Towards a Theory of Landscape Iconoclasm

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'Landscape: the land escapes (1) when we try to seize it with our maps, satellites, geographic information systems and Street Views, land is what evades our surveillance (2) land is the terrain of escape.' (Cubitt 2012)

'Since the middle of the twentieth century, the claim that something is art does not imply what it might have meant at the end of the nineteenth century, when it was made out to be a hallmark of European high and bourgeois society.' (Heyd 2012, 287)

The destruction of Indigenous rock art sites in the Pilbara district in Western Australia has become a natural sight within the mining landscape of the area. Whilst much of the destruction is explained as acts of vandalism and as a result of the industrial activities that are propelling the Australian economy, I claim that a new theory of iconoclasm is needed to explain fully this disastrous example of heritage conservation. Henceforth, in order to explain the destruction of the Murujuga/Burrup Peninsula petroglyphs, the largest archaeological site in the world, this paper develops the theory of landscape iconoclasm. This theory states that the destruction of Indigenous landscapes can be compared to the destruction of religious images, by analysing the inherent symbolic functions of iconoclasm, together with those of heritage, the better to elucidate the state of affairs in the Murujuga/Burrup Peninsula. Furthermore, by drawing from Aboriginal mythology and art-historical and anthropological theories, the theory of landscape iconoclasm is able to explain the destruction of archaeological sites within a framework that falls outside prevalent discourses of heritage.

The Burrup

Known as *Murujuga* ('hip bone sticks out') in local Ngayarda languages, the Burrup Peninsula (the Burrup) is part of the Dampier Archipelago, located in the coastal Pilbara region of Western Australia (Fig. 1). The area is said to host the world's largest concentration of petroglyphs — rock-art motifs produced by a reductive process such as pecking or abrading (Bednarik 2003) — with the number of motifs estimated to be of the order of one million (McDonald & Veth 2006, 149; Vinnicombe 2002, 3). The high frequency of Indigenous sites across the archipelago creates a *continuous archaeological landscape* (McDonald & Veth 2005, 83), and arguably the largest rock-art site in the world. Partly due to the vast size of the peninsula, in the 1960s it was chosen as the location for major industrial development, which has since desecrated this Indigenous cultural landscape. Researchers estimate that 5–25 per cent of rock art on the Burrup has been removed or destroyed as a result of iron mining, industrial expansion and poor archaeological advice (Bednarik 2002, 30; 2006, 26; Donaldson 2009, 512). Up until 2004, less than 14 per cent of land on the Burrup had been affected by industry (McDonald & Veth 2006, 34). Furthermore, the Hon. John Ford, from the Western Australia Legislative Council Hansard (16 August 2005), acknowledged that 7.2 per cent of petroglyphs and 4 per cent of archaeological sites (1682 petroglyphs and 119 archaeological sites) of the total of all archaeological sites were destroyed between 1972 and 2005. In 2002, the late rock-art expert Patricia Vinnicombe believed that 1760 boulders bearing rock art had been relocated and up to 400 sites desecrated. Vinnicombe further noted that, despite the limitless research, education and cultural tourism potential, there was no organization responsible for the management and study of the Burrup's

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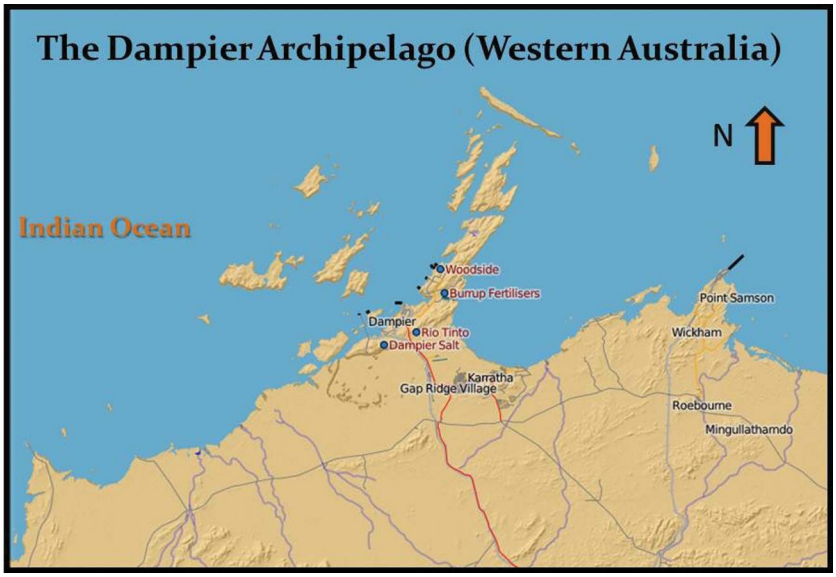


Figure 1. *(Colour online) The Burrup Peninsula (Murujuga), Western Australia. The main companies operating in the area are highlighted in red. (Map: José Antonio González, 2013).*

remarkable cultural heritage. She regretted that in the near future the petroglyphs would be seen in a completely different landscape as a result of the destruction caused by the industrialization of the area. The future of the Burrup, she stated, was determined by a lack of responsibility in the present (Vinnicombe 2002, 20).

Although the Pilbara was known to explorers by the seventeenth century and investigated by ethnographers, anthropologists and linguists since the turn of the twentieth, the rock art of the Burrup was not studied in any great detail until the 1960s and 1970s when its outstanding value was first recognized. In the late 1970s, this recognition was underlined by renowned rock-art expert Michel Lorblanchet, who declared that the Dampier Archipelago contained one of 'the most impressive clusters of [rock art] sites' he had ever seen (in Vinnicombe 2002, 7). Academic recognition for the area was later achieved when research theses were written by scholars in the early 1980s, as well as reports by the now abolished Department of Aboriginal Sites (DAS), created in 1970 as an initiative of the Western Australian Museum to study Aboriginal rock-art sites.

Due to the establishment of industry, archaeological surveys were undertaken, commissioned by those companies responsible for the development. These surveys increased knowledge about the rock art, but they were limited only to those areas devoted to hosting future facilities. To date, no survey has covered the entire area and recorded every rock-art motif, primarily because such a task would carry a very high cost and take a considerable amount of time to complete, estimated in the order of AUD$20 million over some 10 years (K. Mulvaney, pers. comm., September 2010).

By the 1990s–2010s, further surveys had been carried out and the bibliography on Burrup rock art expanded considerably (see, for example, Bednarik 2002; 2007; 2011; Bird & Hallam 2006; Lorblanchet 1992; McDonald & Veth 2005; 2006; 2009; Mulvaney 2009; 2010; 2011; Veth *et al.* 1993; Vinnicombe 2002). Huge coverage by Western Australian newspapers reported on the situation that the Burrup was facing, and the active 'Dampier Campaign', initiated by rock-art researcher Robert Bednarik in 1969–70, attracted more attention. Bednarik's campaign was further publicized in 2006 when an episode of '60 Minutes' was broadcast across Australia, drawing attention to the destruction of petroglyphs at a national level. This shows that an awareness of the destruction of rock art in the Burrup has moved beyond the academic arena, where destruction of art is mainly considered iconoclasm, and it has now entered the realm of public opinion, where the destruction is usually referred to as vandalism. I will return to this point later in the paper.

But the question remains: how is it possible that the largest rock-art site in the world is subject to such destruction and neglect? To begin with, few of the descendants of the original inhabitants of the area remaining have

> much traditional geographic or cultural knowledge of the landscape [...]. No one claimed to have been born there or had died there. No-one claimed direct mythological or totemic links with the Burrup

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> Peninsula or any economic dependence on either the land or the sea. (Veth *et al.* 1993, 170)

This means that there is no claim of site ownership, and that it has been difficult to identify the authors of the rock art. It is in fact claimed that the Margas spirits made some[1] — ancestral people who configured the social order during the Dreamtime (Wright 1965, 106; 1968, 52). The Margas (or Marga) provided food and created the guidelines (Law) that the people should follow. According to Indigenous informants, the Law was as strong as the boulders that now bear the rock art and the teachings. The petroglyphs are symbols of the deeper meaning and reality of the myths surrounding the area, and representations of the myth and ritual ornamentation used to express the corpus of traditional belief (Palmer 1977, 45). Knowing all this changes Westerners' perspectives on the land, because proving ownership of land through texts has been recognized fundamentally as a Western, logocentric concept (see Carter 2010; Collins 2005; Derrida 1998; Gelder & Jacobs 1998) that overrides Indigenous authority. In contrast, Australian Indigenous cultures have used art (rock, cave and bark paintings for example) as a means of asserting their land rights. The heart of the issue is the clash of cultures. Native Title and Land rights, based on a Western concept of ownership, are the only legal means by which Indigenous people can attempt to *prove* that their land is actually theirs. Sometimes this legal tool takes the form of heritage legislation.

Influenced by the outcome of the Mabo decision in 1992 and the subsequent creation of the *Native Title Act* (1993), in the early 2000s five Indigenous groups (Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo, Ngarluma, Yindjibarndi, Yaburarra and Mardudhunera, grouped as Ngarluma/Yindjibarndi, Yaburarra/Mardudhunera and Wong-Goo-Tt-Oo) claimed to have direct links with the Burrup and applied for Native Title rights. Only the Ngarluma/Yindjibarndi secured rights, after the Australian Federal Court granted them in 2005. Although the Ngarluma/Yindjibarndi are the lawful owners of an area where the Burrup lies, according to the Burrup and Maitland Industrial Estates Agreement (BMIEA), the Native Title agreement for the Burrup no longer exists.

As part of the BMIEA agreement, freehold title was handed over to an Approved Body Corporate, composed of the three registered Indigenous claimant groups. This action enabled the State of Western Australia to acquire Native Title rights to allow industrial development to expand across southern parts of the Burrup. Support was also provided to develop a conservation area estate to ensure protection of Indigenous cultural heritage. The agreement also envisioned a series of economic and community benefits for the Indigenous groups, including education and training and a stake in future land developments. In return, 60 per cent of the non-industrial land on the peninsula was leased back to the state of Western Australia to be jointly handled as a Conservation Reserve by the Approved Body Corporate and the then Department of Conservation and Land Management (now the Department of Parks and Wildlife and the Department of Environment Regulation). By defining the land as non-industrial, it created 'an identifiable landmass that could be nominated to the National Estate and meaningfully managed for its conservation values' (McDonald & Veth 2005, 166).

Indeed, assessments have been made in order to seek nomination of the site to UNESCO's World Heritage List (see for example McDonald & Veth 2011; Anon 2012), but the Australian government has not yet formally nominated the site for inclusion on the UNESCO list. At a national level, the Australian Heritage Council (AHC) has been considering the Burrup and Dampier Archipelago National Heritage sites since 2007. Finally, in 2013 the Burrup became Western Australia's 100th National Park. Within the state of Western Australia, however, the site is principally recognized for its rich deposits of gas and iron ore and not for its cultural value. The area is also important to non-Indigenous employees working in the industries established there, since it is the place where they work, live and have built significant social relationships over many years. Non-Indigenous stories and connections attached to the site have already emerged.[2] Clearly, the site is multivalent. As a result, this heritage site is defined on several levels — international, national, state, local and Indigenous.

Discourses of heritage

Seven years ago, Homi Bhabha (2009, 46–7) told us that we should embrace a hybrid discourse of heritage ('part yours, part mine') that truly acknowledges the dispossession and possession of tangible and intangible heritage. Have we achieved that? The secularization of the Dampier Archipelago, through the destruction of sacred Indigenous sites in the Burrup, is actually a *privatization* of the sacred space. Bhabha claims that heritage is the ambivalent result of the clash between barbarism and civilization. It is 'as much about the discontinuity of people as indeed it is about continuity' (Artworks 2008). The destroyer, in other words, is the barbarian inside the civilized world and the aftermath produces dispossessed sites where civilization and barbarism are close together. 'What

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happens to you as you face the threshold of barbarism, knowing that civilization is only on the other side of the door and there is an open passage between them?' Bhabha asks (Bhabha 2009, 46). The Dampier Archipelago is thus a contested space within postcolonial multicultural Australia: what history is going to prevail? Who owns the heritage and how is it interpreted? Iconoclasm serves as a powerful tool to demarcate a territory and define a group in relation to other religious, cultural and social groups (van Asselt 2007, 2). Thus, it is in this scenario of ambivalence and tension that this prehistoric and Indigenous rock art is perceived in Australia and how we can account for its destruction.

In this paper, I liken ideas about destruction of art and ideas about rock art, using the discourse of heritage and value as it has developed in the Australian archaeological discourse of heritage. Perhaps thinking about iconoclasm in regard to the destruction of the Burrup's petroglyphs is misleading, because the case goes beyond the destruction of images: it also includes the destruction of a sacred landscape. Is it, then, *landscape iconoclasm*? I believe that we are obsessed with meaning, and even destruction has meaning. For this reason, the destruction of the Burrup's petroglyphs has been compared to hypothetical situations where the same scenario would unfold at European pre-Historic sites. But instead of comparing the Burrup to other destructions, it is necessary to understand it and let it signify on its own terms.

As late as 1975, Indigenous sites represented a problem for the Australian academic community because they were not integrated into the wider picture of Australian history, whilst the discipline of conservation had done little to preserve the surviving examples, because 'Aboriginal antiquities' in Australia were considered a 'low priority' (Edwards 1975, 46). In contrast, in other parts of the world, remnants of past cultures (Altamira, Lascaux, Stonehenge, Machu Picchu, the Smithsonian National Museum of the American Indian in Washington, DC, and the National Museum of Anthropology and History in Mexico City, to name a few) were viewed with national pride and exhibited as part of the tourism industry in their respective countries. The ongoing destruction of Indigenous rock-art sites that continues today is a reflection of the disastrous heritage mismanagement and segregation of Indigenous culture by the Australian government and the Australian archaeological discourse of heritage. What the Australian government and the archaeologists who practised this archaeological discourse of heritage in the 1970s did not understand is that it would not be possible to preserve Indigenous art without preserving the intangible Indigenous heritage (songs, stories and rituals). Disregarding the value of intangible heritage is still practised in some parts of Western Australia, where mining companies are contributing to the economic development of Australia whilst destroying the cultures that are traditionally regarded as the custodians and owners of the heritage. Even though there are conservation agreements between Indigenous communities and the operating companies in place in some parts of Western Australia, to mitigate the impact on Indigenous heritage sites, the benefits for Indigenous people of living in a sacred site are not evident. How much does the local community actually gain from living in a sacred Indigenous site? To what extent has recognition as heritage sites helped to preserve the art and the Indigenous community? These questions were left unanswered for many years until Indigenous art and culture became heritage and stopped being an ambivalent half-heritage. But scholars are able now to demonstrate the few available benefits which the Indigenous communities receive in exchange for their land (Langton & Longbottom 2012; Pearson 2007, 29), such as royalty and mining payments extended to employment and community development.

Critical studies of heritage concerning postcolonial sites, such as the Burrup, are also widely known (Smith 2004; 2006a,b; Smith & Waterton 2009). Moreover, literature on the current practices of heritage management in sacred places between archaeologists, Indigenous people and the public alike has also been produced (Carmichael *et al.* 1994; Colwell-Chanthaphonh & Ferguson 2008; Davidson *et al.* 1995; Davison *et al.* 1991; Ruberton 2008; Swidler *et al.* 1997). These works open up the discussion to the question 'who owns the past?', by engaging in case studies that frame the definition of heritage taking into account the influence that politics have towards Indigenous heritage sites in postcolonial societies. Likewise, the work of John Carman (2002; 2005) is especially important, since it analyses the processes through which objects, places and sites become valuable and meaningful in terms of heritage. The problem of value is indeed a major concern amongst heritage scholars because it negatively impacts on the conservation of Indigenous heritage sites like the Burrup.

In sum, the destruction of Indigenous rock art on the Burrup is caused by the out-of-date but nevertheless current practices of conservation, which often neglect the core of Indigenous heritage in Australia. Many heritage officers in Australia were trained in the fallacious belief that Indigenous heritage was not valuable in Indigenous terms, and only valuable from an archaeological perspective. Thus it was neither properly protected nor conserved. The whole prac-

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tice and ideological apparatus behind the protection and conservation of Indigenous heritage, *ab initio*, was determined to protect and conserve the valuable artefacts that could be seen, touched and understood by the majority of people without too much effort. Heritage is simply a *modern response* towards an object that we may or may not understand, but that we should nevertheless consider valuable because of its historical importance, aesthetic, temporal or other qualities (González Zarandona 2012). The framework of heritage has been extremely helpful in considering many attitudes, values and possible meanings of the Burrup in a single concept. But at the same time, it is not enough to contain all the meanings that all interested parties would like to project onto the site. Heritage theorists and practitioners are confronted with the harsh fact that heritage cannot be defined in simple terms. Each cultural group defines it differently.

Moreover, heritage acts as heterotopia where other meanings coexist: for example, the possibility of heritage being sacred art, secular art or art. For this reason, we should embrace both possession and dispossession in order to build a discourse of heritage 'that truly [understands] the trials and tribulations of the ethical [. . .] obligation of cultural transmission' (Bhabha 2009, 47). But for successful cultural transmission to happen, it must be the local Indigenous community who tells the story of their site. Otherwise, this *heritagization* of Indigenous sites further postcolonizes Indigenous landscapes and Indigenous people, by offering limited protection to their sites, in exchange for providing an identity to Indigenous people as Indigenous, according to Western standards (cf. Ritter 2003). How, then, can we reconcile the politics of images in Australia and the clash between different Indigenous and European perspectives? Especially if we take into account that the petroglyphs are *their* (local, Indigenous) images, but they are also *our* (national, international) images (for Gelder & Jacobs (1998, 92) these kinds of Indigenous claims are uncanny, because they turned the familiar into unfamiliar: 'what is "ours" is also "theirs": our home is also unhomely.') This is problematic because, even though the institution of heritage appropriates the image, the destruction of the same image is not properly addressed. Some might call it vandalism, defacement or graffiti, but it is clear that it is not.

Towards a theory of landscape iconoclasm

The concept of landscape iconoclasm starts with Robert Bevan's claim (2006) that places with certain meanings are selected for oblivion with deliberate intent. For this reason, Bevan proposes that the destruction of these places is part of an ethnic cleansing, linking the destruction of certain sites to *cultural genocide*. This notion has also been reviewed by Falah (1996), who claims that ethnic cleansing and 'place annihilation' (he also calls it 'landscape erasure') are both frameworks that explain the destruction of historic buildings and other treasures of civilization. The annihilation of space can be intentional or as part of collateral damage. Falah's analysis of the destruction of Palestinian cultural relics by the Israeli government is useful in order to highlight some of the features that characterize this destruction, as they are also evident in the case of the Burrup. Erasing cultural heritage is an extension of the destruction of the culture, and absence of any government policy to preserve cultural monuments contributes to their demise. Neglected and rejected by colonial perceptions, Indigenous sites like Murujuga are destroyed because the mining companies consider them to be obstacles to fulfilling their operation: *this is the crux of the matter*. Furthermore, since authorities, mining companies and the local non-Indigenous population consider Indigenous sites as abandoned property, the physical existence of such sites ultimately depends on the goodwill of social activists and government authorities that normally disregard the history and significance of such sites. Destroying Indigenous sites that are considered to be cultural signifiers continually enhances the political goals of diminishing the Indigenous past and weakening Indigenous claims to the land (for example, the debate after Grahame Walsh's claims in the 1990s that Australian Indigenous people could not have authored the Indigenous rock art in the Kimberley (Western Australia), as it was too sophisticated) (McNiven & Russell 1995; 1997; 2007). In cases where specific sites have been preserved for tourist purposes, archaeological evidence generally designates a continuation that extends back many thousands of years. In this way, the Indigenous cultural contributions to a site are trivialized and considered 'primitive'.

The destruction of significant historical and cultural sites for a certain group is thus deemed a necessary step towards the establishment of a new power, symbol and idea. Destruction, obliteration, substitution or replacement of an image takes on the same meaning as the aim to erase an entire culture. Thus, for Boris Groys (2002, 282), iconoclasm desecrates the idols of the other by serving a historical purpose: from pagan temples to Christian churches to Protestant churches, which were destroyed 'in the name of the religion of Reason', so in turn reason was 'iconoclastically attacked' by the State in Central and East Europe. Later, all these monuments were replaced by

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the 'even more powerful religion of unrestrained consumerism'.

Perhaps this reductionist view of iconoclasm may seem simple to some. However, it is the very nature of the concept of iconoclasm that makes it suitable for a variety of actions that are somehow loosely connected, but need an explanation. Following Groys' argument, the function of iconoclasm is thus a 'mechanism of historical innovation', that re-evaluates 'values through a process of constantly destroying old values and introducing new ones in their place'. Iconoclasm serves a double function because it clears the path and establishes the new ideology. Groys argues (2002, 283) that the assessment of this kind of actions left a bitter aftertaste in the past (especially for the conquered), but it is now seen differently as our society 'idolizes innovation, creativity, and progress', so we are now able to consider these destructions as a necessary step in the road towards a purportedly progress. Old idols, like old ideas, need to be replaced. However, for Groys the story does not end here. There is also the question of the 'other' idols: the new idols, as each destructive action 'also represents a gesture signalling that the new gods are not powerful enough, or at least not as powerful as the old gods. And in many cases, this gesture has proved altogether effective: the new religious movements were suppressed and the power of the old gods reasserted' (Groys 2002, 283).

This, of course, presents iconoclasm as a lineal mechanism that separates winners from losers. But Groys warns us (2002, 283) that we should not see the aftermath of an iconoclasm with such categorical distinction, because witnesses 'are free to choose which of the two sides they refer to identify with, all depending on personal views of history'. In addition, he claims history is composed of revivals and innovation (more of the former than of the latter), 'whereby most innovations make their appearance as revivals and most revivals as innovations'. Of course, he deems that history does not distinguish between victors and losers, but (history) 'presents itself as a sequence of re-evaluations of values without any discernible general direction'. Furthermore, it is difficult to know 'whether defeat means a decline, or victory an increase in power', because victory 'leads to "appropriation" by the status quo, whereas defeat might possibly turn into a later, ultimately victory capable of re-evaluing the status quo' (Groys 2002, 284).

The replaced values in the Burrup belong to a long-standing culture, whilst the introduced values are economic: extraction of mineral resources translated into profit. According to Colin Barnett, premier of Western Australia (*Red Dirt Dreaming Part Two – The Pilbara*, 2013) 'Western Australia is arguably the world's largest and leading mining economy', producing 'over 60 per cent of Australia's mineral production [primarily iron ore] and around 75 per cent of Australia's oil and gas production'. The production amounts to 110 billion dollars a year. 'Western Australia produces over 20 per cent of world iron ore production' and 'around 20 million tonnes a year of natural gas or LNG'. Barnett expects to triple those numbers before the end of the 2010s, noting that it provides 73 per cent of all of Australia's exports to China. The Pilbara accounts for two-thirds of the total production. According to Carman (2005, 59) the difference between heritage and resources resides in the use-value that resources have, whilst heritage does not have use-value because it cannot be used. Moreover, the use of heritage as if it were a resource (natural or not) involves someone being entitled to use it as a resource, simply because he or she owns it. For Carman (2005, 121), this is precisely the heart of the issue, because in this manner heritage is understood in economic terms (see also Moore 1999, 230–31). In comparison to other iconoclastic acts, this is not a case where images are being replaced by words. What is replaced is the idea of a transcendent being or beings; it is the destruction of images, language and culture.

Iconoclasm, iconoclash and *hericlash*

Iconoclasm has entered a new phase of complex history and it can be argued that it now belongs to popular culture. At least it appears to me as such since 2001, when the Buddhas of Bamiyan became the very *icon* of iconoclasm. Later, in a sequence of a 2011 Hollywood disaster film, one of the characters tells the fictional director of the Louvre, whilst safeguarding the 'Mona Lisa' in a bunker, that 'there are too many fanatics out there that could damage her. Just think about the beautiful Buddha statues they blew up in Afghanistan'. The brief sequence confirmed to me that, once the exclusive topic of scholarly research, iconoclasm has now been appropriated by popular culture, sometimes disguised as vandalism. According to art historian Dario Gamboni (1997, 18–19), the term 'vandalism' is more often used when the motivation for the destruction is unknown, whilst 'iconoclasm' implies an intention, sometimes a doctrine. As such, vandalism suggests 'blindness, ignorance, stupidity, baseness or lack of taste', and the actions designated as iconoclasm 'have a meaning'. Thus, I could not agree more with Serge Grusinzki when he claims (2001, 2) that:

> The war of images is perhaps one of the major events of the end of the twentieth century. Difficult to define, entangled in journalistic commonplaces or the meanderings of a hermetic technological sophisti-

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> cation, this war covers – beyond the struggles for power – the social and cultural stakes whose present and future importance we are yet unable to measure.

Thus, the difficulty resides in distinguishing between different frameworks, where iconoclasm is the attack on religious images and overthrow of settled beliefs, whilst the destruction of art involves aesthetical and ethical debates (see, for example, Caygill 2008, 165). Moreover, as Jonathan Jones (2013) recently argued in *The Guardian*, iconoclasm's secularity [in modern Britain] is highlighted by the fact that iconoclasts are not seen any more as attackers on religious idols, but on art.

Iconoclasm may explain many types of destruction, including that of art. But in the case of the Burrup rock art, my own research indicated to me that the term 'vandalism' was simply not enough and other options needed to be considered before calling this destruction 'iconoclasm'. It seemed to me that the destruction of Indigenous rock art could not and did not comply with the established characteristics of the destruction of works of art on the one hand, and on the other it could not be explained as an act of vandalism or the destruction of religious images. It was then that I started to consider that this case might represent a new kind of destruction, which had not been considered before: that of *landscape iconoclasm*.

Understanding, interpreting and reading landscapes is now largely commonplace in Cultural Geography, Art History and Anthropology, because it is now accepted that the concept of landscape is socially constructed and that its meanings derive from the analysis of the varied relations that humans establish within the landscape itself. Landscapes are studied just as texts, symbols, signs and ideas are also studied. They are seen as spaces, places and sites (Baker 2003; Baker & Biger 1992; Bender 1992; 1993; Bender & Winer 2001; Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove & Daniels 1988; Hirsch & O'Hanlon 1995; Lefebvre 1974; Mitchell 1992; Sauer 1925; Stewart & Strathern 2003; Tilley 1994; 2004; Ucko & Layton 1999).

Land is transformed into a landscape by the cultural features (like rock art) that mark the land (Heyd 2005, 46), and thus the destruction of rock art in the Dampier Archipelago amounts to landscape iconoclasm. The Burrup is a particular kind of space that represents a unique Australian landscape, because several groups of stakeholders who work and live in the same area compete for the control of the land (Bednarik 2002; 2006; 2011; Gonzalez Zarandona 2011; Mulvaney 2011).

I came to the conclusion that a landscape iconoclasm was only possible if I reviewed the concept of *iconoclash* together with the concept of heritage. This would provide the opportunity to analyse the Burrup as a threatened heritage site, together with the implications of the destruction of religious images. In the Burrup's case, that means the rock art.

Furthermore, I also concluded that the destruction of images taking place in the Burrup was much more than a simple, irrational act of destruction, a wanton and senseless act. I realized that it was difficult to explain the destruction in terms of idolatry and fear. I knew that these images were being destroyed, but the motives seemed to me much deeper than what I could see on the surface. I then decided to apply Hans Belting's concept of iconoclasm.

Iconoclasm has been defined as an intentional act to dishonour a belief system. Thus, for Mitchell (2008, 186) it is 'the destruction of the "idol of the other"'. For Belting (2005a, 54) it eradicates 'the icons of the enemy in the imagination of a given society'. For Brubaker (2012, 3–4) iconoclasm is the debate that took place in Byzantium in the seventh and ninth centuries, noting that the actual 'image struggle' (the redirection of sacred portraits in Christian worship) should be called *iconomachy*. In the Burrup case these definitions might be problematic, because we cannot talk about idols and prove the degree of intentionality of this destruction by the destroyers. Evidence for the creation of the images by Margas spirits brings another layer of complexity, as this can increase or decrease the power of an image, thereby playing a positive or negative role in their preservation or destruction, respectively. Moreover, the reference of the *acheiropoieta* (not made by human hands) in the world is inaccessible to human beings, except through the petroglyphs. It is a matter of perspective: on the one hand, the Indigenous people believe the petroglyphs and the Burrup are 'invested with souls or inhabited by spirits (either good or bad)' (Freedberg 1989, 284), while on the other some industrial developers believed that the site was valuable only for its mineral resources.

Iconoclasm also encompasses all the destruction that falls outside the preconceived classifications of western monotheism, because some images are as universal as their destruction: they are human creations (Apostolos-Cappadona 2005, 4279). The problem in understanding the destruction of Indigenous heritage is that we aim to explain ancient images using contemporary theory (Hodder 2012), because we firmly believe that images that have no theories to explain them are more difficult to protect than those which have been extensively studied.[3] The meaning, function and uses of the petroglyphs on the Burrup were never recorded (in a Western sense), so contemporary responses and interpretations based on comparative

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Figure 2. *Example of rock art in the landscape (Murujuga/Burrup). (Photograph: José Antonio González, September 2010.)*

studies to them are all we have available. Although the meanings of the petroglyphs will remain unknown or uncertain, the concept of heritage provides not only a framework, but also an illusory security that it might prevent their further neglect or destruction in the twenty-first century. In sum, the study and analysis of iconoclastic acts are predicated upon the meaning and purpose of the images in question, as well as their power. The meaning, purpose and power of the Burrup petroglyphs were undermined by the neglect and indifference of the colonialist mindset, the dominant cultural values and later by the Australian archaeological discourse of heritage.

Through heritage, it is possible to recognize the intangible meanings that contemporary Indigenous people allege they feel. Instead of analysing the destruction of an image (iconoclasm), we should be aiming to create a *semioclasm*, a study of the destruction of meaning. Rather than creating another discourse of heritage, it is imperative to create a *hericlash*: the destruction of a definition of heritage in which invisible meanings and unseen values are not recognized. According to Latour (2002, 34), *iconoclash* is an act where there is an uncertainty about the mediation of a scientific fact, religious idea or an artistic image. Their destruction, as we have seen, might even be constructive. But Latour (2002, 34) also defines iconoclash as a destructive action towards an already destroyed object. Use of the concept of heritage as a modern response to Indigenous rock art simply acted as the redundant gesture of an iconoclash. Where images (rock art) and ideas (Indigenous Law) have been destroyed, they are replaced with other mediated images and ideas (heritage). Just as scientists debunk old models by creating new models, heritage officers (and consumers) install an ambivalent medium where the spirits once lived. Denying the power of the *acheiropoieta*, they break them by installing mediated images and ideas made by human agency. On this basis, the destruction of Indigenous heritage on the Burrup is a hericlash, because the site has already been destroyed and desecrated by the same label of heritage (see Figure 3). Heritage (in its many forms: labels, charts, policies) provides protection but it also destroys. It provides (Western) significance to the petroglyphs by losing their Aboriginality so that they can be considered heritage. It makes the invisible visible (a process of commodification and fetishization, nonetheless) at the



Figure 3. *Example of industrial intervention within the rock-art landscape in the Burrup. Photograph: José Antonio González, September 2011.)*

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Figure 4. *By fencing off the removed boulders, it was thought that the boulders were being saved from destruction. I argue that putting the boulders into a compound and stating that access is restricted with a sign is a hericlash. (Photograph: José Antonio González, September 2010.)*

expense of taking away its authenticity. And this is very important to consider, because authenticity is one of the most important values that heritage assessments take into account. This is why I argue that heritage is a mechanism of inclusion and exclusion, because to be considered universal, a site must lose its local values.

Heritage practitioners proclaim heritage to be a clean process of mediation, when in reality it is a sullied and ambivalent medium (for example, Logan & Mackay 2013, 10), because it is merely a response that aims to provide a deferred value to fill the void left by colonialism. This is also linked to Probst's argument (2012, 11), that heritage is linked to death: the original owners must die before their possessions become the heritage of the living (for another view on ambivalent heritage, see Chadha 2006). But what happens when the destruction occurs in a setting such as a sacred landscape and the culture that created and understood that landscape was exterminated?

Landscape iconoclasm

To conclude this paper, I present a new theory of landscape iconoclasm. This theory has, as its starting point, the anthropological theory of the image devised by German art historian Hans Belting, who proposes an ongoing history of the image that is not limited to the discourse of art history. Belting claims that images should be understood in a triadic relation comprising image, medium and body (Fig. 5).

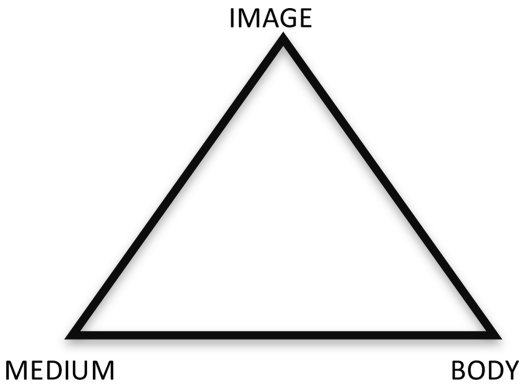


Figure 5. *Belting's triad.*

Medium is the carrier or host where the image is deposited; it is the medium in which the image is made. The body (the brain) is responsible for making, projecting, remembering, archiving and perceiving the images. If the medium is the filter that allows us to identify images as images (as opposed to living bodies or lifeless objects as the iconoclasts identified them), then the body is the channel through which the image is censored or transformed. Sometimes the medium and the body are conflated, as in the case of language, where verbal images need a body to be projected. For this reason, Belting (2005b, 304–6) considers the medium to be a technical or artificial body 'designed for substituting bodies via a symbolic procedure'. Belting does not consider the concept of heritage, but he does touch upon what he calls the

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politics of images and the colonization of images, both relevant aspects for the theory of landscape iconoclasm I propose. As Belting (2005b, 305) proposes in his iconology:

> The politics of images relies on their mediality, as mediality usually is controlled by institutions and serves the interests of political power (even when it, as we experience it today, hides behind a seemingly anonymous transmission). The politics of images needs a medium to turn an image into a picture.

If we agree that the medium in this case is heritage, then the image is the petroglyph. The Burrup was converted into a heritage site to make it visible and assigned a (positive) value, overcoming former negative values such as the colonial gaze and the rude aesthetics that this gaze practised towards Indigenous rock art. But as previously noted, heritage is nothing more than a modern response that provides a contemporary significance to a group of ancient images that are endangered. The rendering of images from one medium to another is understood differently in different contexts. In some contexts they are more meaningful to us than others. Some are given symbolic meaning and those that are not are susceptible to being destroyed, either literally or metaphorically. In the case of the Burrup petroglyphs, it is in precisely this new medium in which they are situated, heritage, that they find their symbolic meaning and value, despite the fact that petroglyphs had value and meaning to Indigenous groups for thousands of years before the petroglyphs were labelled as heritage.

The politics of the image in Australia deployed a medium-like heritage to post-colonize Indigenous images in the twentieth century in the same manner that the colonial explorers rudely gazed at them in the nineteenth. In this sense, politics is understood as either a struggle for power or a group of practices and institutions that aim to solve the clash derived from conflicting interests over power, money and liberty (Chilton & Schaffner 2002, 5). In the first case, in being caught up in a struggle for power, the image (petroglyph) was negatively perceived through the colonial body; in the latter, the petroglyphs were perceived as heritage (medium) and Indigenous heritage (picture). In the case of the Burrup, the institution of heritage, which serves the interests of many stakeholders, regulates the politics of the image. For this reason, the medium of heritage is not the best tool for Western viewers to understand Indigenous images, because it reinforces the idea that they are different and, as such, cannot be explained in satisfactorily Western terms. Rethinking heritage as a process of mediation (*iconoclash*: a post-colonization of Indigenous images) sets the context in which we can frame the destruction of the Burrup rock art. But instead of rejecting the images in their own context, Indigenous people still resist the idea that their images are simply heritage. For Indigenous people they are *sublime*: something that cannot be explained but is nevertheless meaningful. Thus, Indigenous people can deploy the artificiality of the concept of heritage, to claim back their land by appealing to the values, instead of the meanings, that the site elicits for them. By using a Western concept of value (heritage) as Western viewers do, Indigenous Traditional Owners would be subverting the heritage system for their own benefit. The ontology of Indigenous images cannot be explained by the concept of heritage, not because it cannot contain them but because they have been post-colonized in terms of heritage.

As Belting shows (2005b, 319), it is when Indigenous images like petroglyphs are considered art in the colony[4] that they are stripped of their political and religious meaning. In Australia, it is the concept of heritage that detaches the political and religious affiliations from the images and the landscape. In the nineteenth century, when the images were discovered by European explorers and settlers, colonial bodies reinterpreted them in negative and ambivalent values, including the bodies that projected the images, and even the medium (the caves and the rocks). Today, we can witness the neutralization of Indigenous art (the image) through another medium (heritage) but neglect the body that created the image. In this case, bodies react to the image but not the medium. For example, the bodies of the ancestral beings called the Margas (the medium fused with the landscape) were dismissed as the mere product of fantasies or elements of mythology. For this reason Belting claims (2005b, 305) that the 'less we take note of a visual medium, the more we concentrate on the image, as if images would come by themselves'.

In Belting's triad (Fig. 5) rock art is a picture that is formed by the rock (its medium), the petroglyph (its image) and the bodies that interact with them. But how can we explain destruction on the Burrup without taking into account the landscape, its most important medium? Of course, Belting does not address this, because for him the medium would be heritage. By reforming, destroying, removing and privatizing the landscape, the industries on the Burrup are acting as iconoclasts, reforming, destroying and removing sacred images, to replace them with their transcendent beings: money and heritage; symbols nonetheless. Indigenous landscapes bear the marks of the ancient beings and heroes who exist(ed) within them, realizing deeds and providing Indigenous people with the guidelines that form the Law. Some of the markings

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which they made in the landscape are petroglyphs. They are therefore significant cultural markings. By applying a Western logic, the landscape is considered a natural site that requires the actions of bodies to transform it so that it can produce goods. This logic could be either derived from John Locke's view on property and land (1988 [1689]) or simply as a division between nature and culture, which in the Indigenous cosmogony is irrelevant.[5] The intangible values of the landscape become invisible to those who choose to believe that the landscape is natural rather than cultural. By destroying a sacred landscape filled with cultural markers (e.g. petroglyphs, bodies of the ancient heroes and ancestral beings, the Margas), the destroyers are not only destroying the image and the medium in which they exist, but are also destroying the body. But whose body is being destroyed?

It is the sacred landscape – the body and the medium – that is being destroyed. It is in the landscape that petroglyphs are made, but it is also the landscape that provides them with cultural significance. The landscape acts as a living medium, which is also a *body*, hence its double status: the Burrup petroglyphs make us aware of the landscape, and vice versa. With the destruction of the landscape, the death of the Margas is performed in a triple sense: in the destruction of the medium (the rocks), the image (the petroglyphs) and their bodies, although Indigenous groups may or may not differentiate between the three senses, as they are one and the same. Thus, from the Indigenous perspective, the destruction clearly amounts to a landscape iconoclasm. From a Western perspective this amounts to a cultural heritage disaster. The Burrup is a mutilated landscape that bears the cultural markings of Indigenous groups, but also of the industries that have established themselves there, and this includes the label of heritage (see Bednarik 2002; 2006; 2011 and Mulvaney 2011 for an account of the many stakeholders in the area and their interests; and Gonzalez Zarandona 2011 for a deeper analysis of the role heritage plays in the Burrup).

Finally, the value of this theory lies in naming this destruction for what it is (a desecration of the sacred landscape: a *hericlash*), rather than using other concepts that do not fully address the destruction of petroglyphs, like vandalism, because this is not only a destruction of an already destroyed material culture, but is also the destruction of a living culture and a form of art, which has been largely marginalized. The study of iconoclasm in regard to landscape is an area of iconoclasm and heritage studies that could be taken into account for further research. In this sense, many forgotten sites could be studied from another perspective. It is not only the destruction of a landscape that this theory takes into account, but how a pre-Historic landscape and a pre-Historic culture can also form part of the *history of art*. For this reason, a theory of landscape iconoclasm can also expand the theory of image, if it is considered as Belting does, rather than considering images as simple units of significance as sometimes in other disciplines such as art history and museology, by abstracting art from its context. The concept of landscape iconoclasm, as applied in this case, is new; however, other researchers had previously analysed rock art and landscape archaeology from different perspectives with different results (see Chippindale & Nash 2004 for an overview of landscape rock-art archaeology and Chapman & Gearey 2013 for analysis of iconoclasm in European prehistoric landscapes).

This landscape iconoclasm, as studied in this manner, will allow other researchers to apply a theory of landscape iconoclasm to overcome the simple scenario of destruction in which images are simply destroyed or defaced, due to different motivations, and achieve a fuller account in regard to (mainly) pre-Historic sites. Furthermore, landscape iconoclasm could be applied to various cultural landscapes, including those of built environments, urban and suburban spaces, and again with specific allusion to some vital debates about struggles in urban revitalization and tensions over ambivalent heritage intersections, public spaces, cultural, religious and social values. Landscapes have value that can be associated with the value inherent to (religious) images (cf. Walsham 2011), and their destruction is well explained as landscape iconoclasm (cf. Chapman & Gearey 2013).

After years of neglect, the sheer artistic significance of the Burrup and its destruction is starting to be recognized (see Anderson 2011; Anon. 2012; Bednarik 2006; Donaldson 2009). Probably in a few years a place on the World Heritage List might be secured, thus forcing industries to leave the site and relocate somewhere else. As a destruction of cultural heritage the Burrup is another statistic in the archaeological record, whereas as a landscape iconoclasm it can find a rightful place in the history of Australian and pre-Historic art, incidentally finding another characteristic that will make it stand out from other archaeological sites, and not having to rely any longer on the fact that it is the largest rock-art (archaeological) site in the world. The Burrup will shed some light on the importance of this site as a truly special place, favoured by many skilled artists. Until then, a theory of landscape iconoclasm adds another string of evidence to recognize the beauty of ancient (pre-Historic) images, by showing how and why they are being destroyed.

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Notes

1. The word 'Marga' in the Ngarluma language possibly means 'man', as similar words are found to have similar meanings: 'maiaga man' and 'myaga' (Palmer 1975, 155). For von Brandenstein, 'Marga' is the contraction of Maralga, a Yindjibarndi word (in Wright 1968, 54). The petroglyphs of the area, not only on Murujuga, were also thought to be made by the Marlu or the Miniyiburu (Dreaming ancestors) (Palmer 1977).
2. The most famous is the story about the 'Red Dog', a stray dog who lived in the area during the 1970s, whose deeds have now become part of local mythology. For example, he is said to have travelled all the way to Japan on a cargo ship and saved the life of a member of the local community, before being attacked by a shark. A film was produced in 2011, directed by Kriv Stenders.
3. Despite many compelling attempts (Raphael 1945; Breuil 1952; Leroi-Gourhan 1971; Clottes & Lewis-Williams 1998; Lewis-Williams 2002) to explain pre-Historic images, these grand theories have not satisfactorily explained them.
4. Two of the first Burrup rock art researchers, Enzo Virili and Robert Bednarik, came from Europe.
5. Gina Reinhart, owner of a Pilbara mining company and allegedly the richest woman in the world, famously remarked: 'Beauty is an iron ore mine' (in Baird 2013).

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