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Signs of a Distant Past: interpretive signage and the representation of Indigenous history in Australian protected areas

This paper will examine how Indigenous cultures and their connections to country are presented to the public in protected areas through a textual analysis of interpretive signage. In protected areas, different representational tropes are used to interpret colonial/settler, natural heritage and Indigenous landscapes and places. Importantly, these representational forms also do significant affective work, particularly in terms of communicating notions of identity and belonging. A key way that this affective intensity plays out is through processes of alienation, though which contemporary communities are distanced from country and history through a distant and detached view of culture, authorised via the template of scientific objectivity. This notion of affect will be explored through a comparative study at Carnarvon Gorge, Gariwerd, and Uluru National Parks.