

portraiture places multiple encounters into play, the most obvious being that between the viewer and the subject of the artwork, an experience often charged with an unnerving immediacy. Yet all portraits await viewers already imprinted with the echo of encounter. This presentation is an attempt to flesh out the possibilities of encounter engendered by a mixed-media artwork that my Yolngu collaborators and I labelled *Djalkiri #1*, but nicknamed the bark TV. I present it here with conflicting impulses. Claiming *Djalkiri #1* as portrait feels immediately constraining, if not downright colonising. If, as art historian Marcia Pointon argues, portraiture is one of the “great defining metaphors of Western culture”, then why impose the category at all? What will be obscured, obliterated even, in the process? What might be gained?

**Bio:** Associate Professor Jennifer Deger works collaboratively with Yolngu in Australia's northeast Arnhem Land developing new forms of practice-led and collaborative anthropology. She has published widely on Aboriginal visual culture, experimental ethnography, the anthropology of art and indigenous aesthetics, including her book *Shimmering Screens: Making Media in an Aboriginal Community* (University of Minnesota Press, 2006). Her creative work includes the documentary films *Manapanmirr, in Christmas Spirit* (2012) and *Ringtone* (2014), video artworks *My Red Yolngu Heart* (2011) and *Christmas with Wawa* (2008), and the exhibition projects *interventions: experiments between art and ethnography* (2009), *Christmas Birrimbirr (Christmas Spirit)* (2011), and *Gapuwiyak Calling: Phone-Made Media from Arnhem Land* (2014). Jennifer is a Tropical Leader at the Cairns Institute, James Cook University.

**Contact:** [jennifer.deger@jcu.edu.au](mailto:jennifer.deger@jcu.edu.au)

---

**Author:** Eduardo de la Fuente

**Title:** Contemporary Landscape Theory and the Tropics: Notes for a Phenomenological-Material Account of ‘Lushness’

**Session 2A:** 10:50 – 11:20, Rm D3.059

**Abstract:** Recent developments in landscape studies and associated fields of research (e.g., cultural geography, place-theory and material culture studies) have been gesturing towards a ‘non-representational’ account of landscape. Central to such literatures is an attempt to move away from the notion that the landscape is some kind of *tabula rasa* upon which culture inscribes images and iconography, narratives and representations. Whether influenced by Latour’s Actor Network Theory, landscape phenomenology, Bachelardean accounts of substances, or the anthropology and sociology of the senses, this line of thinking posits that landscapes are places where we ‘dwell’, engage in a variety of practical activities and which offer their own distinctive ‘affordances’ or agential affects. What might this theoretical development mean for sociocultural studies of the tropics? In this paper, I contend that a phenomenological-material account of tropical phenomena can profitably be focused on a quality we might term ‘lushness’\*. Lushness involves an excessive, if not decadent, amount of something; and tends to suggest voluptuousness, fecundity, density, vividness, an object or ambience that arouses the senses, as well as the sensation of feeling refreshed. Tropical lushness ‘affords’ various embodied activities from lying on the

sand to immersing oneself in water or the taking of cover under dense canopies. Tropical landscapes encourage outdoor-ness and often blur the boundary between inside and outside. In considering the phenomenological-cum-material qualities of the lush, I reflect on four instances: tropical landscaping of gardens and public spaces; the geography and affordances associated with tropical waterfalls; buildings and other structures that take on a 'ruinous' state due to tropical conditions; and the social and culinary life of tropical fruit (e.g., lychees, bananas, mangos, durians, and paw-paws). Drawing on such cases, I will suggest that tropical lushness involves a spectrum of aesthetic and material possibilities ranging from the cultivated to the supposedly 'wild', and that discerning the boundary between the cultural and the natural – in the case of tropical lushness – is no straightforward matter.

\*NB: I would like to acknowledge that the concept of tropical lush was suggested by Warwick Powell, during the early stages of joint research we are undertaking into the sociocultural and experiential dimensions of Townsville's highly successful waterfront parklands, The Strand. Needless to say I don't hold him responsible for my elaboration of the concept here.

**Bio:** Eduardo de la Fuente recently took up the position of Senior Lecturer in Creativity and Innovation in the Arts and Creative Media Academic Group at James Cook University. He has degrees in economics and politics, a PhD in cultural and media policy, and has previously held academic positions in sociology and communications programs in the University of Tasmania, Macquarie University, Monash University and Flinders University. His new position entails heading up a new undergraduate and MBA program in creativity and innovation studies that cuts across the fields of creative arts and business. He has previously published books and articles on the avant-garde or R&D end of modern musical culture; the entanglements of art and economy in the age of aesthetic capitalism; and recently coined the term 'socio-aesthetics' to describe the role that aesthetic patterns play in society, culture, economy and everyday life. He hopes that coining a new concept will increase his citation rates or, at the very least, help him to organize his own thoughts. Eduardo is currently engaged in a study of the trend towards ultra-modern or minimalist styles in skyscraper, apartment, hotel and restaurant design; and was recently commissioned by the Sydney firm Luxperience to undertake research on new understandings of luxury in an age of hyper-minimalism and 'cool hotels'. He is also beginning a research project with Professor Adrian Franklin (UTas), Dr Kate Booth (UTas) and Dr Michael Walsh (UoC) that will examine how art plus music (including festivals and performances) have been successfully combined at the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Hobart. Eduardo is Treasurer of the International Sociological Association's Research Committee for the Sociology of the Arts (ISA RC37) and a permanent Faculty Fellow at the Yale Centre for Cultural Sociology.

**Contact:** [Eduardo.delaFuente@jcu.edu.au](mailto:Eduardo.delaFuente@jcu.edu.au)

---