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THE TRANSLATED LANDSCAPE: INTERPRETING SOUTH AFRICA THROUGH JEWELLERY PRAXIS

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Can a landscape function as a visual text that could, in turn, be translated through various multimodal practices? Through an account of Groenewald's own creative practice, which translates landscape images into jewellery/sculptural pieces, this paper unpacks the complexities of translation and language within the memory politics of the South African landscape.

Translation in the context of the South African landscape[1]

In South Africa, our relationship with the landscape is complicated and has been so for many centuries: from the occupation of the landscape when the first settlers arrived in the Cape of Good Hope in 1652,[2] to the Apartheid years where inhabitants were forcibly removed and relocated according to racial classifications and categorisations. These issues have had a lingering influence on the South African socio-political environment, where issues of land, ownership, place, and displacement are still highly polemical and of great concern. As such, the very idea of the South African landscape speaks of the trauma, loss, and brutality that shape our understanding of our living environments or the spaces through we move. The South African landscape is thus clearly embedded in the histories and memories of its inhabitants, while the very idea of who has the right to imagine themselves as part of a given landscape has perhaps never been more topical. This idea is reiterated by W. J. T. Mitchell's sentiment that the landscape is not just a physical environment, but rather, a place of dwelling that remembers, is shaped by, and is embedded in the consciousness of its inhabitants.[3]

The collective and individual memories and narratives that encompass our relationship with the South African landscape are multiple and often conflicted. In order to achieve a more inclusive and diverse account of the collective memory of the South African landscape, Cherryl Walker urges artists to express and explore the problematics of the South African landscape through their art praxis:

> We need intellectuals, artists, activists who can script a multiplicity of narratives about land. Land as an economic resource cannot be adequately understood through the simple story of dispossession/restoration that the prevailing master narrative has told. This "headline history" obscures almost as much as it reveals. Nor can the complex and varied meanings of land in contemporary South Africa be adequately analysed through the sharp dichotomies of black/white, rural/urban, commercial/communal, capitalist/socialist that have dominated so much of the debate. Despite its unbound authority, "race" itself is insufficient as a category with which to devise a meaningful programme of developmentally progressive land reform. South Africa's current land dispensation is the product not only of the past to separate black and white in the service of their own political and economic power. It is also the product of complex and dynamic interactions among differently constituted sets of people, in an often-difficult environment.[4]

The translation of multiple perspectives and narratives through art praxis is, in response to the words of Walker, of great importance to contemporary South Africa, as visual media can potentially assist in providing a more diverse and inclusive account of the South African landscape. This also provides a means to comment on the historical context of the South African landscape on a personal level, in a way that can facilitate a conversation that operates between generations.

Contemporary South Africa is marked by an urgent need for re-engagement with the landscape, as well as the critical representation thereof from a perspective that is sensitive towards the entangled nuances, histories, and layers of meaning that are present in the landscape. According to Sarah Nuttall, entanglement provides a means where sites which were "once thought of as separate—identities, spaces, histories—come together or find points of intersection in unexpected ways,"[5] and that a way to engage with spaces that are layered with different histories is "to revisit the aftermath of official segregation, [where] the concept of segregated space in socio-historical terms [can be used as] a methodological device for reading the

post-apartheid situation."[6] As such, we believe that translational theory allows us to enter into an entangled and multimodal conversation with the landscape, insofar as it provides a personal account of the artist's experience of a specific landscape, assuming a fresh perspective on the problematics of the South African landscape through its visualisation in the form of jewellery pieces. Furthermore, translational theory facilitates a conversation that can be experienced through the interaction and engagement with the work by means of non-verbal communication. The jewellery object is, thus, an operative as well as an interpretive tool, which can enable communication as well as interaction with the landscape. This will be discussed in more detail later, alongside a discussion of Groenewald's work.

In this paper, we view translation not only as a textual device, which implies the translation of text from one *language* into another but also as a multimodal device that allows for the visual/physical translation from one *mode* to another. We view the landscape as a visual text, and we are interested in how this visual text can be translated in a multimodal manner through different visual media or modalities, such as jewellery design.

Translation and visual language

Interdisciplinary approaches have recently become a topical focal point in translational studies, and suggests a move from translational studies, to post-translational studies, implying a move beyond the traditional interpretation of the term (which places translation in isolation) to an "Outward turn … that redefines itself and begins to enjoy greater exchange with other disciplines in a mutually beneficial process of importing and exporting methodologies and ideas."[7] The term "post-translational studies" was coined by Siri Nergaard and Stefano Arduini in their 2011 text, 'Translation: A New Paradigm'; in which they redefined translation, allowing it to operate within the broader context of culture and not merely within the parameters of linguistic borders. Nergaard and Arduini define post-translation as a form of translation studies that open up translation to function as an "interpretive or operative tool … where translation is fundamentally transdisciplinary, mobile, and open-ended."[8] This idea is reinforced by Susan Bassnett's suggestion that translational studies should expand "its self-imposed boundaries, so that the field can reach out to other disciplines and become more open to ideas about translational issues coming from other researchers who may not be primarily engaged in translation."[9] Post-translation has opened the door for translation studies to expand into topics such as translational spaces in cities, music, dance, film, fashion, and food, to name but a few.[10] And, as such, translation studies could be opened up to be applied to fields such as the arts, memory studies, semiotics, and landscape studies.[11] In this paper, post-translational studies provide us with the means to make connections between artistic research practices in the field of jewellery design and landscape theory within the context of photographic discourse.

The primary motivation for translation is often associated with a dislocation, as the translator is forced to navigate and bring together different languages in a new or different environment. As such, the link between landscape studies and theories regarding translation begins to emerge more clearly. In many ways, the translator promotes the circulation of cultural ideas and is the agent in the production of new connections or commonalities between nations, cultures, languages, and landscapes. Subsequently, cities and landscapes often demonstrate the influence of translation through cultural markers such as architecture, art, and theatre, where the cityscape

is often the visualisation, the palimpsest, of different layers of cultural influences.[12] The South African landscape (as it stands today) has clearly been altered by its inhabitants, and traces of its colonial past can, for example, be seen in the way that imported trees and plant life such as poplar, wattle, pine, gum, oak, prickly pear, and many more, dot the landscape.[13]

Sherry Simon suggests that once the boundaries posed by a traditional understanding of translation is removed and the emphasis is placed on the cultural conditions that are conducive to translation, rather than the act of translation itself, one will be able to better conceive the extent of the influence that translation has on culture.[14] When investigating the South African landscape from such a perspective of translation, the links between cultural exchange relocation and dislocation become apparent, especially when looking at visual landmarks such as architecture, monuments, and agriculture. These cultural infiltrations can be seen in the way that the South African landscape and cities have been developed, documented, divided, and farmed. Monuments such as that of Jan Marais, Cecil John Rhodes, Die Afrikaanse Taal Monument which, along with the Cape-Dutch Architecture, can be seen across the Western Cape (and in other parts of South Africa), are some examples of how cultural ideas have been translated into visual symbols that communicate, rather strongly, the colonial influences which have inscribed the visual language of the Western Cape with cultural nuances. The ways in which our urban spaces have been divided, segregated, and named would be another example of how cultural discourse has been translated into the physical landscape. Simultaneously, the South African landscape testifies to its precolonial history through the multiple works of rock art that have been engraved and painted onto rock-faces all over the landscape. Rock art paintings or engravings are often expressions of the religious belief and cultural structures of the San, Khoikhoi, and Khoekhoe people who inhabited the landscape long before Europeans arrived on the southern tip of Africa and are coded with multiple social, religious, and cultural messages.[15] As such, translation can be conceived as a cultural condition that underlies all forms of communication, rather than a purely textual device.

The physical landscape can, as such, be understood within the context of language as a visual text of sorts, which is inscribed with layers of histories of the inhabitants of a particular space and the cultural influences that helped shape that space. Fragments of these histories and cultural influences start blending together in the landscapes with which we now engage, where layers of different histories and cultural influences constitute a seemingly coherent visual language where translation functioned as a central agent in the transferal of the cultural ideas helping to shape a particular landscape.

Approaching translation as an agent that extends beyond the traditional boundaries of language and text, opens up its potential in terms of application. In the context of this paper, translation allows us to define the landscape as a culturally constructed space that can be read as a visual text. By extension, once the landscape is understood within such a context—as visual text—and translation theory is understood as a cross-disciplinary device, then translation theory also allows us to investigate the translation of the visual representation of the landscape from one visual media into another. This form of translation is referred to as intersemiotic,[16] where translation occurs between two different sign systems.[17] This concept is reinforced by Kobus Marais, Professor in Linguistics and Language Studies at the University of the Free State; he states that "translation takes a plethora of forms, depending on medium, technology, culture, time, and space, among others."[18]

Jewellery praxis as translation

In Groenewald's artistic work, she explores the potential of her jewellery praxis as, perhaps, an ideal means of cross-disciplinary translation, as jewellery is inevitably entangled in politics of landscape and culture because of its material nature, as well as symbolic function. As such, we explore the potential of jewellery praxis to function as a medium or tool that allows one to express concerns regarding the South African landscape.

Figure 1. Hjalmar/Oliver Bekker, Hasiesfontein-Molteno (1950–1970). Scanned photographic image from the Bekker Family Archive.

Figure 2. Hjalmar/Oliver Bekker, Hasiesfontein-Molteno (1950–1970). Scanned photographic image from the Bekker Family Archive.

Figure 3. Hjalmar/Oliver Bekker, Hasiesfontein-Molteno (1950–1970). Scanned photographic image from the Bekker Family Archive.

Jewellery practices often include a wide variety of materials, which function on a symbolic level as a means of communication. Over time, the variety of materials that are commonly included in jewellery pieces have kept on increasing. However, the most characteristic materials included in the production of jewellery remain materials mined from the earth, such as precious metals and gemstones. This makes jewellery a particularly interesting medium to use in order to address landscape politics in South Africa, as the mining of precious metals and minerals has, to a large extent, helped shape the landscape. Cities such as Johannesburg and Kimberly were founded around the minerals they possess. Thus, the symbolic function of jewellery is multi-layered and subtly speaks of South Africa's colonial history even before it has taken on a functional or representational form. Removed from ruptured soil, these materials act as reminders of the commodification, socialisation, and exploitation of the landscape.[19] In this process, the jewellery piece (the mined, modified, and commodified landscape) enters the symbolic realm,[20] as a form of body adornment that communicates messages of personal significance.[21] The nature of the materials with which Groenewald works thus becomes a medium through which she questions issues regarding landscape and culture, specifically because of its origins, symbolic function, and the political context that surrounds the extraction of natural resources in previously colonised countries such as South Africa. Her work often includes found materials such as fragments of discarded objects, stones, plant life, soil, and twigs—found in the agricultural landscape where she grew up—and mined minerals, such as gemstones and precious metals, in combination with artificial materials, such as plastics and resins, and fragile materials, such as glass. The distortion, unconventional combination, and manipulation of these materials speak to the complex relationship she has with the landscape in question. In this sense, an interesting parallel appears between the way that Groenewald "mines" the landscape where she once lived for objects that may be seen as mundane or discarded and imbues them with cultural significance by turning them into jewellery pieces (see Figure 8).

Ellen Maurer-Zilioli comments on the relationship between place in relation to jewellery when he states that "[i]f the body can grow, allow itself an imaginary second layer thanks to jewellery … not an outward projection but an internalisation of space. Instead of expanding into emptiness, jewellery then absorbs and incorporates it."[22] Jewellery thus provides a certain intimacy or an internalisation of space in our conversation with landscape. The intimacy, in the way that the jewellery object is worn, also suggests a sense of cultural location, which refers to the body becoming a

different type of landscape, so to speak, when the jewellery piece is placed upon it. This idea resonates with that of Robert Baines when he states that "[the] jewellery artefact and its placement … on the body informs cultural topology."[23]

The relevance of the jewellery object as artefact and its relation to the landscape becomes heightened through its symbolic implications and intimate relationship with the body. In this regard, Elizabeth Grierson suggests that "the crafting of artefacts or objects presents an innovative way to talk about place. Artefacts carry the imprint of place; they suggest, echo, trace, and design our ideas of place."[24] In Groenewald's art practice, she echoes Grierson's opinion and employs her artistic practice as a jeweller to explore the mnemonic function of the South African landscape through the creation of jewellery objects. Specifically, her work investigates how the landscape has been translated into photographic images found in an old family archive (see Figures 1–3) and responds to these images through her art-making process (see Figures 4–14). In agreement with Grierson, we believe that "[artists] carry the imprint of their surroundings and locations as they migrate from place to place."[25] Following this line of reasoning, we believe that the jewellery pieces Groenewald creates can be viewed as idiosyncratic retranslations of the South African landscape. These pieces thus function as markers of her personal connection with a specific landscape.

Figure 4. Joani Groenewald, digitally manipulated image taken by Hjalmar and Oliver Bekker of Hasiesfontein-Molteno between 1950 and 1970. Bekker Family Archive.

Figure 5. Joani Groenewald, digitally manipulated image taken by Hjalmar and Oliver Bekker of Hasiesfontein-Molteno between 1950 and 1970. Bekker Family Archive.

We are particularly interested in how the media into which the object is translated and how the placement of the piece on the body impact on the meaning of the translated "text" (in this case the South African landscape), and allows for metamorphosis and transformation that is sensitive towards the role different media play in carrying across an intended message. In this regard, we investigate how translational discourses and practices resonate with jewellery design as a methodology for translating a given "text"[26] (a message, like a photograph, that was deliberately coded to communicate a specific message or idea).[27]

Figure 6. Joani Groenewald, blind contour drawings and design development.

For Groenewald, the use of materials is a strategic decision, as each material has its own individual characteristics and cultural associations that communicate in subtle ways through their inclusion in the jewellery objects she creates. For this reason, she makes use of fragile materials, such as glass to reference the fragility of her relationship with the South African landscape and her own sense of belonging. Glass is also a material that is made by heating soil to extreme temperatures, thus also carrying with it the imprint of a specific place. The process itself also references a specific harshness and transformation through trauma. The use of soil and plant life makes direct reference to the landscape in question. She specifically includes soil from the farm where she grew up in order to make a direct connection to this landscape through her work. In some of her works, she also includes fragments of prickly pear or moulds of the plant. The prickly pear, an imported and invasive plant species, has seamlessly integrated into the South African landscape in such a way that it seems to belong. For Groenewald, this complex sense of "belonging" also speaks to her own feelings of being in and longing for the landscape where she was born and in

which she grew up. Furthermore, the use of plastics, moulds, and resins talk about the artificiality of our connections with places and our own myths that we construct around our past, while also referencing the scope for manipulation and distortion in the process of translation.

In this practice-based study, we are interested in the way that the materials and representational properties of a jewellery piece impacts meaning. Furthermore, we are interested in the role of the artist in the process of production. The artist, in this study, is seen as the translator, as they are responsible for translating an image from one medium to another. The example used here is that of photographic images that were taken of a specific farm landscape in the Eastern Cape, which were translated into jewellery pieces. This process illustrates the power of the artist or translator over the meaning of the original text. Groenewald explores the role of the translator through various practical processes in order to explore the parameters of translation on a visual and tactile level. Susan Sontag suggests that "to translate is … to lead something across a gap, to make something go where it was not."[28] She also emphasises the role of the translator as a mediator, as "the translator is the one who finds (identifies, formulates) the comparable customs in another language."[29] According to Sontag, translation is a means to explain, adapt and, perhaps, improve.[30] Based on this interpretation of Sontag's, it is evident how the translation of a text—be it visual or textual—from one mode to another impacts on the meaning of the original text. By using found materials from the landscape, for example, and manipulating them in order to assume another function, one of symbolic or cultural significance—the artisan bestows new meaning on those objects. It is exactly this aspect that Groenewald explores through her process. Her work demonstrates how the translator distorts and manipulates, through the process of intersemiotic translation, as she translates images of the landscape where she grew up (collected from an old family archive of their farm in the Eastern Cape) into jewellery pieces. Her process explores various aspects of translation, firstly through digital manipulation, where she plays with contrast and repetition in the reproduction of the found images (see Figures 3–5), and secondly through contour and blind contour drawings of the images. She then reinterprets aspects of these drawings in designs for jewellery pieces (see Figures 6 & 7). She also collects materials from the given landscape and reuses them in the physical production of the jewellery pieces that she creates. She relies on the inherent properties of the materials she uses to communicate a sense of place and attachment. Simultaneously, she emphasises her role as the translator, and highlights how the translator has the ability to adapt and manipulate meaning.

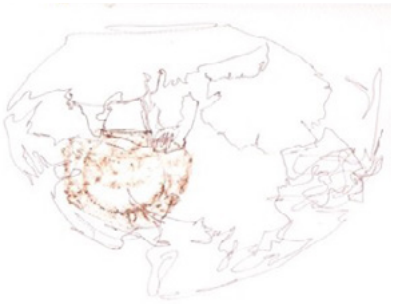

Figure 7. Joani Groenewald, object prints, blind contour drawings, and design development.

Figure 8. Found objects from Hasiesfontein-Molteno, photograph by Joani Groenewald, 2019.

Translating tacit knowledge: a conclusion

As the above examples demonstrate, contemporary jewellery design constitutes a form of practice-based research that is, at the heart of it, conducive towards the production and translation of tacit knowledge.

Tacit knowledge can be defined as the skills, ideas, and experiences people have that are not easily expressed in language (in fact, it is more felt and embodied than spoken or codified).[31] As Michael Polanyi asserts in *The Tacit Dimension*, "we can know

Figure 9. Joani Groenewald, 2019, *Time Capsule* (pendant), silver, glass, plastic resin, soil, and leather cord.

Figure 10. Joani Groenewald, 2019, *Skipping Stones 1* (ring), silver, glass, plastic resin, and soil.

Figure 11. Joani Groenewald, 2019, *Skipping Stones 2* (pendant), silver, glass, plastic resin, soil, and waxed cotton cord.

Figure 12. Joani Groenewald, 2019, *Skipping Stones 3* (brooch), silver, plastic resin, and soil.

Figure 13: Joani Groenewald, 2020, *Cast in Stones 1* (brooch), silver, plastic resin, steel wire, and soil.

Figure 14: Joani Groenewald, 2020, *Alien-Nation* (brooch), silver, plastic resin, steel wires and prickly pear.

more than we can tell,"[32] and it is exactly such tacit, bodily, rooted forms of knowing, of the body doing and making in ways that cannot be translated directly into words and that cannot always be adequately articulated by verbal or written means. Hence, tacit knowledge quite often escapes the grasp of codified or explicit knowledge systems, such as those we most often work with as academics. And herewith the challenge (and opportunity) of practice-based research, as the latter entails (and, we argue, can potentially accommodate) the translation of tacit knowledge into coded knowledge. Without trying to argue for practice-based research as an easy solution to the complex divide that still holds sway over "body" and "discourse," "doing" and "thinking," we do believe that practice-based research holds the practitioner accountable, or challenges the artist, to try and comprehend how the body, its mechanisms, mannerisms, and tacit skills, responds to a given research question. Hence, practice-based research entails the translation of tacit into explicit knowledge, and vice-versa, as it entails a process of coding and decoding, learning and unlearning, taking up and discarding, within the realm of creative practice. As Ritesh Chugh maintains, tacit and explicit knowledge are not separate in practice, and it is the actual interaction between these two modes of knowing that is vital for the creation of new knowledge.[33]

It is exactly this construction of new knowledge, we believe, that is central to practice-based research, which resonates clearly not only with the role of the artist as translator, but also with the artist's position as mediator between bodies of knowledge, be they tacit, tactile, object-based, or discursive.

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Notes

1 It is important to note that this study touches on (or is informed by) various complexities that cannot be addressed in a single paper, and for this reason, it is critical to acknowledge that we will not discuss the politics surrounding the representation of the South African landscape or the very specific role of the jewellery object as a means of communication in detail. Rather, the focus of this paper will be on the role of translation itself in the context of artistic research practices. These topics will be addressed in detail in Groenewald's PhD study.

2 Abdi, 'Identity Formations and Deformations in South Africa', 147.

3 Mitchell, 'Introduction', 5.

4 Walker, 'Looking Forward, Looking Back', 24.

5 Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 11.

6 Nuttall, *Entanglement*, 20.

7 Bassnett, 'Foreword', x.

8 Nergaard and Arduini, 'Translation: A New Paradigm', 8.

9 Bassnett, 'Foreword', ix.

10 Gentzler, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*, xii-xiv.

11 Gentzler, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*, 1.

12 Gentzler, *Translation and Rewriting in the Age of Post-Translation Studies*, 6.

13 Bennett, 'Reading the Land', 46; Groenewald's work includes references to some of this imported plant life, specifically the prickly pear, in order to represent her relationship with a particular landscape, where the prickly pear has invaded the landscape in such a way that it has become so seamlessly integrated that it seems to belong. See the discussion of her practical work for a more detailed account. This apparent belonging is subtly implied by some of her pieces, and also speaks metaphorically about her own sense of belonging within a specific landscape.

14 Simon, *Translating Montreal*, 17.

15 'About Rock Art, Rock Art of Africa'.

16 Intersemiotic translation is a term first defined by Roman Jackobson and refers to the transmutation of signs and "interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems," Jakobson and Brower, 'On Linguistic Aspects of Translation', 113-118.

17 Ketola, 'Teaching Intersemiotic Meaning Construction in Design'.

18 Marais, *A (Bio)Semiotic Theory of Translation*, 6.

19 Even though the relationship between jewellery and its relation to the landscape can be traced through various cultural contexts, the aim of this study is to focus on jewellery and its relation to the South African landscape as understood from an idiosyncratic "western South African perspective."

20 Assuming a post-modern disposition, we approach the symbolic function of objects—jewellery objects/artefacts included—as unstable, fluctuating, and multifarious.

21 See Barthes, 'From Gemstones to Jewellery'; Vigna, 'Heirlooms'; den Besten, *On Jewellery*; English and Dormer, *Jewelry of Our Time*; Groenewald summarises Roland Barthes' take on the symbolic function of jewellery in her MA thesis; 'Fragmented Mnemonics: An Investigation into Contemporary Jewellery as Means of Externalizing Memory', as such; "[i]t is apparent that jewellery is embedded in a framework of symbolism and myth. Roland Barthes was particularly interested in the mythologies that surround jewellery objects. He elaborates on these mythologies in his essay 'From Gemstones to Jewellery' ... Barthes explains how jewellery becomes a discourse with a symbolic language of its own. In his text, he focuses on specific mythologies that surround certain aspects of jewellery, such as diamonds and gold:

"As for the quintessential stone, the diamond ... it is incorporated into a new magical and poetic domain, that of the paradoxical substance, both lit up and stone cold: it is nothing but fire and yet nothing but ice. This cold fire, this sharp, shining object which is nevertheless silent, what a symbol for the whole world of vanities, of seductions devoid of content, of pleasure devoid of sincerity! And about gold ... gold is a substance more intellectual than symbolic ... But as a sign, what power it has! And it is precisely the sign par excellence, the sign of all the signs; it is absolute value, invested with all powers including those once held by magic ... here the gemstone becomes the very concept of price; it is worn like an idea, that of a terrific power, for it is enough to be seen for this power to be demonstrated."

In this text, Barthes addresses the mythologies surrounding jewellery during the 1950s in Europe. The relevance of this text does not lie so much in his discussion of the mythologies that surrounded jewellery at that time, but rather in what can be deduced from this discussion, namely that jewellery is embedded in a framework of mythologies and that these mythologies are inconsistent and culture specific. Acknowledging these mythologies allows the contemporary jeweller to analyse them and expose them as such"; Groenewald, 'Fragmented Mnemonics', 48–49.

22 Maurer-Zilioli, 'Remembered Places—Imagined Spaces', 135.

23 Baines, 'Intelligent Jewellery Spaces', 15.

24 Grierson, 'The Art of Migration through Contemporary Jewellery', 6.

25 Grierson, 'The Art of Migration through Contemporary Jewellery', 8.

26 With regards to the landscape as text and textuality, we will refer to Jacques Derrida's two texts; *Positions* and *The Double Session*; as well as Barthes's text *Mythologies* in relation to the way we ascribe meaning to our surroundings. We rely on these theories in our conversation with, and the interpretation of, the South African landscape.

27 Kotarba, 'Symbolic Interaction and Applied Social Research', 412–425.

28 Sontag, 'Being Translated', 15.

29 Sontag, 'Being Translated', 15.

30 Sontag, 'Being Translated', 15.

31 Chugh, 'Do Australian Universities Encourage Tacit Knowledge Transfer?'

32 Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, 4.

33 Chugh, 'Do Australian Universities Encourage Tacit Knowledge Transfer?'

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