

The beard

A lecture performance with Ludwig Leichhardt and Wilhelm von Blandowski,
1860|2013 re-enactment

Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll



Fig 1. Leichhardt portrait

Reenactment as temporal collapse of two moments:

1. 6 March 1860 – lecture room half full, half geriatric, low light, cold but stuffy air –
– Wilhelm von Blandowski is called to speak.

2. 27-28 September 2013 - As lecturer on the podium with a panel of men I begin to
unpack and apply a beard to my face. I do this before I begin speaking, focussed on
the glue and the hair and the mirror. The audience laughs uncomfortably. The beard
fits well and the lecture begins.

I have spent years researching the historical figure of Wilhelm von Blandowski and began to identify with him for the failure and madness brought on by his attempt to write and draw an encyclopaedia of Australia. This performance lecture was an admission of this identification -- and a question to the ways researchers begin to resemble their historical subjects yet clothe their affections in a rational denial of identification -- a denial of the death of the author.

Costume: The beard-in-the-field, as opposed to the beard trim for the studio photo (Fig. 1). Ludwig Leichhardt haunted in the centre of Figure 2, I am told as I photograph him, bears “genetic resemblance” to his great great uncle Ludwig Leichhardt. Rather than the genetics cited, I seize upon the hair as some essence of the man. Thus the emulation of the phantom Leichhardt is expressed in Blandowski's hair, an intuitive antennae.

A misplaced moustache, not a monobrow or a very long handlebar moustache on a hot day. *Oh no* I mean a moustache growing from an eyebrow and into a head of hair. Not a normal dirty explorer's head of unwashed, dusty and hardened hair *uhuh* this is closer to the *Haarmenschen*, hairy race that the Habsburg's put on display as curiosities.¹

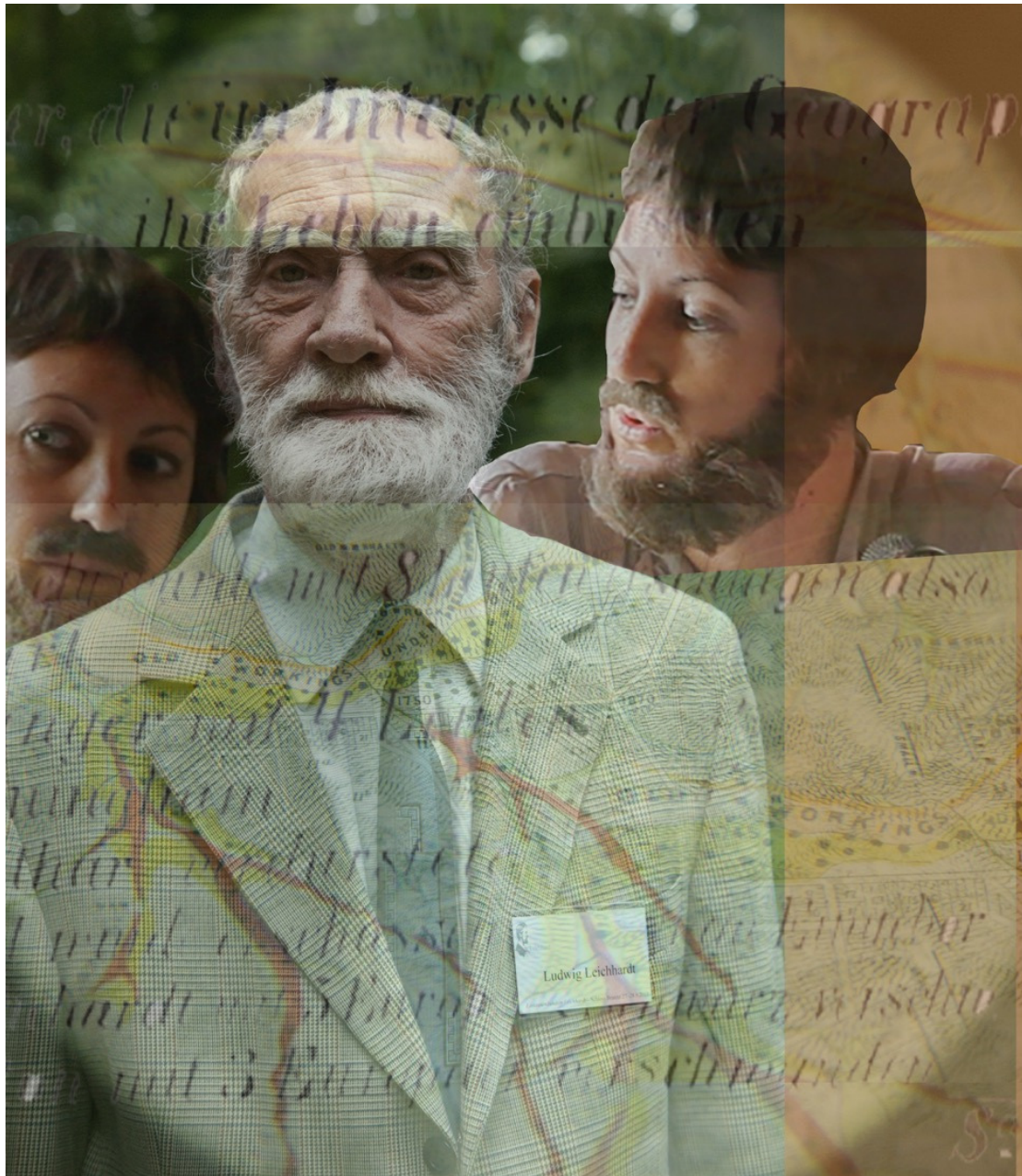


Fig 2. Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, Ludwig Leichhardt and Wilhelm von Blandowski, photographic collage of performance documentation, 2016.

Language: Let us not get hung up on these cosmetic details.

The far more disturbing part of this character is the way he is talking. He is not talking to us because he is delirious, not in a sunstroked, dehydrated heroic survivor delirium. Rather, with the obsession with the notion of the center, of crossing the unknown, he is a martyr to the search for a way through the center of Australia.

Script

Blandowski: So kommen wir in meiner Schilderung heute von den wichtigsten Erforschungen Australiens unternommenen Reisen – eine kurze Übersicht - zu unserem Landsmann Leichhardt, dem es im Jahre 1844 gelungen war, die große Erforschungsreise von Morton Bay (nordöstlich von Sydney) bis Port Essington glücklich zurückzulegen, musste bei seiner zweiten Unternehmung, zu der er sich vier Jahre später gerüstet hatte, seinem Untergang finden; in welcher Gegend weiss man noch heute nicht mit Sicherheit... Es ließ sich zu bald von dem wüsten Charakter des Landes abschrecken.²

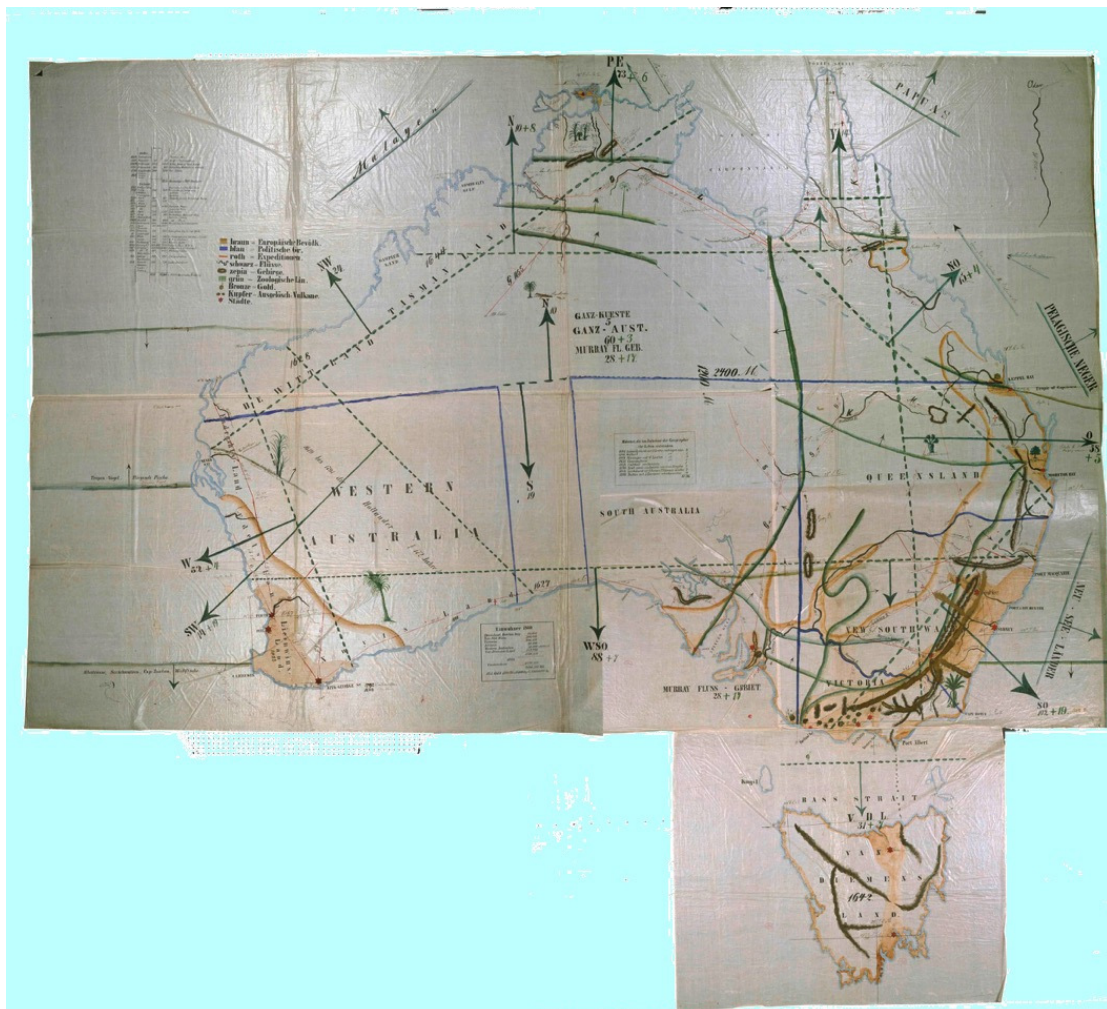


Fig 3. The Map

When Blandowski (1822-1878), a successor of Leichhardt in the exploration of Australia, lectures in Dresden in 1860, he invokes Leichhardt in a central table that reads, “men who gave their lives for Geography, 1848, Leichhardt disappeared with 5

Europeans and 2 Blacks = 7” (Fig 3).³ Thus Leichhardt fills the empty centre of this map of Australia that Blandowski already begun during his ten years in Australia, 1849-1859. There is a synchronicity in that the year Blandowski arrived, funded by a Prussian collector in Hamburg to go as an artisan scientist to Australia, Leichhardt’s disappearance haunted the colony. Blandowski is haunted by the collective fear in the colony of the sudden death that awaited in the centre of this last continent that the Humboldts had not explored.

On the occasion of the Cottbus conference *1001 Leichhardts*, I performed a re-enactment of part of this lecture by Blandowski that dwelt on his fellow German explorer and predecessor. I focussed my re-enactment on the theories in the map that was used as a backdrop to try to woo audiences during the lecture (Fig. 3). This was a map that attempted to explain *everything* about Australia, from the distribution of flora and fauna to the route of every expedition to date.

Contra to Leichhardt’s alliance with the squatocracy, Blandowski did not follow his lead in using the naming of his discoveries to please his sponsors. Instead he named his fauna using the indigenous names he collected for them, mixing the names with nasty characteristics of the Melbourne Philosophical Societies’ elite. Alliances and identification are thus central to Blandowski’s failure to emulate Leichhardt. Can this be read as Blandowski’s resistance to being made economically instrumental by the colonists that he openly despised? Blandowski writes of his ‘friendship’ to the Nerri Nerri, which can be traced through his encyclopaedia. From the two 'Blacks' that he lists 'disappeared' with Leichhardt to the one million that he lists in his demography on the same map, he persistently focusses on Aboriginal people. The *Argus* newspaper reports that Blandowski thus “perverted science” with Indigenous names and his mockery of English science.⁴

As a grubby impersonator on stage, my re-enactment shows Blandowski struggling with Leichhardt’s failure, as a reflection of his own. Mine is an anachronistic performance of Blandowski, playing the madman, the fool, that can speak their mind and can reflect honestly and humorously what could not be said seriously.

What are we doing with Leichhardt after 200 years?



Fig 4. Knut as Elvis

The draw that re-enactments have for their actors includes some mad thrill in the possibility of channelling, embodying, resurrecting, understanding or identifying with someone else intersubjectively through performance. The disappearance, premature death, and its correlation to fame is a more obscure version of Elvis, or Knut, no less haunted by failing stardom and sudden death (Fig. 4).⁵

Is this a threat, the audience asks, that some mutation of the bearded white man will eternally return?

Did I become a zombie Leichhardt through the re-enactment, a Leichhardt back from the dead and haunting his successors?

A Mary Magdalene in desert exile, visited by Blandowski, another spectacular failure in the legacy of nineteenth century Australian explorers. Akin to Icarus, Leichhardt flew into the sun. While the plows of squatters and gold diggers forged their jagged lines, he aimed quietly at what turned out to be the deadly inferno.⁶ It didn't announce itself as such, and he dipped out of sight while we were not yet watching.

Notes

¹ See also: Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, 'The Inbetweenness of the Vitrine: Three Paraerga of a Feather Headdress', P. Basu (ed.), *The In-Betweenness of Things: Materialising Mediation and Movement between Worlds ~ A Cabinet of Curiosities ~*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2017), pp. 24-46. For portraits painted of a hairy race kept as curiosities in the Schloss Ambras during the 16th Century, see: <<http://www.habsburger.net/en/media?s=&page=2>> and <http://bilddatenbank.khm.at/viewArtefact?id=5529&image=GG_8329_kor.jpg> Accessed 23 October 2013.

² Blandowski, Wilhelm von. “Über die Ureinwohner Australiens”, *Sitzungsberichte der Naturwissenschaftlichen Gesellschaft Isis zu Dresden*, Vol. 10–12. 1861, 101–10. [Translation] And so we proceed from my account today of the most important explorations and journeys made in Australia – a short overview – to our fellow countryman Leichhardt, who accomplished the great expedition from Morton Bay (north east from Sydney) to Port Essington in 1844, he perished on his second venture for which he prepared four years later; in which area we still do not know with certainty ...He was deterred too quickly by the rough character of the country.

³ “‘Männer, die im Interesse der Geographie, Ihr Leben einbüßten’. 1848. Leichhardt mit 5 Europ. & 2 Schwarz verschw. = 7 [sic]”. Wilhelm von Blandowski. Map of Australia. Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, Kartensammlung, c. 1860, 2.10 × 1.85 m.

⁴ *Argus*. Melbourne, 27 March 1858. See also Khadija von Zinnenburg Carroll, *Art in the Time of Colony*, Oxford: Routledge, 2016, esp. Ch. 3.

⁵ Knut is an infamous icebear whose celebrated life began and ended early in the Berlin Zoo. The Re-enactment and the images in this piece are part of a larger body of works made by the author in Berlin during a DAAD and Alexander von Humboldt Stiftung fellowships from 2010-2013.

⁶ For Auden on Breughel's *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus* see <http://english.emory.edu/classes/paintings&poems/auden.html> Accessed 23 January 2017.