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Practising Place, Performing Memory:

*Identity Politics in an Australian Town , the
'Village in the Rainforest'*

Thesis submitted by

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Abstract

This anthropological study focusing on the small Australian town of Kuranda is an exploration of theoretical and philosophical issues regarding the politics of identity. It is a study of the way people constitute themselves in relation to place and construct, communicate and contest categorical identities generated within the context of a bureaucratic state order and global economic and political forces. The study is not about any particular culture or sub-culture, not the European settlers, nor the Aboriginal population, but the practices of both groups at the interface of their social and political engagement. The ethnographic task was to explore the fields of sociality of people who call Kuranda home, in order to discover how they make it such, through their practices of *place-making*.

The thesis is built around a number of linked situational analyses of conflicts that have arisen in the town in connection with both public and private space. These conflicts are analysed and interpreted in terms of Victor Turner's concept of social drama. The social dramas include public performances of protest and, in turn, generate theatrical and other staged performances which allow Kuranda people to reflect on their social situations. These performances are explained as resistance practices of *implacement*.

The power of the bureaucratic order is felt by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. However they are differentially constituted within it. Unlike non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal peoples' historical and contemporary experience of the constituting force of the state is one of total domination. These different experiences of power are expressed in the various performances of protest analysed in this thesis.

Through performance both the indigenous people and the Kuranda settlers confront and resist the discursive practices which generate the categorical identities that constrain them. Performance allows them to explore different possibilities of being and, by bringing body memory into the limelight, to interrogate discursive practices which define the limits of human experience and memory as being exclusively furnished by the human mind.

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I declare that this thesis is my own work and has not been submitted in any form for another degree or diploma at any university or other institution of tertiary education. Information derived from the published or unpublished work of others has been acknowledged in the text and a list of references is given.

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