These sentiments of a consuming landscape can also be directed towards the rural beaches of the Margaret River region, but there are a few points of difference. The landscape of the beach encourages people to pursue leisure activities that could be considered dangerous. This overlap of pleasure over danger is one of the main reasons why people become complacent and fall prey to the oceanic landscape. In many instances people give themselves willingly to pleasure seeking activities at the beach and ignore the risks which position them in life threatening situations. If Australians treat the beach as a playground, they can become contemptuous of the gothic terrors embedded in its natural order; therefore exposing themselves to being consumed by a volatile and fluid landscape.
Many of these qualities of the Australian Gothic have informed my videography as a means of envisaging the strange and concealed aspects of a coastal landscape; a site which stimulates human imagination in apprehending its unknown qualities. One of these unknown qualities embedded in the gothic landscape is the human apprehension of darkness as an agent which conceals malevolence. David Jones in Textualities, *PreCinematic Media and Film in Popular Visual culture 1670-1910* (2011) comments on human trepidation by explaining that the “Gothic is primarily concerned with the fear of the Other” (Jones, 2011; 3). He adds that the conceptual understanding of the “feared Other” is commonly investigated through dark themes. For instance the Gothic could not be understood without its relationship to “darkness and its many connotations such as death, evil, immortality, and the mysterious” (3). Furthermore these gothic connotations are useful in depicting the obscure character of the beachscape as a site which can be connected to aesthetics of malevolence such as the unseen terror of rips or the grotesque form of the shark.

The photographic series *The mystery of nightfall* (2013) portray a jagged and inhospitable shoreline as darkness is falling. The images may represent literal connotations of a gothic seascape but they also imply a sense of mystery that arbitrates hostility, fear of the unknown and yet prevents any form of visceral investigation.

(fig.17) Michael Wise *The mystery of nightfall* (2013) digital photographs in sequence
Another work which is informed by gothic notions is *The mysterious movement of landscape* (2014) a video narrative which portrays the beach as a pure and white expanse which is gradually corrupted and transformed into a beach composed of dark and linear formations; a foreboding environment devoid of any human or animal presence. I documented the beach when it was under the influence of a powerful southerly wind that sand blasts anyone or anything that is connected to its surface. The video responds to the notion of terra firma in motion which is contradictory to the concept of a concrete landscape and the stillness of a fine Autumn day at the beach. *The mysterious movement of landscape* (2014) alludes to a landscape in transition composed of light reflective sand particles that are scattered and reformed by powerful winds to form geometric patterns. These undulating ripples of sand are not only on the beach itself, but mirrored on sandy bottoms under the sea, signifying evidence of the mysterious and invisible forces which power motion within the landscape of the beach. The concluding narrative portrays the beach as a dark and still gothic landscape.
Australian artist Rick Amor in his painting *Shark in a Wave* (2002) has portrayed the beach as a site of gothic significance. His depiction of the monstrous shadow of a shark moving through the rising form of a wave, visually overwhelms the insignificant figure on the rocky shoreline. Amor creates an ominous narrative which gives the impression that a giant shark is stalking the stooped person as it moves phantom like through the wave. The juxtaposition between the ghostly image of the shark and the figure which seems unaware of the shark’s presence, highlights human vulnerability to wild sea creatures, a vulnerability which is only safeguarded by holding a position on land. Amor’s symbolic image of a shark reinforces the notion that the reality of the shark’s presence in the ocean wilderness should be considered our resident gothic nightmare.

In both reality and myths in literature and art, it is conceivable to assume that the beach is inhabited by Australia’s own gothic monster. The seasonal shark migration along the Western Australian coastline means that it has the capability to revisit beach sites which have provided them with a valuable food source. As such it is possible that one shark has the ability to terrorise a significant number of beach locations. In this regard, the reality of the great white shark could be compared to the fiction of the Grendel narrative in which “the supernatural is evoked” (Butts, 2008; 113) where the monster revisits its killing sites, appearing and disappearing like a phantom. In support of this theory: there is the knowledge that three male surfers have been killed by a Great White shark in close proximity to Gracetown over a period of nine years - two of the attacks occurred at beach sites only a few hundred metres apart. Something primitive and virtually beyond human understanding is an analogy which could be attached to the gothic horror of the white shark in the modern era: a mysterious force which has evolved from ancient origins. An example of a gothic
disturbance can be seen in the story of Ken Crewe who was a regular early morning swimmer at Cottesloe Beach and who died from wounds after a monstrous shark attack in 2000. His day began like any other day: a daily ritual shared with friends in the familiar surroundings of his favourite urban beach. The shark’s presence reinforces the notion that the symbolic representation of the shark could be interpreted as a gothic terror that is a kind of “cultural fear of a national enemy” (Gillard, Thomas, 2003; 39). Thus this notion of the unseen monster lurking beyond the shoreline has become a gothic reality for most people who engage in Australian beach culture.

Dryden (2003) discusses gothic disturbances of well-known spaces, explaining that they represent hauntings of locations where people frequent as some kind of domestic space or site as part of their weekly program (27). For most people who regularly visit the beach in summer, the beach becomes part of their weekly ritual and may be considered a familiar recreational space. There are other gothic connotations which can be connected to the coastal landscape of the Margaret River region. For example, the ominous presence of fragile limestone cliffs rising above the coastline could be interpreted as a morphology, which can intimidate and install fear within the spectator on the beach. Allen (1997) describes similar concepts of intimidation and fear within the Australian landscape by explaining that certain mountain locations were considered desolate representations that inspired apprehension in explorers, often leading to their despair (44). Allen suggests that the explorers’ memories were effected by their wretched experiences in the mountains because they named them, “Mount Misery, Mount Dreadful and Mount Hopeless” (44). Though the environments of beach and outback are in complete opposition with each other, they still share similar gothic traits of fear and the uncanny, where people can suffer from either isolation, disappearance or death. Some of the coastal sites in the Margaret River region are also named with gothic denotations which interpret suffering, punishment and death, such as “Gallows” and “Guillotines” and a particular section of reef, named “The Surgeon’s Table” which incidentally has indirectly
caused the deaths of two people. Other gothic representations at the beach include the grotesque appearance of sea creatures, the darkness lurking in the depths of the sea and the wind swept waves of a storm ravaged beachscape.


A storm ravaged beach is illustrated in a sketch of one of Western Australia’s famous shipwrecks, the wreck of the Georgette, which occurred in Caldarup Bay, now popularly known as Redgate Beach. The shipwreck was first bought to the world’s attention in 1876 when a sixteen year old Grace Bussell and her indigenous stockman rode their horses into the surf to rescue survivors from the stricken steamer ‘Georgette’. Descriptions of the rescue appeared in newspapers, magazines and personal letters from which I will extract sections to show that at this point in history, Redgate Beach can be identified as having aspects of the coastal gothic. A magazine article and illustration fig. (30), (artist unknown) were first published under the title the heading of “Grace Darling and Grace Bussell heroines of a special kind” (The Australian Women’s Weekly, 1933; 72).

Accounts of the shipwreck in 1886 exist through the captain’s log and a passenger’s letter from George Leake to his sister Mary dated 28th of December 1876. The letter describes the conditions the passengers faced after the ship ploughed into the sandbank. Leake wrote about the difficulties facing the passengers in traversing from the ship to shore and wrote that even though the surf was large and dangerous no one came to any harm (3). In interpreting Leake’s writing, I have discovered that his description of the natural events surrounding the shipwreck contradict the artist’s sketch in the Australian Women’s Weekly. The artist’s sketch is an impression that follows the gothic tradition of applying fiction to define an unknown seascape. Whether the artist’s

19 “The Surgeon’s Table” is a shallow flat section of reef which is part of the famous Margaret River, Surfers Point reef break. It is located near the end of the points left hand breaking wave and can create a sudden and shallow disruption of the wave which can cause surfers to wipe out. It has indirectly caused two surfing tragedies.
sketch is correct or not, it still provides visual evidence that Redgate Beach can be interpreted as a gothic landscape which has been imagined as a site of catastrophe.

My discussion in this chapter has alluded to gothic notions co-existing with the sublime and beautiful South West coastline of Western Australia. At first glance, my assertions appear to be a perverse sense of view, considering the coastline of the Margaret River region is promoted as one of the most scenic locations in the world. However, evidence suggests that in art, literature, cinema and popular culture the gothic is continually evolving in real and imagined landscapes whether they are depictions of the beach, the harsh interior of Australia or represented in modern technical applications. These new representations of the gothic are multilayered and evolve within the rural and modern urban environments of the twenty-first century. Dryden (2003) expands on the notion of a continuously evolving gothic, by stating that; “In the twenty-first century the gothic continues its metamorphosis” in emerging technologies such as “computer games, graphic novels, animation and the computerised landscapes of film and television” (189). The premise of the gothic whether it is real or fictionalised is just as relevant now, as it was in previous incarnations throughout history and should be recognised in our visual and written language, especially when articulating the darker side of the beach.
Conclusion

This exegesis The Aesthetics of a Malevolent Beachscape has primarily responded to my life experience of the beach and the dangers that I perceive are embedded in its image of scenic beauty. My inquiry has examined the beach through a framework of lived experience, historical precedents and theoretical discussion as well as creative practice, which have exposed its malevolent character. Even though I am at the end of this research, I am still coming to terms with why people including myself, now perceive the Margaret River coastline as a far more malevolent seascape than it was five years ago. An obvious response to this change in perception is that as a result of this research, I have become more aware of the dangers existing in the oceanic environment. However during this period, the reality was that an unprecedented number of shark deaths and drownings occurred which influenced me to envisage a darker tone in my written and creative components of my thesis.

Thus, I have portrayed the beach as a site that has a twofold function; one of pleasure and the other terror, a site where beauty and death can occur in the same instance. I have examined the aesthetics of malevolence and its function within the coastal landscape and exposed several characteristics which cause apprehension within Australian contemporary beach culture. Most of these negative aspects of the beach have been ignored or have had little attention in Australian art movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, even though, as beach culture evolved it was common knowledge to most beach users that malevolent acts of nature can swiftly turn a pleasant summer day out into an experience of human catastrophe. Nevertheless, from the second half of the twentieth century, art and literature in Australia began producing images and written narratives of the darker characteristics of the beach; for example Paul Delprat’s painting Shark Attack (1963), depicts a person bleeding out after a shark bite and Rick Amor’s Shark in a Wave (2002) paintings portray the gothic shadow of a large shark moving through a rising wave, juxtaposed against a lone
figure standing on the rocks. In addition, author’s such as Tim Winton in *Breathe* and *The Turning* and Robert Drewe in *The Shark Net* provide detailed accounts of Western Australia’s malevolent coastline, such as the threats from marauding sharks, or dangerous rip currents, and the gothic fear of surfing giant waves.

I provide evidence of imagery of coastal malevolence in seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth century marine painting and twenty-first century videography which demonstrate the volatility and absolute power of storms in an oceanic environment. In my video *The falling sea* (2014), I illustrate the physical transformation of wave energy fragmenting as it collides with the protruding granite architecture of the shoreline. The rock pillars are symbolised as objects of darkness that represent eroded shadows of their original forms, contrasted by exploding shrouds of white water. I have intentionally created a vision of an ominous seascape, which has dark undertones that challenge our senses and feelings of security within the coastal landscape. I assert that these characteristic values of coastal malevolence can be defined through human perception as sublime moments of awe, fear and apprehension.

The discussion has been extended by an exploration of the power of beauty, beginning with an analysis of Friedrich’s and Turner’s paintings to illustrate that beauty can be found in their use of a reduced depth of field. I have employed their paintings as visual stepping stones to discuss my video *Passing through beauty* (2014); which represents an underwater world in which sunlight illuminates an intimate labyrinth of kelp. The work visually narrates a marriage between beauty and death. In addition, I have examined the aesthetics of a beautiful seascape to consider whether beauty represents a form of deception and analyse whether the seductive image of beautiful scenery can lead people towards incorrect judgments. The power of beauty at the beach is omnipresent in all observable things; the shimmer of light reflecting off seawater, wind blown ripples in the sand and the rhythmic movement of waves. Yet things in nature, perceived as beautiful, are not always what they appear to be. The surface beauty
of a landscape can become an agent for representing false images that can conceal an object’s (landscape) true identity and purpose and so the unwary can misinterpret the underlying threats of danger and terror operating within the landscape of the beach.

In my discussion on landscape and terror I focused on two aspects of landscape; the concept of falling and the acts of predation within the landscape of the beach. Both concepts have a relationship with the coast and are connected to recent histories as well as people I have known in the Margaret River Region. I have considered the tragic aftermath of the Gracetown cliff collapse of 1996 and the profound effect shark fatalities have had on coastal communities in the Southwest of Western Australia from 2010 to 2013. The aftermath of these tragedies have caused many people to now view the landscape of the beach with fear and suspicion. I have ascertained that Southwest beaches are sites which exhibit gothic connotations. In so doing, I show that gothic malevolence and scenic beauty work hand in hand within the image of the coastal landscape. It is within this duality of the beach that I use the term ‘coastal gothic’ to expose the beach’s darker traits which can corrupt a beautiful beach scene and invoke human suffering of wretchedness, despair and death. In tandem, I present the shark (the ghostly great white shark) as Australia’s gothic monster which haunts our urban and popular country beaches.

To summarise the creative component of my project The aesthetics of a malevolent seascape, I have composed five video artworks which have informed, and been informed by my research. My video The falling sea (2014) depicts the malevolent forces of nature striking Redgate Beach during a winter storm in 2012 and portrays the coastal landscape as a dark and Gothic environment which is totally inhospitable to human occupation. In addition I explore falling in this video as an aspect of terror within the landscape of the beach and record giant waves transforming into white water after colliding with vertical stone morphology. I consider the aftermath of rising and falling waves and their
production of white energy which can physically and mentally assault the mind; and analyse the concept of white and all its associations and meanings which had an impact on my understanding of the beach. Furthermore, I examine the symbolic power of white in the oceanic environment to have negative connotations which often inspire imaginary narratives which can cause anxiety and fear. In this regard, representations of white in the beachscape have the capacity to challenge human comprehension of terror embedded in whiteness.

My second video *Passing through beauty* (2014) explores a submarine landscape and examines a floating island of seaweed as a sublime and deadly experience. The work begins with a narrative of abstract imagery caused by the movement of objects (seaweed) in a reduced depth of field. The camera is set underwater in the internal structure of the seaweed, where I discover beautiful colours of sunlight trapped in the transparent membranes of the kelp. The viewer observes the narrative shifting from a world of abstract imagery that transforms into a labyrinth of organic forms and shapes within the architecture of seaweed, to discover in the concluding frames glimpses of human body parts entangled within its mass.

I have also created three other videos which have informed part of my research. *Drifting towards extinction* (2014) analyses how human play within a beach environment can lead to a potential death by drowning. The video records a group of people enjoying themselves in the surf at Redgate Beach, who are playfully unaware they have been captured in a rip current. The narrative works within the context of human survival in a beautiful underwater seascape, where people float to the the surface to capture their breath. My video *The mysterious movement of landscape* (2015) - explores the aesthetics of sand movement in a dark and foreboding beach environment. The narrative of this video is antithetical to a fine day out at the beach and exposes the landscape of the beach as a continuously changing surface of form and texture created by the forces of nature. The sound of the shifting sands highlighted in the video are gradually reduced to silence and the stillness of the sculptured forms.
My final video *The jaws of a hungry child* (2014) is composed of two symbolic elements, the innocence of a child’s face and the terror connoted by shark’s teeth. In this work I ask the viewer to analyse the ambiguous imagery of a child’s face floating within the image of a tiger shark’s jaws and question the potent relationship which exists between innocence and terror. And I wonder which animal generates the most fear over time.

My videography and exegesis contributes to an understanding of the oceanic environment and furthers creative comprehension of the Margaret River coastline. It is a dynamic environment which has imposing morphology counterbalanced by the beauty and power of the ocean. Simultaneously, this coastline represents a threatening landscape where significant numbers of people die because of dangerous currents, shark attacks and king waves. The overall story and imagery in my exegesis *The aesthetics of a malevolent beachscape*, should be understood as an integral component of our visual language of the twenty-first century, especially when articulating negative aspects of Australian beach culture.
List of illustrations in exegesis.

(fig.1) *Blue shadow* (2012) digital photograph, P15

(fig.2) Charles Condor *A Holiday at Mentone*, (1888) oil painting, image courtesy Art Gallery of South Australia, P20

(fig.3) *Surf Bathing at Manly Beach, New South Wales* (1900) b+w photograph, image courtesy National Library of Australia, Canberra, Trove, P21

(fig.4) *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 1* (2012) digital photograph, P29

(fig.5) *Australia Day Redgate Beach Scene 2* (2012) digital photograph, P30

(fig.6) *A family fighting a rip current* (2012) digital photograph, P31

(fig.7) *Drifting towards extinction* (2014) video stills, P38

(fig.8) Phil Hastings’ *Steadfast* (2009) video still, image courtesy of Phil Hastings, P45

(fig.9) *The falling sea* (2014) video still, P51

(fig.10) Ephemeral *formations of lightness and darkness* (2015) digital photograph, P56

(fig.11) *Passing through beauty* (2014) video still, P59

(fig.12) *Passing through beauty* (2014) video still, P66

(fig.13) *Passing through beauty* (2014) video still, P67

(fig.14) *The falling sea* (2014) video stills, P81

(fig.15) *Jaws of a hungry child* (2014) video still, P92

(fig.16) *The mystery of nightfall* (2013) digital photograph, P94

(fig.17) *The mystery of nightfall* (2013) digital photographs in sequence, P102

(fig.18) *The mysterious movement of landscape* (2015) video stills, P103
Appendix 1
List of video artworks discussed in exegesis and uploaded to Vimeo channel.

Drifting towards extinction (2014) duration 03:35:00
https://vimeo.com/167745033

Passing through beauty (2014) duration 04:00:19
Soundtrack by Kai Engel, At the end everyone dies (2015)
https://vimeo.com/167778908

The falling sea (2014) duration 04:08:00
https://vimeo.com/167874714

The jaws of a hungry child (2014) duration 03:14:24
Soundtrack by Podington Bear Submerging Green (2015)
https://vimeo.com/167754578

The mysterious movement of landscape (2015) duration 02:14:00
https://vimeo.com/167990828
Appendix 2

Documented below are other multiple screen shots and photographic works, that were not included in the final exhibition but have been undertaken as part of and been a contribution to my research -

![Image of shark underwater with water splashing around.
A dark image with a circular object.
A wave crashing into a rock.
A wave breaking in the ocean.
A wave breaking over a sandy beach.
A wave with a surfboarder.
A group of people surfing in the ocean.
A surfer riding a wave.]

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Appendix 3

Permission statements for copyright material.

PERMISSION TO USE COPYRIGHT MATERIAL AS SPECIFIED BELOW:

[Still image from the video artwork titled Steadfast by Phil Hastings]

I hereby give permission for Michael Wise to include the above mentioned material(s) in his/her higher degree thesis for Curtin University, and to communicate this material via the espac@Curtin institutional repository. This permission is granted on a non-exclusive basis and for an indefinite period. I confirm that I am the copyright owner of the specified material.

Signed: Name:  

Position: Artist – Associate Professor

Date: 2/10/16

Please return signed form to Michael Wise at email address - michael.wise@student.curtin.edu.au or mwpwise@westnet.com.au

Email mwpwise@westnet.com.au

06/02/2016

Dear Copyright Owner Art Gallery of South Australia,

It is my understanding that you are the copyright holder/publisher for the following material:

Charles Conder A Holiday or Montevue (1888) oil painting

I would like to reproduce an extract of this work in a doctorate/Master’s thesis which I am currently undertaking at Curtin University in Perth, Western Australia. The subject of my research is The Aesthetics of a Malaise: Seascapes, which primarily responds to my life experience of beach and the dangers which are embedded in its image of sensis beauty. I portray the beach as a site that has a twofold function of pleasure and the other of terror, where beauty and death can exist in the same instance. I am carrying out this research in my own right and have no association with any commercial organisation or sponsor.

The specific material I would like to use for the purpose of the thesis is to demonstrate that Australian beach paintings up until the 1960s were exposed to the negative character of the beach. Once completed, the thesis will be made available to online users via Curtin University’s Institutional Repository espac@Curtin (http://espac.library.curtin.edu.au). The material will be provided strictly for educational purposes and on a non-commercial basis.

I would be most grateful for your consent to the copying and communication of the work as proposed. If you are willing to grant this consent, please complete and sign the attached approval slip and return it to me at the address shown. Full acknowledgement of the ownership of the copyright and the source of the material will be provided with the material.

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I look forward to hearing from you and thank you in advance for your consideration of my request. Yours sincerely Michael Wise

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Signed:  

Name:  

Position:  

Date:  14 February 2016

Please return signed form to Michael Wise at email address - michael.wise@student.curtin.edu.au or mwpwise@westnet.com.au

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Appendix 4

List of conferences and art exhibitions.

Exhibitions -

*Shark Mythologies* (2013), digital projection on to St John’s Greek Chapel, Prevelly Beach. Margaret River community presentation of *Southwest Stories*, for the Bunbury Regional Galleries, Western Australia.


*SoDA15*, Curtin University’s School of Design and Art 2015 exhibition, John Curtin Gallery, Bentley, Western Australia.

Conferences -


Eco Arts, Australis Conference, The Arts & Environmental Sustainability (2013), *The Great White Shark Myth; is it effecting shark sustainability*, Innovation Campus, University of Wollongong, New South Wales.
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Winton, T., 2008, *Breath*, Melbourne, Australia


Visual Texts


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Viola, B., 2011, *Fire Woman*, University of Berkeley, YouTube www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLA228CFF516FAD624
“Every reasonable effort has been made to acknowledge the owners of copyright material. I would be pleased to hear from any copyright owner who has been omitted or incorrectly acknowledged.”