

On the periphery of Coburg's industrial area, in between old factories and abandoned lots, the Coburg Velodrome is a place where the wind circulates, sounds oscillate and things accumulate. Forgotten fragments form strata; piles of concrete rubble, volcanic basalt and clay mix with old industrial remnants and construction debris between sealed concrete surfaces and sports fields. Many of the parks around Coburg were once quarries; massive open-cut holes where millions of years of clay and basalt deposits were blasted, dug up and reconstructed into the roads and buildings on its surface. Basalt is now primarily seen as ballast along railway tracks, specks of aggregate through construction concrete and asphalt covering roads. When the quarries around Coburg were eventually filled in with rubble, rubbish and debris, they were covered over with a top layer of sports turf, transforming them into recreational reserves. Just beneath this surface, under a thin layer of dirt, this basalt still forms a significant part of the Coburg strata.

The strata of Melbourne's Coburg region was formed by millions of years of slow accumulations, eruptions, erosions, and transformations of its surface. Around 400 million years ago, when Coburg and most of south-eastern Australia was submerged under an ancient sea, marine life, sand, silt and debris formed sediments on the ocean floor, depositing thousands of metres of silurian sandstone bedrock. Over immense spans of time, sands and clays, washed down from granite hills to the north and deposited by ancient streams, accumulated in layers of sedimentary rock. Along Edgars Creek, near the old Kodak factories- turned housing estates, exposed outcrops of this ancient silurian and sedimentary rock emerge from under the walkway. 30 million years ago, these rocks were covered by volcanic basalts when continental drift caused molten magma to escape from stresses and fissures in the surface. Over time, this basalt was covered once again by sands and clays eroded and washed down from silurian bedrock to the north.

This surfacing and resurfacing of Coburg was 4 1/2 million years ago subjected to more volcanic activity, when the whole of south-western Victoria was completely overlaid by a series of immense lava flows, creating one of the largest basalt plains in the world. Coburg lies at the extreme east of this plain and the now extinct volcanoes to its north have been weathered into soft hills and covered in soil and grass. As each lava flow ran down the Merri and Edgars Creeks, it shifted its path, diverting around newly formed basalt rock and between softer sedimentary sandstones. Over time, the creeks deposited layers of silt and thousands of years of wind and rain eroded the basalt into soil for the grasslands now known as 'The Coburg Plains.'

Flat, windswept and fertile, these open grasslands and tree-lined rocky creeks of Coburg that had developed over millions of years, forming the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people, were seen by early colonists as perfect for sheep farming. Wealthy Scottish settlers purchased large areas of farmland in Coburg, mainly for investment rather than direct use. Few Scottish landowners developed long-standing attachments to their land; most subdivided and resold. As speculation halted during the Depression, many farms were sold to banks and building societies, subdivided into allotments too small to farm and neglected, becoming a wasteland of thistles. Weeds and thistles became so prominent around all the vacant lots in Coburg that it was commonly called 'Thistle town' and one of the worst areas of neglect became known as 'The Coburg Badlands.'¹

Scotch Thistles were probably introduced to Coburg in the early 1800s as an ornamental plant brought over by Scottish settlers to whom it was a national Scottish emblem. Thistles grow best in ruderal places. Ruderal originates from the latin word rudus meaning rubble; eroded, excavated and deposited rock and debris. They are the first species to colonise disturbed areas; farmland turned and left vacant, demolished building sites, old quarries and industrial zones, roadsides, railways and wastelands. Thistles have a long and continuing history in the vacant lots of Coburg. Land, cleared, disturbed and fenced off is then left waiting for future investments and developments, inaccessible but also unused. The thistles that pop up in these spaces remind us of the ongoing oscillations of place, its colonisation and gentrification. Around Coburg, these in-between spaces act as fissures and cracks in the surface, where forgotten fragments accumulate and merge. Overlooked and indeterminate by nature, blurring the imagined separations between things, these areas invite experimentation and improvisation, providing portals to alternate layers of history and place.

Along the back of Newlands rd, between industrial areas and the Merri and Edgars Creeks, bright purple

Artichoke Thistles signpost tangents, luring us off designated paths and into scrap yards, factory fringes and former quarries, creating a feedback loop back to the industrial and geological histories of Coburg. These areas were once Coburg's most extensive zones of basalt quarries. Initially formed along the Merri Creek, where it was easier to cut the rock at the edge of the basalt flow, quarrying began at the present site of Coburg Lake and Pentridge Prison, spreading up the creek along Newlands rd and radiating throughout Coburg. Basalt was drilled along its grain till it cracked or blasted with gelignite, creating piles of bluestone fragments that could be used in the construction of buildings, roads and railways around the area. When the quarries closed down, these massive holes became rubbish dumps. Many of the former quarries around Newlands rd are now scrap yards, where rubble and debris from buildings demolished elsewhere is piled up on its now-sealed surface.

This hilly area of The Coburg Plains is particularly windy. Locals who grew up around here remember how the dust from the quarries, the dairy farms and the construction of the Kodak factories used to circulate, forming a layer over its surface. They remember the sounds carried on these winds; farmers whistling and factory horns sounding for the start of shifts.² Once pillars of modernist design, the Kodak buildings were left derelict and surrounded by wasteland when the factory closed down in 2004, marked for demolition to make way for the new camera-themed housing estates that now sprawl over its surface. On top of Coburg Hill, the former Kodak Distribution Centre still stands as a modernist monument to this time, with its yellow and white bands rising above the surrounding weeds, excavated earth and piles of basalt like strata. Up along the scrap yards now, the wind circulates dust around piles of old bricks and concrete rubble, through long grasses, thistles and bits of scrap metal, resonating like a drone. A musical drone is a continuous tone with subtle harmonic details that aren't immediately apparent, but arise through careful, durational engagement and a shift in awareness. As we keep returning to these peripheral places, things accumulate and oscillate, forming constantly shifting dialogues, layers and loops. The wind stirs things, uncovering hidden histories, fragments and tones.

Along the road from Coburg to Kyneton, flat, continuous farmland is punctuated by gently undulating hills. Now covered in grass and mostly hidden from view, these hills are some of the 400 volcanoes of the Victorian Volcanic Province that stretches all the way from Coburg to Bendigo and 350km west to South Australia. On the periphery of Kyneton, near the border of Dja Dja Wurrung and Taungurung Country, between the bluestone buildings and streets of Kyneton and Malmsbury, is Green Hill. Unlike some of the more spectacular geological sites of The Macedon Ranges visited by tourists and well-known to locals, Green Hill is a gentle undulation in the Macedon strata. Now covered in grass, fenced off as private farmland and largely hidden on the outskirts of Kyneton, with neither physical signposts or a google map location, this quiet hill is one of the most significant volcanoes in the greater Kyneton and Malmsbury region, with basalt flows up to 50km, just east of Bendigo.³ The immense flows from Green Hill have shaped the topography and drainage of the Campaspe and Loddon Rivers, the basaltic soils of the present farmland and the industrial history of quarrying throughout the area, but have remained largely hidden beneath the shinier surface of The Gold Rush.⁴

On the road to Green Hill, dry stone walls mark the boundaries of farms. I think about how these basalt rocks were dug up to clear farmland and pushed to the edges of the roads that lead to the place they come from, like a strange oscillating drone loop that has erased its original source; a small hill in the distance, an echo. The rocks are covered in iron oxide that peels off in rusted flakes like it peels off the forgotten farm fragments, in one continuous surface. Long wire fences along waves of long, dry grass are pierced with thistles and stacks of rocks. The road at the base of Green Hill is called Boundary rd, the boundary to Kyneton and as close as we can get to this place. Along one side, a cracked clay road is eroded here and there, exposing basalt just beneath the surface. We watch the dry grass oscillating over the hill then return to the car and drive back to Coburg.

Carly Fischer 2023

1. Richard Broome, *Coburg: Between Two Creeks*, (Port Melbourne: Lothian Publishing Company:1987). 1, 2, 17-22, 153, 165.

2. Marilyn Moore, conversation at Coburg Historical Society, 3/4/22.

3. Victorian Resources Online. https://vro.agriculture.vic.gov.au/dpi/vro/nthcenregn.nsf/pages/nc_eruption_points_green_hill. Accessed 4/1/2023.

4. Susan Walter, *Malmsbury Bluestone and Quarries: Finding Holes in History and Heritage* (La Trobe University: 2019). 4-5.

Carly Fischer and Edwina Stevens began collaborating in 2018 through a shared interest in investigating the hidden histories and peripheral dialogues of places, through similar sculptural and audiovisual methodologies. Engaging with places through more intimate, fragmentary and generative processes, their collaborative practice seeks to create alternate narratives that question broader cultural and colonial perspectives. Based in Narm/Melbourne, but also drawing on Edwina's connections to Aotearoa, their projects are particularly focused on the political importance of smaller details and local narratives. Their often expansive sculptural and audiovisual installations incorporate collected and reconstructed fragments, field recordings, archives and synthesised sound that overlaps and shifts to create generative dialogues with places. Their collaboration 'I feel the earth move under my feet', created in response to a residency at Melbourne's Living Museum of the West and exhibited at Incinerator Gallery in 2019, was included in Radiophrenia 2019, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, with their following collaboration 'Conversation Piece' exhibited at Bus Projects and The Incinerator Art Award in 2021. 'Velodrome' was first exhibited at Schoolhouse Gallery, Coburg in 2022.

Carly Fischer is a sculptural and audio installation artist from Narm/Melbourne. Her work explores the smaller details, peripheral zones and hidden histories of places, creating alternate narratives that question broader cultural and colonial perspectives. Engaging with environments through a fragmentary and meandering process of objects, materials, sounds and histories, her sculptural and sonic reconstructions reflect on places as complex and shifting sites of accumulation, interaction and negotiation. Carly has exhibited in Australia, Germany, Austria, the Netherlands, Scotland, Japan and the US through solo, group and collaborative projects and residencies, including at Bus Projects and Incinerator Gallery, Melbourne, Centre for Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Bundoora Homestead Art Centre, Melbourne, The Art Gallery of Ballarat, Warrnambool Art Gallery, Watch This Space, Alice Springs, Gippsland Art Gallery, KWADRAT and REH Kunst, Germany and MU Artspace, Netherlands. She completed an MFA in 2015 at Monash University, focusing on some of the problems with site-specific practice in a contemporary context.

Edwina Stevens (Otepoti/Dunedin, Narm/Melbourne) is an audiovisual artist working across composition, installation and live performance, focusing on synthesised sound, field recordings, found acoustic elements/instruments and obsolete media. Her work investigates audiovisual processes of engaging with places that are collaborative, improvisational and serendipitous, exploring entanglements of the temporal, material and experiential through chance encounters, tangential processes and unanticipated outcomes. Her audiovisual practice has been exhibited through installations, radio pieces and screenings at Composite, Bus Projects, Incinerator Gallery, Centre of Contemporary Art, Glasgow, Radia Network, ABC Spotlight Audible Women, Melbourne Environmental Film Festival, Blue Oyster Gallery, None Gallery and The Anteroom, Dunedin, Artspace, Auckland and HSP Christchurch. She is currently undertaking a PhD at Deakin University and also composes/performs as 'eves', most recently performing a commissioned composition at Substation for MESS Sonorous.

'Velodrome' has been developed and exhibited on the unceded lands of the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung, Taungurung and Dja Dja Wurrung people of the Kulin Nation. The artists pay respects to the Traditional Custodians and Elders past, present and emerging.

'Velodrome' has been supported by the Victorian Government through Creative Victoria and Regional Arts Victoria.



VELODROME

Carly Fischer and Edwina Stevens