CREATING FALSE MEMORIES FOR A PLACE THAT NEVER WAS (PART 2)

CARLY FISCHER

Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was (Part 2) is a sculptural and audio installation that explores the relationship between fact, fiction and fantasy in Australian cultural representations. Referencing some of the strange souvenirs perpetuating such representations, the installation investigates how national and transnational, specific and generic narratives of place in Australia are often confusingly intertwined.

CARLY FISCHER | *Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was (Part 2)*, 2016 | Found Australian, Indonesian, African and Polynesian wooden souvenirs, found wooden household objects, pine, Tasmanian oak, balsa, bamboo, MDF, cotton, nylon, rocks, adhesives, acrylic paint and varnishes and audio soundscape. Dimensions variable | Image courtesy of the artist

Between 1969 and 1970, ethnomusicologist Hugo Zemp recorded a woman from the Solomon Islands named Afunakwa singing the Baegu lullaby "Rorogwela". The recording became part of an LP released in 1973 by the UNESCO Musical Sources collection titled *Solomon Islands: Fateleka and Baegu Music from Malaita*.[1] Afunakwa's song didn't receive a wide reception and, apart from academic musicology departments, largely disappeared back into the sea from which it had come. In 1992, polished by 20 years under the sea, the song resurfaced in France as part of musical duo Michel Sanchez and Eric Mouquet's (*Deep Forest*) ambient ethno-electronica debut album *Deep Forest*.[2] The album was supposed to be set in Africa, with the first track announcing "somewhere, deep in the jungle, are living some little men and women".[3] In the track "Sweet Lullaby", Afunakwa's voice reappears in this African jungle, almost unrecognisable among water-splashing sounds, yodels, pan pipes and ambient electronica.

Back across the sea in Australia, *Deep Forest* became hugely popular with a 90's generation that was largely disconnected from the rest of the world, their own culture and the deep indigenous history of the country.[4] *Deep Forest* music could be heard in Australian homes and shops, outdoor parties and day-spas and in ads and music videos on TV. It seemed like a time when anything was possible, where cultures could come together in a kind of transnational tribalism "to be at one with the world, without really knowing what that might mean."[5] Imagining a rainforest, somewhere vague and unknown, many Australians listened to Afunakwa's voice in *Deep Forest's* "Sweet Lullaby" without knowing who it was, where it had come from or what it might mean. Perhaps *Deep Forest's* ambient ethno-vagueness resonated with an Australia that didn't itself know where it was placed. But that was the 90's.

In 2015, having returned to Australia after 8 years abroad, I wandered into an Australian souvenir shop in Swanston St, Melbourne. Among a wall of seemingly Indigenous Australian didgeridoos and boomerangs, was a collection of strange wooden masks covered with Indigenous Australian dot painting. Somewhere between Australian, African, Indonesian and Polynesian, the masks seemed to be from both everywhere and nowhere, presenting to passing tourists a vague notion of transnational tribalism as authentically Australian. Assured by the context of their display and the shop assistant's pitch about a supposed indigenous tribe in Central Australia, these tourists no doubt returned home with stories of deserts, ancient tribes and voodoo rituals. The masks reminded me of *Deep Forest*, simultaneously

concealing and revealing cultural histories that mixed fact, fiction and fantasy. Perhaps there was a link between the perceived vastness and vagueness of both Central Australia and Central Africa that allowed these generalised cultural representations to be continually placed onto them.

Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was reconsiders this relationship between fact, fiction and fantasy in such cultural representations and what it might mean for contemporary Australia. Across 2 sculptural and audio installations in the respective Melbourne spaces *Bus Projects* and *Blindside*, the project combines collected stories and cultural mementos with fabricated reflections and memories. In the installations, sculptural and audio fragments from the investigation are cut up, remixed and reassembled, creating narratives that parallel its confusing path.

Exhibited at *Bus Projects* in February 2016, the first part of the project was based around the mask and its story. Prompted to travel to Central Australia in response to what I had been told at the souvenir shop in Melbourne, I carried the mask as a prop, gathering people's reflections on the origin of this strange object and collecting souvenirs along the way. Weaving interviews recorded from Indigenous Australian artists, gallerists, museum staff, anthropologists and souvenir shop staff in Central Australia, the installation's audio soundscape, mixed by sound artist Mieko Suzuki, merged these stories with found and fabricated sounds from the desert. Created in response to the soundscape, the installation's sculptural components remixed and reassembled collected souvenirs and memories from the journey into strange totems that slipped between different places and possibilities.

In *Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was (Part 2)* exhibited at Blindside, the installation considers the relationship between the mask and *Deep Forest*. Extending on the first part of the project, the installation uses an audio soundscape to activate sculptural reflections. Inviting participants to respond to questions about their memories of *Deep Forest* music, the places it evokes and its popularity in Australia, the installation's audio soundscape reconstructs fragments of these interviews into a story about *Deep Forest* and Australia. Mixed by sound artist Mieko Suzuki, the story includes samples of *Deep Forest* tracks, some of the original recordings they used (such as Afunakwa's "Rorogwela"), *Deep Forest* interviews and advertisements that used the music. Created in response to the soundscape, the sculptural components in the installation merge found and fabricated souvenirs and ephemera, reflecting on some of the confused cultural representations emerging from the stories told. Shifting between magical and mundane, specific and generic, cultural artefact and commodity, the sculptures act as ambiguous propositions suspended between fact, fiction and fantasy.

In his article *A Sweet Lullaby for World Music*, ethnomusicologist Steven Feld refers to how our era is dominated by sonic fantasies and virtualities, creating a musical world that is experienced as both specific and vague at the same time.[6] These fantasies that Feld referred to in 2000 still seem to haunt our contemporary context, not only sonically but through the cultural objects, souvenirs and ephemera that continue to reflect Australia. Creating false memories for a place that never was, these fantasies become a mask, concealing a landscape of rich cultural possibilities from the past and into the present, not vague but specific and placed. Perhaps Lucreccia Quintanilla best emphasises this reality for contemporary Australia at the end of the soundscape when she asks us "what kind of place do we want Australia to be?"[7]

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1   Steven Feld, "A Sweet Lullaby for World Music", in *Public Culture* 12.1 (2000). p154.

2   Ibid.

3   Deep Forest, "Deep Forest", in *Deep Forest* (1992). The title of the musical duo, their first album and the first track are all *Deep Forest*.

4   I would use "White Australia" here, but that would exclude Australians from a non-white migrant cultural background as well as Indigenous Australians, who were also disconnected from their culture and Australia at that time. Although I assume *Deep Forest* was more popular for a white market, I haven't found specific evidence of this in my research.

5   Viv Miller, recorded in an interview between Carly Fischer and Viv Miller, Artery Cooperative Studios, Melbourne 22/03/2016.

6   Feld, p145.

7   Lucreccia Quintanilla, recorded in an interview between Carly Fischer and Lucreccia Quintanilla, Artery Cooperative Studios, Melbourne 20/04/2016.

Carly Fischer is a sculptural installation artist from Melbourne. Her practice explores some of the problems involved in working site-specifically with place in a contemporary context, reflecting on the complex relationship between stereotypical representations of places and their local realities. Based on the various locations she has travelled to, her installations are sculptural reflections on how facts and fictions of these places are often complexly intertwined. Remixing, revising and reconstructing the cultural detritus collected from place to place, Fischer creates sculptural propositions and environments that suggest a more ambiguous contemporary place.

As a point of departure, *Creating False Memories for a Place That Never Was (Part 2)* draws on a potentially fictional wooden mask found in an Australian souvenir shop and the ambiguous explanations about its origins. Tracing the path of these explanations, the investigation stumbles upon the musical group Deep Forest and their parallel stories of place. Reflecting on the strange transnational tribalism that the mask and the music weave, the installation presents sculptural and audio reconstructions that consider these confusing narratives and their relation to Australia.

Carly Fischer recently completed an MFA at Monash University, studying under Professor Callum Morton, having previously graduated with a BFA (Hons) from RMIT University in 2000. Since 2000, she has exhibited widely in Australia, Germany, Austria, Belgium, the Netherlands, the US, the UK and Japan, including at Craft Victoria, Helen Gory Galerie, Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Gippsland Art Gallery, Australia, KWADRAT and REH Kunst, Germany and MU Artspace, the Netherlands. Fischer has also been the recipient of several grants and awards, recently including an Australia Council Grant and Australian Postgraduate Award for work in response to Australia.

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