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## Visions Aqueuses en Lower Murray Country

Camille Rouliere

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Normandie Université

## THÈSE

**Pour obtenir le diplôme de doctorat**

**Spécialité LANGUES ET LITTÉRATURES ETRANGERES**

**Préparée au sein de l'Université de Caen Normandie**

**En cotutelle internationale avec Université d'Adelaide , AUSTRALIE**

## Visions of Waters in Lower Murray Country

**Présentée et soutenue par  
Camille ROULIERE**

**Thèse soutenue publiquement le 02/11/2018  
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I acknowledge the Kaurna Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which the University of Adelaide is located; and I acknowledge the Ngarrindjeri Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which my research bears—lands which were never ceded. I respect and acknowledge their respective ongoing relationships with these lands and their connected bodies of water.



**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this thesis contains names of Indigenous people who are deceased.**

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## Abstracts

### English Version

Waters are contested entities that are currently at the centre of most scientific discussions about sustainability. Discourse around water management underlines both the serious absence and devastating overabundance of water: rising sea levels compete against desertification; hurricanes and floods follow periods of prolonged drought. As we increasingly pollute, canalise and desalinate waters, the ambiguous nature of our relationship with these entities becomes visible. And, while we continue to damage what most sustains us, collective precarity grows. It is therefore unsurprising that shifting our understanding, and subsequent use, of water has been described as one of the biggest—and most pressing—challenges of our time.

My research answers to this challenge. It centres on spatial poetics, that is, on the manner in which people engage and interact with their environment through art. More precisely, I explore the relationships between humans, waters and sound—both intrinsic and human-produced—in Lower Murray Country (South Australia). My aim is to unveil, theorise and create maps of these co-evolving relationships to reveal an array of manners to perceive and relate to these waters; and then draw on this plurality to question—and potentially reimagine—their cultural construction and representation. In order to do so, I transform waters into a leitmotif which enables me to weave my investigation together and move in-between theoretical and physical spaces to bring people and their environments into dialogue, both at the local and global levels. In particular, I draw on the watery movements of flow and resonance to operate this weaving, and associate these with rhythm analysis and resounding (after philosophers Henri Lefebvre and Fran Dyson, respectively). I am also inspired by the work of philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant and use his concept of Relation as a key to enable me to translate these watery movements textually.

I apply this aqueous theoretical frame to nearly two centuries of sonic production—ranging from Ngarrindjeri performance and colonial ballads through to contemporary classical music and sound art; and to nearly two centuries of evolution in the sonic character of Lower Murray Country’s waters—ranging from disfiguring deforestation and damming through to rising salinity and irrigation. As such, this thesis is built on the “accumulation of examples” advocated by Glissant (*Poetics of Relation* 172-4). It is structured around four sections—four punctiform visions of waters written as a prelude to a potential infinity of others. Furtive, partial,

oriented and fragmented, these visions denote times of particular significance: times open to challenge; times of hinges and articulations where radical alteration (can) occur.

### Version Française

L'eau a creusé son chemin jusqu'au cœur des discussions sur le développement durable. Les discours autour de la gestion des eaux soulignent à la fois son abondance dévastatrice et son absence critique : la montée des eaux se juxtapose à la désertification ; les tornades et les inondations répondent à des périodes de sécheresse prolongées. Alors que nous polluons, canalisons et dessalinisons à un rythme toujours croissant, la nature ambiguë de notre relation avec l'eau devient visible. Pendant que nous continuons d'endommager ce qui, par-dessus tout, rend la vie possible, la précarité augmente pour l'ensemble de la population. Il n'est donc pas étonnant qu'un changement de paradigme dans notre compréhension des eaux, devant engendrer une modification dans leur utilisation, soit présenté comme l'un des plus grands et plus pressants défis de notre époque.

Ma recherche répond à ce défi. Elle porte sur la poétique de l'espace, c'est-à-dire sur l'étude de la manière dont les êtres humains vivent et interagissent avec leur environnement à travers les arts. Plus précisément, j'explore les relations entre les humains, les eaux et les sons (à la fois propres et générés par les humains) dans la Lower Murray Country (Australie Méridionale). Mon but est de révéler et théoriser ces relations qui évoluent en parallèle afin d'élaborer une cartographie mettant à jour toute une gamme de manières de percevoir et de comprendre ces eaux, et d'être ensuite à même d'utiliser cette pluralité pour remettre en question—et potentiellement imaginer à nouveau—leur construction et représentation culturelles. Afin d'atteindre ce but, j'érige "les eaux" en leitmotiv qui me permet d'unifier ma recherche et me déplacer entre des espaces physiques et théoriques pour mettre en dialogue les individus et leur environnement, tant au niveau local que général. En particulier, je me sers du mouvement des eaux que forment le courant et la résonance pour opérer cette synthèse, mouvement que j'associe à la rythmanalyse et la réverbération (d'après les philosophes Henri Lefebvre et Fran Dyson, respectivement). Je me suis également inspirée du travail du philosophe et poète Édouard Glissant. En particulier, son concept de Relation est une clef pour me permettre de traduire textuellement ces mouvements des eaux.

J'applique cette méthodologie aqueuse à presque deux siècles de production musicale—allant des pratiques ngarrindjeri et des ballades coloniales à la musique classique contemporaine et l'art sonore ; et presque deux siècles de modifications touchant au "caractère sonore" des eaux de la Lower Murray Country—matérialisée à travers la déforestation défigurante, la retenue des eaux, l'irrigation mais aussi la salinité croissante des eaux comme des sols. Ainsi, cette thèse se construit selon le principe d'accumulation d'exemples prôné par Glissant (*Poetics of Relation* 172-4). Elle est structurée autour de quatre sections—quatre visions punctiformes des eaux écrites comme un prélude à une potentielle infinité d'autres. Furtives, partielles, orientées et fragmentées, ces visions procèdent de périodes particulièrement significatives : de périodes pouvant subir des changements, de périodes charnières où des altérations radicales peuvent poindre ou apparaître effectivement.

## Declaration of Originality

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint award of this degree.

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Camille Roulière

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# **An Introduction to Watery Worlds and Methodologies**

Nous éclairons de nos mots l'eau qui tremble  
Nous avons froid de la même beauté.<sup>1</sup>  
Édouard Glissant  
(*Pays Réel, Pays Rêvé* 84)

I grew up near water; in between a stream and a river, next to ponds and wells, close to abandoned mills and *lavoirs* (washing places). My entire village used to kneel beside the running water with their notched wooden boards, as if in prayer. I always went to the river when I was sad or angry. I listened to it running, running through my world, and suddenly the cacophony of everything around me did not seem to matter any longer.

With my brother and cousins, we fished for gold, tadpoles, water spiders and crayfish so small you had to be a kid to spot them. We lived in water. I do not remember learning how to swim. It seems I always knew. We had a swinging rope tied to a tree from which we could jump into the middle of the river. *Splash*. We could fly for an instant. Our favourite game probably was the building of dams. We piled up stones and caulked the breaches with green algae which flowered white in late spring. Our aim was to create rapids so that we could flow down faster on our body boards: to control and shape water for our own enjoyment. Water transformed us into little almighty gods.

Everywhere in the world, humankind replicates these childish games. We westerners are the product of our cultures.<sup>2</sup> We extract water's divine essence and take it for ourselves. Our sour tendencies of geographical expansionism and projection means that it no longer matters where we stand: "L'Occident n'est pas à

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<sup>1</sup> "We lighten shivering waters with our words / We feel cold from the same beauty." (Unless specified otherwise, all translations within this thesis are mine.)

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "culture" as defined in the 2001 UNESCO's *Universal Declaration of Cultural Diversity*: "the set of distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual and emotional features of a society or social group" (qtd. in Boaden and Ashton 20-1).

l'ouest. Ce n'est pas un lieu, c'est un projet"<sup>3</sup> (Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* 12 n. 1). We dam, we cruise, we drill and mine; and we have replicated these activities on a scale so large that it spreads across the globe. As we increasingly pollute, canalise and desalinate waters<sup>4</sup>—forever colonising them—the ambiguous nature of our relationship with these contested entities becomes visible. From the paradisiac and pristine scenery of holiday postcards through to the devastated landscapes of post-tsunami news reports, images of water surround us. Whether in bodies, bottles or billabongs, water is everywhere we look and touch. And, while we continue to damage what most sustains us, collective precarity grows. Injustice around water distribution and use is increasing. Crises linked to water (be they military, alimentary or ecological) are ever more frequent, putting escalating pressure on our capacities to be resilient and manage water in the face of these changes.<sup>5</sup> As a result, water has flowed to the centre of most scientific discussions about sustainability worldwide. Discourse around water management underlines both the serious absence and devastating overabundance of water: rising sea levels compete against desertification; hurricanes and floods follow periods of prolonged drought.

\*

The wells at home have recently stopped giving water in summer. There is just not enough to go around. The aquifer is depleted and polluted. The river's lower water levels have made it unsafe for swimming: *Leptospira icterohemorrhagica* and other fantastical sounding diseases lurk in these stagnating waters.

Experts have repeatedly stressed that “[t]he world is running out of water. It is the most serious ecological and human rights threat of our time” (Barlow et al.). It is therefore unsurprising that shifting our understanding, and subsequent use, of water

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<sup>3</sup> “The West is not in the west. It is not a place; it is a project.”

<sup>4</sup> My use of “waters” in the plural is a way to semantically convey the diversity of entities composed of the element ordinarily referred to as H<sub>2</sub>O.

<sup>5</sup> As summarised in the “Budapest Statement 2016”.

has been described as one of the biggest—and most pressing—challenges of our time (Weir; Somerville; Barlow). Yet, relatively few scholarly works focus on water outside of social, engineering and biological sciences, particularly in an Oceanic context (Chen et al.; Somerville).

This thesis intends to address the gap surrounding the study of imaginary and symbolic waters in an Oceanic context; of waters which are not perceived as finite objects through a scientific and metonymic prism, but as physical and/or aesthetic subjects within the arts and humanities. It focuses on spatial poetics, that is, on the manner in which people engage and interact with their environment through art. More precisely, I explore the co-evolving relationships between humans, waters, and sound<sup>6</sup> in Lower Murray Country<sup>7</sup> (South Australia), a triangle with Cape Jervis, Cape Jaffa and Mannum as its vertices.

Within the global field of spatial humanities research, cultural studies of the environment have been theorised as a way to move past limitations imposed by nationalism and colonialism when it comes to memory, culture, and identity (Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country*; Nora, *Présent, Nation, Mémoire*; Alonso; Casey; Massey, “Places and their Pasts”; Said). In an Australian context, the cultural study of the environment has indeed become a means of revisiting and deconstructing the building of national narratives (Carter, *The Road*; Gibson, *Seven Versions*). It has been demonstrated that through these narratives relations with place are still often subverted, disrupted, silenced or smothered by the insidious

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<sup>6</sup> In this thesis, sound is used in a general sense, as everything and anything that is audible and belongs to the sonic realm—including musical sound.

<sup>7</sup> Country is a word used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe their traditional land. It is “a word for all the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features” (Dodson, “Welcome to Country”). My use of the term is non-proprietary. It is primarily ethical: it is my way to acknowledge the significance of the notion of Country in Australia, and to respect the fact that Indigenous people use this word in preference to generic terms such as region or area, which are devoid of the connotations attached to Country. I also use the term to denote my own understanding of place in Australia: as a non-Indigenous person, I draw on this term, not to speak about Country, but to subjectively disengage from settler geographical conquest of Australia. Through this disengagement, my objective is to discuss the decolonising potentialities currently arising from the deconstruction of the settler legacy. Country is indeed a living entity where encounters between living things are recorded and, as a result, the “traumatic legacies of colonialism [are lying] silent in or addressing us through the continent’s ground” (D. B. Rose, *Reports* 49, 163). The presence of these “traumascapes” (this term was coined by historian Maria Tumarkin (5) to designate places repeatedly bound by violence) is also illustrated by cultural critic Ross Gibson in *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland*. Finally, this use is also poetic: Country is a place of creation, and only from such a place can a thesis be written.

presence of ongoing—albeit “mutated” (Rutherford, “Introduction” 1)—forms of colonialism.<sup>8</sup> Author Jeanine Leane characterises these in terms of overwriting: she argues that there is a continuous imposition of authoritative meanings on waterscapes which often destroy and always condition, shape and constrict Aboriginal possibilities for expression (see also Wright; Langton; Warren and Evitt 136). This overwriting fragments and empties the environment as Aboriginal footprints are rendered invisible (Byrne and Nugent). Tracks and traces are scratched out; they are erased; they become phantoms. And this emptiness also haunts non-Indigenous Australians as the pragmatics of the collective amnesia symptomatic of such erasure deny them the opportunity to authentically connect to place (D. B. Rose, *Reports* 47; Gibson, *Seven Versions* 175). It confines their cultural possibilities and identities within islands of void, from which Australian waterscapes forever remain foreign countries (Gammage, “The Biggest Estate on Earth”).<sup>9</sup> As cultural critic Emily Potter urges, there is an ongoing challenge of belonging in a country damaged by years of colonial practices (“Postcolonial Atmospheres” 75-6). This shows that cultural studies of the environment are still required in order to open up the Australian historical and cultural discourse in the public sphere (Carter, *The Road*; D. B. Rose, *Reports*) and, as a consequence, to expand the possibilities for the current political and ecological dialogue based upon it. As anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose explains, this new form of dialogue<sup>10</sup> requires difference and seeks “relationships across otherness” without trying to erase that difference (*Reports* 21).

Through the present study I intend to contribute to this imaginative dialogue. Although considerable research has been devoted to literary and visual arts, rather less attention has been paid to sound when it comes to analysing the cultural construction and constriction of Australian waterscapes. Yet, sound surrounds us,

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<sup>8</sup> This is why, globally, spatial history has also been characterised as colonial history (Said 19): it supports the narrative of a monolithic History (Glissant, *L’Intention Poétique* 216), aggravated by the tendency to use only English-language sources to build this narrative (Johnson 329).

<sup>9</sup> Writing of unsettlement has actually become a form of belonging, as notions of superficiality, illegitimacy and emptiness fill the pages. Author Murray Bail has suggested that the compulsive discussions about landscape will only fade away once the nation is at ease with who it is. This joins the analysis of the importance placed upon landscape in the Australian psyche offered by Gibson (*South of the West* 65-72). Overwriting corresponds to an attempt both to create and to fill the emptiness; and yet writing never seems to be enough.

<sup>10</sup> That is, by opposition to traditional western dialogue practices often conducted as Platonic or Socratic debates, and therefore remaining between one and oneself (Arendt 10).

shapes our environment—and our relationships with this environment—as much as the visual and the tactile (Dyson).

In light of these diverse considerations, the aim of the research is to unveil, theorise and create maps<sup>11</sup> of the aforementioned co-evolving relationships in order to explore how Lower Murray Country's waters are sonically perceived, portrayed and modified by humans.<sup>12</sup> As I focus on rhythmic processes of translation and on what these mean in terms of human (non)understanding of Lower Murray Country's waters, this thesis thus answers the challenge surrounding water enunciated earlier. It intends to question the ambiguous cultural constructions and representations of these waters; and potentially (re)imagine—or (re)make—what they mean to the people interacting with them. In particular, I investigate how waters have shaped diverse senses of identity and belonging over time, and how music has been composed in response to the ongoing colonisation of waters in Lower Murray Country and their subsequent degradation—and potentially denounces or counterbalances it. That is, I examine how music enables people to imagine more sustainable futures. I am interested in both watery histories of cultural movements and the intrinsic acoustemologies of waters to reveal how watery sound bears the mark of contentious social relations. As I explore watery environments and cultural movements in these environments through sound, I also show memory (both conceptual and body-linked), culture and identity (both collective and individual) at work in landscape,<sup>13</sup> and illustrate the intertwined processes of cultural transformation of a colonial place and of peoples in that environment.

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<sup>11</sup> These maps take many forms (from topological to spectrographic), and the relevance of such diversity is discussed as the thesis unfolds.

<sup>12</sup> As such, this thesis adopts an ethno-ecological perspective to scrutinise Lower Murray Country. This focus on the socio-cultural construction of waters corresponds to what geographer William Kirk describes as the “behavioural environment” (that is, the environment as subjectively sensed and manipulated).

<sup>13</sup> The term landscape is used here when geographers might argue that what is being discussed is not only landscape, but also and primarily place (or space from a colonial point of view in early Australia). Primarily, I use landscape in its most basic sense: “all the visible features of an area of land” (“Landscape”). I also use it as a generic term to mean simultaneously place, space and time, thus underlining their close link and overcoming the tendency to discard place away from scientific and philosophical discourses in favour of the perceived meta-narratives of space and time (Casey 283; 288-9). Its use is perhaps best illustrated by Gibson (*Seven Versions 2*): “Between the physical geography and the ‘cultural’ settings that get created in imaginative tale-telling and picture-making, there always lies a landscape—a place where nature and culture contend and combine in history.” Using landscape in an Australian context can be polemical as it has been used in a colonial sense, is still being used to justify some colonial practices and competes with the Aboriginal notion of Country. I have nonetheless chosen to use landscape in this specific instance, and in some others to

This introductory chapter unfolds along three main axes which ground all subsequent pages. The first axis consists of a condensed literature review of the colonisation of waters in Australia, and in Lower Murray Country more specifically. I use it to articulate the decolonial goals of the thesis, especially in terms of fostering dialogue. The second axis covers the theoretical application of two key properties of waters—flow and resonance—which serve as models for the thesis’ shape and progression. Using flows and resonances, I involve bodies to recontextualise the sound of waters in Lower Murray Country, placing it in movement and preserving its porosity. In the third axis, I introduce philosopher Édouard Glissant, whose work underpins this thesis. I incorporate his concept of Relation—pivotal to my work—within a framework of academic deconstruction; and discuss the pertinence of the three-stage design of the research. This axis particularly highlights how this design permits me to weave syntax creation within the thesis, and how this form of creativity both supports and contributes to the arguments developed within these pages.

\*

When I moved to Australia over ten years ago, water took on a different meaning for me. It was no longer everywhere. The country was nearing the end of its Millennium Drought.<sup>14</sup> Fresh water was scarce and piped; it came with warning labels: blue-green algae blooms, black waters—I was mourning. Rivers had turned to puddles of salt.

---

follow. This choice rests on an academic consideration: the research falls within the global field of spatial humanities, and landscape is the standard term used (Meinig and Jackson). I also use this term to signify how landscapes “refuse to be disciplined. They make a mockery of the oppositions that we created between time and space, or between nature and culture” (Bender qtd. in Massey, “Landscape as a Provocation” 34).

<sup>14</sup> This drought lasted for over a decade (1996–2011) and led to the near death of the entire river system (Weir).

## Watery Worlds: The Rhythms of Waters in Lower Murray Country

Waters have figured prominently in the European colonial imaginary (Dunlap). Deemed to represent a source of mobility, development and commerce, water's hypothetical presence and abundance were tantamount to a good omen. This mythological<sup>15</sup> framework of colonisation has shaped the settlers' quest for water in Australia; a quest encouraged by seemingly promising outer geographical features.

The largest country of Oceania at 7.7 million square kilometres, Australia is surrounded by water. Such a set of characteristics means that it is sometimes referred to as an "island continent", although the term is incorrect in geographical and geological jargon (Cunningham). Yet, despite these watery premises, Australia is mainly a dry land. It is, in fact, the driest inhabited continent on earth (Preston).<sup>16</sup> With its mostly semi-arid to arid climates, it receives, on average, less than 300 millimetres of rain annually. The relatively small amount of water that runs through this giant country proved a source of disappointment and frustration for the colonists: it was difficult to locate, lacked permanence, behaved unexpectedly and disappeared prematurely (Carter, *The Road* 54-60). This is because Australian waters tend to spread out and form "dis-tributaries" rather than permanently flowing streams "by way of tributaries" (55): they are of a pulsative nature.<sup>17</sup> These waters

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<sup>15</sup> My understanding of the term "mythological" is based on literary theorist Roland Barthes's explanation in *Mythologies*. He argues that myths are omnipresent: they form a language which tinges and influences all aspects of a people's socio-cultural perception and construction of the world (*Mythologies* 10, 107-8; see also Harari 144-65). Cultural geographer John Rennie Short characterises the myths mobilised to build and maintain a nation as "national environmental ideologies" (xiii, xxii, 55). The historical and geographical reality of such ideologies is obliterated, and they are presented as a-temporal and universal. Barthes argues that this lack of anchoring is essential to the existence of myths: their imaginary eternal quality makes them seem justified as they appear to form a factual system rather than the system of values—with its motives and explanations—that they are (*Mythologies* 120, 142-3, 152-5). Myths are thus the manifestation of a cultural perspective which is stated as the objective and true condition of the world (Barthes, *Mythologies* 130; Short xxii). Throughout this thesis, my position is that of the mythologist, showing "at once an understanding of reality and a complicity with it" (Barthes, *Mythologies* 157). As a white researcher, I am indeed located and speak from within the framework of settler mythologies: I am critically, and not practically, aware of its presence and impact.

<sup>16</sup> Antarctica is drier, but unpopulated.

<sup>17</sup> The phrase "pulse ecology" was coined to describe Australian ecological rhythms, characterised by long and irregular cycles of scarcity and plenty (Robin et al.).



did not suit European expectations, and their unpredictability required that they be modified to conform to a European vision of water behaviour and use. Imported European mythologies were plastered onto Australian waters, which have been subjected to continuous colonisation since the arrival of the first European settlers in 1788 (Weir; Somerville). As waters become increasingly scarce and contested, the impact of this ongoing colonisation is widespread: it affects Australians—and particularly Indigenous Australians—as negatively as the environment (Hemming and Rigney, “Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar”; Sinclair; S. Ryan). While this negative impact is visible in each and every body of water in Australia, it is perhaps most dramatically obvious in the waters of Murrundi/Murray River,<sup>18</sup> which has been a site of cumulative and intensive colonisation.

Murrundi/Murray River is the longest river in Australia<sup>19</sup> and a central constituent of Murray River Country—or, as the authorities now call it, the Murray-Darling Basin. Due to an abundance of sustenance, its banks have been inhabited for over 40,000 years by a larger number of Aboriginal communities than elsewhere in Australia (Berndt and Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*; Weir; Power 18; Cleland 23; Murray). For these communities, the waters represent a spiritual lifeforce: they are the blood of the many Countries spreading within and around them; and significant sites of social, economic and religious activities (*National Cultural Flows Research Project*).

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<sup>18</sup> Throughout this thesis, I use dual place names to highlight the plurality of understandings and experiences of places. Murrundi is the Ngarrindjeri name for the river, while Murray was given by Charles Sturt when he “discovered” that same river in January 1830, even though Hamilton Hume and William Hovell had already encountered it in 1824 and named it the Hume. I use the Ngarrindjeri name as my research focuses on Lower Murray Country. Many other Aboriginal names are attached to the river as one journeys upstream.

<sup>19</sup> With its length of 2,508 kilometres, it is the third longest navigable river in the world, after the Nile and the Amazon.



Map 1. Murray River Country  
(Source: MDBA)

When European explorers stumbled upon Murrundi/Murray River in the 1820s, it represented an acceptable materialisation of their long-held dream. The physicality of the waters empirically substantiated the promise of riches and allowed for the projection of the squatters' expectations because of a perceived monetary potential reachable through agricultural and pastoral development. As a result, this fertile region was promptly settled (Sim and Muller). An agricultural industry burgeoned. In the settlers' imagination, this fast-growing industry quickly emerged as a business of national importance upon which successful development rested, and still rests (Robin 207-9; Alexandra and Riddington 326). Water management—centred on agricultural needs—became indispensable to support this ever-expanding pastoral vision, and a plethora of investments flooded the region for that

purpose (*Living Murray Story* vi). This managerial disposition stems from settlers' mythologies: it has been imported from the relatively regular rhythms of Northern European ecologies to provide a structure through which to read and append authoritative meaning onto seemingly empty and malleable "antipodean" spaces (Short 55; Carter, *The Road*). Through the application of this mythological framework over Country, Murrundi/Murray River was gradually transformed into what is colloquially known as the "food basket" of Australia: a multibillion dollar industry<sup>20</sup> reliant on an assortment of engineered water-controlling structures.

This intensive agricultural development and expansion is not without dire consequences for the region's environmental health. Forcibly entered into an intensive irrigation system, Murrundi/Murray River is gagged: it is dotted with so many flow-altering structures that its total flow has been reduced by 61 per cent, and 40 per cent of the time its waters are not able to reach its mouth (*Regulation Impact Statement*; "Water Flows" 11). Such human-imposed water diversion, storage and flow have shown their limits: the steady decrease in water flows that water-controlling structures engender has placed the entire area under major and unprecedented environmental threat (Zhu et al. 898; Sinclair; Hammer; Murray). While popular awareness about the failure of the current system was raised during the Millennium Drought, it has become clear that the appalling and constant decline in environmental health is not restricted to drought years, and that this degradation has a profound impact on the physical and mental health of riverine communities (Weir, Sinclair). The unsustainability of imposing this system on the pulsative water ecologies of the Australian continent, along with the need for managerial change, have been documented for decades (Norris et al.; Gawne et al.).<sup>21</sup> As historian Michael Cathcart writes, this system represents "White Australia's greatest folly" (7); a folly which has transformed a lush, fertile and densely populated homeland

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<sup>20</sup> The agricultural yield of this annual \$15 billion industry accounts for 40 per cent of the country's production, and one third (or \$5 billion) of it is produced with the assistance of irrigation (*Regulation Impact Statement* 4-5, 7).

<sup>21</sup> In 1901, Murrundi/Murray River stood at the heart of the federation of the Australian colonies, which united in part in order to harmonise the management of its waters across state borders. Standardisation of (regulating) practices across state borders still guides the federal government's bid to address the current environmental crisis. Since 2008, a new overarching governmental agency called the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) has overseen and regulated waters throughout Murray River Country.

into a fragmented geographical space facing such an environmental crisis that the issue has been deemed a national priority (Weir 40; S. Ryan).<sup>22</sup>



Photograph 1. Cattle on Dried Earth

This transformation has happened because the gigantic monetary stakes at play around the “food basket” have required the reduction of a complex ecosystem to a quantifiable and finished “thing”. Imposing a business model upon the waters of Murray River Country has indeed made alteration and compartmentalisation not only possible, but inevitable. A multi-layered partitioning, both abstract and concrete,<sup>23</sup> breaks the flows and confines waters to specific predetermined and manageable locations. Clearly delimited geographical zones are defined (from states through to sections for specific small-scale interventions and expert reports). Over thirty structures, ranging from dams to locks, punctuate these geographical

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<sup>22</sup> This threat has become so severe that the government has warned that, at the current rate of decline, critical water needs will soon be impossible to meet in certain areas (S. Ryan 8).

<sup>23</sup> These modes of partitioning and measuring are ontologically linked: each in turn justifies and reinforces the legitimacy of the others. The discursive modes ideologically support and enable the implementation and construction of the material ones, while the latter empirically demonstrate the pertinence of the former. Each, whether through its physical or imagined presence, provides a caption from which waters can be read.

zones and act as boundaries so that the waters are not randomly (or naturally) distributed within them. Measuring points, such as the 122 hydrologic indicator sites dotting Murray River Country, “make facts”<sup>24</sup> and produce the relevant data inputs—a plumbing blueprint—through which to decide where to distribute the waters for optimal results (Weir 42, 96): the colonial “vision of drought-proof Australia” is satisfied (Potter, “Reimagining Place” 247).

No longer flowing through Murray River Country but transformed into well-defined, stable and confined quantities, waters belong, at specific times, to the physical spaces within it. Flows become “fixed”, that is, increasingly regulated, predictable and manageable sets of data. These sets are thought to represent and quantify water flows in an absolute manner: the (mathematical) metonymy is total. Data also makes everything quantifiable in economic terms (Sadin), including what has been defined as “cultural values”. Through this restrictive and exclusively anthropocentric measuring system,<sup>25</sup> water flows are translated into cost-effectiveness ratios, and restoration outcomes are expressed in terms of capital loss/profit, and not in terms of ecological health. The aim is clearly to deal in waters: profitability, not sustainability, is the priority (Mooney and Tan 33). Environmental activist Maude Barlow precisely denounces how, in Australia, waters are yet to be perceived as existing beyond the economic dimension. This Australian propensity for quantifying water reinforces the belief that waters should be viewed through an unnatural economic lens (Robin 186), and thus governed by market forces. This mercantile perspective positions the environment as a business competitor, with claims that rival those of pastoral development and prosperity, as if to say that waters used on the environment are lost for agriculture. Environmental humanities scholar Jessica Weir describes this as creating a supposed dichotomy between economy and ecology, and argues that this opposition is reinforced by the

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<sup>24</sup> Scientific “fact making” consists of replicating controlled experiments (Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern* 17-18, 24). This “fact making” process has made it possible to assert the universality of both science and nature: western science becomes knowledge which is applied to a constant nature; a nature which remains the same, no matter whom the observer is. This leads to the negation—and even erasure—of local differences. The objectivity of the data produced through “fact making” is never questioned; and neither is the withdrawal of science’s historicity (Latour, *Facing Gaia* 72).

<sup>25</sup> The lack of consideration of the (in)adequacy of using a finance-based measuring system—let alone the possibility of developing an alternative measuring system, or the appropriateness of measuring in itself—means that values and benefits which cannot easily be quantified can legitimately be rapidly discarded.

different—and often contradictory—flow regimes required by agricultural growing seasons and river ecologies (35). Articulated as incompatible, a sacrificial choice is made between one and the other (Altman and Markham). Despite managerial changes on the surface, waters thus remain firmly located within a capitalist narrative framework (Somerville 7). These changes disregard the fact that this competitive, linear, aggregate growth economic model is precisely what impedes and destroys ecological resilience and regeneration (Jones; D. B. Rose, “Fresh Water Rights”), and compromises the recognition of the need for drastic change (Connell 37). Environmental degradation on such a scale calls for the (re)invention of an eco-literacy, rather than the improvement of the current, unsustainable eco-literacy. Yet, “the deceptive neo-colonial authority of capitalism” (Satchell 111) acts as a hegemonic force driving pseudo-reforms to feed itself and remain in control of Murray River Country’s “liquid gold” (Sinclair 76-9; 233): its waters.

Such a reductive and narrow conceptualisation of waters empowers “destructive modern water habits” by negating individuality and networks of connectivity (Weir 143). As D. B. Rose demonstrates, it not only kills the life of the waters, it also kills our capacity to connect with this life (“Justice and Longing” 12-3). It translates waters into a simple object of science and commerce to be grasped “in consumptive terms” (Weir 73): an abstract number of gigalitres to be stored or sent flowing, a mute and disembodied natural resource; a commodity.<sup>26</sup> This conceptualisation bears witness to the undeniable failure of the settlers’ mythologies to move beyond an initial “deplete, destroy, depart” colonising impulse (Grinde and Johansen), and consequently their inappropriateness to promote a sustainable perspective from which to imagine ourselves in place. As sustainability education scholar Margaret Somerville summarises: “Despite massive resources spent on scientific research to analyse the extent and nature of the ecological problem, we do not know how to transform the way we think, and consequently act, in relation to water” (7). Such a loss of sustainable mythologies means that waters in Murray River Country are mismanaged, and in the end lacking. Transformed into a descending line on a graph,

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<sup>26</sup> This commodification becomes obvious when analysing the vocabulary used to discuss waters: their role is expected to be purely utilitarian, and when they are transformed it is perceived that something useless is “improved” and becomes a vector of development (Arthur, *The Default Country* and “The Eighth Day of Creation”).

waters become a sterile series of paper trails: they are deprived of agency and reduced to non-existent ecological entities. Fixed and reduced to numbers, thoroughly uprooted from their ecosystems, they are silenced. Their gagging is complete. Such silencing implies the dismemberment<sup>27</sup> of bodies of waters. Weirs and dams clot blood flows and constrict the heart pulses of “boom and bust”<sup>28</sup> watery cycles through Country. Further than this, negating bodies also opens the door to the construction of corporatised (no)bodies. These negated bodies are nobodies: they solely exist based on their value in a money-governed system, rather than as distinct (and yet interconnected) physical entities. Reducing bodies to data thus means that corporeality becomes merchandise; a currency which can be manipulated, traded, and eventually exhausted.

Sound philosopher Frances Dyson denounces this corporatisation of corporeality on a larger scale in *The Tone of Our Times*. In this seminal work, she explores current eco-crises from a sonic perspective, and uses sound—or rather, the way we delimit and fail to consider sound—to offer a reading of our degrading ecological and economic systems. Discussing data and its targeted and selective—ethically dubious—use, she writes:

There are no words or models to allow comparisons between scales of the unimaginable. ... there is a degree of pedantry in the presentation of scientific and economic data that graphs escalations: in ... the rise in ocean temperatures, the reduction in agricultural land, resource depletion, and so on over past decades. These graphs demonstrate a shift of such magnitude and consequence that the word “data” seems too simple, too fragile, too myopic to provide a foundation that could carry the weight and the gravity of the situation. “Data” can be contested, re-presented, negotiated in a way that leaves the magnitude of the global crisis held within the humanised sphere of imaginable and knowable facts, and as such, can be hidden within or obscured by discourse. (148)

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<sup>27</sup> This concept of dismemberment links to philosopher and spatial historian Paul Carter’s work on memory. Memory is comprehended as a material process which consists of putting scattered pieces back together. These different pieces are dis-membered, until memory re-members them (Carter, *Material Thinking* 10-11). Dismembering then also implies trying to forget and precipitate into oblivion through physical action.

<sup>28</sup> I borrow this turn of phrase from *Boom and Bust: Bird Stories for a Dry Country* (Robin et al.)

Data proves insufficient—even inadequate—when it comes to comprehending and discussing eco-crises. Philosopher Timothy Morton’s notion of “hyperobject” echoes this inadequacy. Hyperobjects (such as global warming) are entities of such magnitude and scale that they cannot be grasped in their entirety. Viscous and global, they infiltrate and permeate everything everywhere; and are perceived through a myriad of seemingly disconnected manifestations, rather than as all-encompassing hyperobjects. These manifestations generate a succession of fatigue rather than deliver a single blow, to which one could (re)act when confronted with it (Bradley). As such, the intangibility of hyperobjects defies—and mostly defeats—imagination: they lead to its failure. Yet, imagination does not have to go far to feed off manifestations of these hyperobjects. Dyson articulates the earth’s reactions—the increasingly more frequent natural “disasters” punctuating and composing our routine—as a “voluminous response to the quiet conjectures of data”. She continues and nuances: “This is not a ‘response’, *per se*—there is no dialogue here” (149).

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Cyclones, typhoons, floods and eroding coastal areas present themselves through volume. Waters pound and crash whatever lies in their way. They appear as loud scenes of madness on the news reports bringing them to my TV screen. They scar bodies, leaving palpable marks of destruction in their wake. In Murray River Country, though, this “voluminous” testimony to the “quiet conjectures of data” speaks from the opposite end of the spectrum. The issues arise from the lack of sonic volume; the deafening silence of places where waters used to flow, or the muted, salty shriek of dried dampness under the soles of my feet. The Mouth is gagged. Destruction feels more insidious when it does not yell through torn cliffs and house ceilings; but murmurs and casts over Country a quietness that sounds closer to a form of despair than to the end of the world as pictured in apocalyptic movies. When in Lower Murray Country, nobody is subjected to the roars of overabundant watery presence, but I have learnt—along with everything around me—to cry for the absence of water. For how long can I continue to be deaf to



silence? If connectedness is felt, it is in the form of invisible losses: missing species, wind erosion and jetties protruding on land are left there to bear witness to the colonisation of Murray River Country's waters.



Photograph 2. Signage in Lower Murray Country

Because of their location at the very end of the river system in South Australia,<sup>29</sup> Lower Murray Country's waters are particularly damaged by this colonisation. Their health is principally determined by upstream water management and regulation. Such a geographically induced dependency means bearing the worst of the degradation, as upstream abuse combines with local abuse (*Regulation Impact Statement* 13-16, 82; Strevens 221-2).<sup>30</sup> Despite their great diversity—as river, lake

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<sup>29</sup> South Australia is known as the driest state on the driest continent. This highly local approach is in line with a global trend within the field of humanities as seen through the works of philosophers and geographers Henri Lefebvre (*La Production de l'Espace*), Yi-Fu Tuan, David Harvey and Edward Said. The geographical limits imposed on this study are indicative and do not imply that the movements of the peoples living in or journeying through this area did not extend beyond these boundaries.

<sup>30</sup> Yet, the compartmentalisation of waters in Murray River Country means that the environmental problems menacing Lower Murray Country, while caused and aggravated by insufficient upstream flows, can be responded to in isolation: the closing of the Murray Mouth leads to continuous dredging; and salt water influx from the estuary to the construction of five barrages, which destroy

and lagoon waters stand alongside, and interact with the oceanic waters of the Great Australian Bight—Lower Murray Country’s waters<sup>31</sup> thus remain particularly vulnerable to, and defenceless in the face of, mutating forms of colonialism.



Map 2. Lower Murray Country  
(Source: MDBC)

The Ngarrindjeri—the Traditional Custodians of Lower Murray Country—are doubly affected by this ongoing colonisation, and this despite the theoretical specificity<sup>32</sup> of the South Australian system regarding the land rights of Aboriginal people (Foster and Sendziuk). Resulting practices—labelled a “new wave of dispossession” (Weir 57)—impede their right to self-determination (Jackson et al.); and intergenerational connectivity is lost as places disappear and systems of

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“The Meeting of the Waters”, an important Ngarrindjeri identity marker and place (Kämpf and Bell; Simons).

<sup>31</sup> What these waters are and how they take form, along with a timeline of their colonisation, is developed within the body of the thesis.

<sup>32</sup> Founding documents of South Australia recognised the property rights of Aboriginal people and made provision for these rights to be respected (Reynolds).

knowledge can no longer be transmitted in an embodied form (Hemming and Trevorrow; “Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin”).<sup>33</sup>

Since the Millennium Drought, the road to recovery has been slow and uneven. It has been seriously threatened by upstream states which regularly fail to hold up their end of the bargain when it comes to water extraction and redistribution.<sup>34</sup> Beside this issue, the measures taken are also proving their limits: there is an ongoing exclusion of Aboriginal people despite their knowledge about these waters, as well as a misunderstanding of—and disrespect for—the relevance of this knowledge to natural resource management (Hemming et al.; Somerville 7-8; Weir; D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Hattam et al. 109-15). It seems that government agencies are still failing to move beyond a colonial frame of reference. New forms of settler colonialism continue to condition the overall vision for Lower Murray Country’s waters; along with national ways of being around, and interacting with, these waters. It infinitely (re)iterates an insurmountable chiasmatic dissention between economy and ecology; between currencies and bodies.

This thesis attempts to deconstruct and move past these binary (re)iterations. It is concerned with how to instigate and/or reignite dialogues across such (re)iterations and lay new ground on which these dialogues between humans and their watery environments can sprout. Literary theorist Roland Barthes writes: “Myth hides nothing and flaunts nothing: it distorts; myth is neither a lie nor a confession: it is an inflexion” (*Mythologies* 128). By looking at the points of intersection of conflicting “inflexions”, this thesis places mythologies in imaginary dialogues. As it attempts to hear silence beyond power-oriented discourses, it allows me to listen for responses and to craft a space where the voices of the colonised—whether human or non-human—can be heard.

By exploring and bringing together the musical diversity of watery sound in Lower Murray Country, this research indeed aims to imagine a space within the enforced

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<sup>33</sup> The ecological devastation is such that Ngarrindjeri cultural weavers need to source their sedge from elsewhere as it no longer grows abundantly on their Country’s banks (Corowa; *Ngarrindjeri Lakun* 15-17; Chance 104; “Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin”).

<sup>34</sup> There are currently several legal enquiries into the matter, and much public outrage has been expressed.

silence of colonialism where the multiple voices composing watery movements in Lower Murray Country can be heard and confronted. Such space will contribute to forging and fostering encounters. These (imaginary) encounters are designed to counteract the hegemony of violent monological epistemologies and open the possibilities for renewed localised and inclusive intercultural exchanges which will anchor belonging and nurture the (re)construction of a vigorous polyphonic waterscape, promoting healthy ecologies in our time of environmental crisis.<sup>35</sup> As such, this research responds to artist, philosopher and spatial historian Paul Carter's impulse to construct a symbolic and poetic history of Australian landscapes (*The Road* 349-50). This impulse for poetic histories of formerly colonial societies is also voiced by historian Greg Dening in the wider Pacific context ("A Poetic for Histories"). Such histories highlight that there is no single understanding of Country, no unique grand narrative. They oppose monolingual discourses which have been implemented through imperialism and colonialism, and which still deny many a rightful voice in the account of the cultural retention and/or transformation of Australian waterscapes. This thesis reads beyond the seemingly incontestable settler environmental ideology which gives the impression that there is, and can only be, one Australia—as denounced by author Alexis Wright (15). Via its methodology this research addresses the need for plural visions of Australia to coexist on equal terms.

This thesis is therefore conceived as a project of decoloniality (of thoughts) and an attempt to reach beyond the limits of postcolonialism and its sometimes criticised analytical, academic aspects. Social justice scholars Jarrett Martineau and Eric Ritskes write: "the task of decolonial artists, scholars and activists is not simply to offer amendments or edits to the current world, but to display the mutual sacrifice and relationality needed to sabotage colonial systems of thought and power for the purpose of liberatory alternatives" (2). In this optic, where repayment assumes a supposed equivalence—an equivalence that "is ultimately, logically impossible to

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<sup>35</sup> Richly and diversely cultured environments have been shown to foster healthy and sustainable environments (Pretty et al.; Higgins-Desbiolles 147). Yet, in Australia, Indigenous peoples seem to be the only peoples who strongly believe that both culture and Country need to be thriving in order to sustain one another (Graham 106; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 257; Kinnane 25; Corowa; Weir 13, 47). It has been argued that, if such an attitude toward the environment were more widespread, this would represent a much-needed evolution in the history of interactions between imperial plans and environmental approaches (D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Plumwood; Biggs 17-21).

establish” (Dyson 154), this thesis proposes another manner of approaching and understanding indebtedness. Rather than requiring “isolation, separation and unicity” (154), equivalence is understood and discussed in terms of connectedness, relationships and similarities. In implementing these shifts in the perception of equivalence, I aim to decorporatise corporeality and (re)embody waters textually by developing another way to explore and represent them. As such, this thesis steps into imaginary realms to assert that, from the ruins of the present and the ashes of irreversible environmental degradation, a positive outcome can emerge: circumstances are slowly and somewhat shyly pushing us toward positive change. This entire thesis thus rests on philosopher Michel Serres’ rhetorical, optimistic query: “What if the present crisis in turn sounded the end of the economy’s exclusive reign?” (*Times of Crisis* 23).

## Listening to the Music of Waters

“Sounded” is a thoroughly appropriate term: at a time of unprecedented environmental degradation, there is a lack of attention granted to the study of sound when it comes to ecocriticism<sup>36</sup> (Dyson; Serres, *Les Cinq Sens* 23), particularly in relation to waters. Previous research on this topic has mainly concentrated on literature, politics, visual arts and history, rather than sound (Bradley; D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Dick; Dunlap). Reciprocally, it is rare for music and sound scholars to focus on environmental interactions; and even when they do, there is a tendency to overlook and ignore environmental destruction (Barclay).

Of the studies which have looked directly at music in an Australian context, the focus has primarily been on the music itself.<sup>37</sup> There are two main streams of research which are generally kept separate, despite the fact that cross-cultural exchanges and influences occupy a part in both scholarships: one dedicated to settlers’ musical practices and the other to Indigenous ones. In response to the enduring common belief that not much music worthy of attention was produced by settlers in Australia before the mid-1960s (J. Rose 6-7) and that, as a result, there was no such thing as settlers’ Australian music, some of the scholarship has long been characterised by an attempt to refute such groundless prejudice and define Australian genres and their evolutions (Whiteoak; J. Rose; Radic; Covell; Bebbington).<sup>38</sup> Additionally, the highly politicised period of the 1950s witnessed the rise of a scholarship dedicated to popular music, and especially folk music, which was then enthusiastically perceived as the oral tradition at the root of the

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<sup>36</sup> That is, analysing the construction of the environment.

<sup>37</sup> Extensive recording, indexing and defining of Australian musical production and scholarship was undertaken until the late 1990s as the lack of such a guide on which to base further research was a concern for many academics (Covell; Crisp; Pinne; Marsi; Radic; Rowley). More recently, music scholars John Whiteoak and Aline Scott-Maxwell edited *Currency Companion to Music and Dance in Australia*, which offers a good summary of the Australian musical scene and scholarship (although some parts are more developed than others depending on the expertise of each contributor).

<sup>38</sup> It is interesting to note that, to address this perceived cultural cringe, composers (such as Peter Sculthorpe) have addressed issues concerning Indigenous rights or turned to Indigenous music in a quest for a distinctive and authentic Australian sound. These cultural borrowings raise many ethical problems (Koch, “Aboriginal Influences”). The Jindyworobak movement, which rose and disappeared in the 1950s, can be seen as the literary manifestation of such a trend. This reflects the presence of nostalgia without memory (Appadurai 49), and contrasts with lived and transmitted memory (Nora, *Présent, Nation, Mémoire* ix).

development of a national ethos (Smith; Smith and Brett).<sup>39</sup> While the focus of Indigenous music study was at first placed on “traditional” music,<sup>40</sup> the scholarship diversified and cultural contacts have received increased attention since the 1980s and the rise of world music (Jordan). Contemporary researchers perceive a clear continuum between traditional and contemporary Aboriginal music, as non-Aboriginal musical styles were adapted to Aboriginal musical purposes and circumstances (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson; Walker; Isaacs; Wild 583; Stubington 35-6, 123-4; Reeve; Brunton 32:23; Ellis et al.). Through ethnomusicological and anthropological approaches, scholars have primarily worked on understanding the meanings of Indigenous music to Indigenous performers and their audience, and how these meanings are conveyed, most notably through the analysis of the interwoven relation between dance and music (Berndt and Berndt, *The World of the First Australians*; Strehlow; Rowley; Isaacs; Ellis, *Aboriginal Songs*; Barwick et al.; Whiteoak and Scott-Maxwell; Magowan and Neuenfeldt). Generally, music in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies has been unanimously described as occupying a preponderant role and as being closely linked to power and knowledge (Brunton, particularly 41:21; Waterman; Stubington; Dunbar-Hall; Mattingley and Hampton). It also appears that, while Aboriginal music and its history have been studied extensively, little research has focused on this music and landscape,<sup>41</sup> and particularly waterscape.

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<sup>39</sup> Indeed, in the 1950s and 1960s, a wave of left-wing collectors such as John Meredith, Ron Edwards, Hugh Anderson, John Manifold and Russel Ward discovered and interpreted the folk music of the previous century. Through their selective and politically motivated collection, they created the canon of an “invented tradition” (Hobsbawm and Ranger) which formed the basis for the folk movement and revival in Australia (Smith; Radic 12). Subjected to the professionalisation of the performers and the continuous influences from recorded musical models from the USA, this canon ramified and dislocated to form country, bush and roots music from the 1970s onward, and then world music from the 1990s under a push from cultural politics for globalisation. Cross-overs between musical scenes such as rock, jazz and hip-hop have also had a great influence on folk and country musicians (Smith; Whiteoak and Scott-Maxwell; Beddington). Despite this diversity, this genre remains built on authoritative memories, and as such, it constructs a dominant historical narrative which excludes “dissident” voices and records (White; Lowenthal, “History and Memory”; Ohnuki-Tierney; Bakhtin). This nationalist narrative is yet to be fully subverted in Australia.

<sup>40</sup> The urgency of recording what many researchers perceived as a disappearing tradition governed the scholarship in that area for a significant length of time. As a result, the focus was primarily placed on country and traditional tribal contexts, to the detriment of urban or peri-urban styles and contact music (Isaacs; Wild 583). Additionally, performances which corresponded to western notions of “traditional” Aboriginal music were perceived as more authentic and “real”, while any production influenced by western culture was deemed corrupted (Stubington; Kartomi).

<sup>41</sup> In Australia, landscape is indeed only very occasionally and briefly studied in relation to Indigenous music and, in such cases, the analysis is generally grounded within global discourses about the strong and crucial links between songs, places and identities for Indigenous peoples (Isaacs; Lipsitz; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson; Stubington). These links are made particularly obvious by the

Despite its relevance in our time of ecological crises, the work of sound artists and musicians in Australia continues to be sparsely documented and subjected to little critical scrutiny (Coyle 15). This statement applies more strongly to rural contexts, which receive even less attention than urban and/or industrial ones (Ashton et al.; Evers et al. 3). This is surprising as there is a recurring concern for, and a strong history of experimentation with, the environment in Australian music (Richards; Barwick et al.; Martin; Coyle). Worldwide, the fields of acoustic ecology and soundscape<sup>42</sup> composition (or sculpture) are growing steadily. Pioneers such as composers R. Murray Schafer and Barry Truax (“Soundscape Composition as Global Music”) have both defined and experimented in the genre. In Australia, the work of sound artists such as Ros Bandt—who defines sound art as “an art practice which designs and crafts sound as its primary medium” (qtd. in Coyle 15)—and Leah Barclay has also been influential. Some of it centres around waters, albeit not the waters of Lower Murray Country. As such, the musicality of these waters remains mostly ignored. Yet, in light of the work undertaken in the fields of eco- and ethnomusicologies, it seems that sound studies offer a good way to approach and understand a place’s formation and evolution (Lipsitz; Feld and Fox 43-4). Both indeed posit that musical production strongly epitomises the cultural environment of its bearers and reflects their historical experiences (Herndon and McLeod; Kaemmer).<sup>43</sup> This is because environmental ideologies inform all cultural perceptions and productions, sound included (Cummins 5-6). The latter underscores the evolving human interactions and relationships with waters. Cultural values and meanings imbue and shape this sound; and, as such, listening to it means hearing peoples and cultures. It also means hearing waterscapes. Poet Charles

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ongoing creation and performance of songlines in the Australian context (Kock, “Aboriginal Songs in Land Claims”; Radic). Country has also been described as the primary issue, topic and political message in contemporary Aboriginal music and performance (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 248; Breen). Yet, beyond these observations which often sit within a wider Indigenous frame, the specific evolving descriptions, connotations and meanings attached to landscapes are rarely given much analysis.

<sup>42</sup> The term “soundscape” was coined by composer R. Murray Schafer to designate a sonic environment (or landscape) consisting of all the sounds around us (131). It carries an ideological as well as ecological reach. In this thesis, I extend this term, as is often done in scholarship, to encompass wider sonic landscapes, including those generated by human-produced compositions relating to waters. The term “acoustic environment” also applies to what I am describing.

<sup>43</sup> Although these are often interpreted and manipulated through politicised and/or idealised lenses.



Baudelaire states: “La musique donne l’idée de l’espace.”<sup>44</sup> Sound does not arise in isolation from its spatial surroundings. It arises out of an environment, and this environment contributes to giving it a shape. It imprints sound; but is also imprinted by it in return. Musicologist Thérèse Radic writes: “for a country to exist ... it must be sung and only then can it be said to exist” (17). Sound—and the sounding of sound—is used to shape, enclose and control our (sensorial) environment (Dyson 2). It has therefore been described as an often-neglected and/or unexplored source of hindsight beyond the ocular-centrism displayed in literary and pictorial studies.

Over the last decade, the potential of listening to the music of waters (both intrinsic and removed—that is, human-produced) has been extensively documented. Music has been theorised as “text for ecocritical musicological interpretation” (R. Ryan 43). A relatively recent branch of investigation, ecomusicology, has emerged. It “considers musical and sonic issues, both textual and performative, related to ecology and the natural environment” (Garrett). As such, it offers “new *social critiques* about the intersections of music, culture and nature—and in general, about the world around us” (Allen 418, original emphasis; see also Allen and Dawe). Music in particular—because it is a field of symbolic activity which locates<sup>45</sup> and because it has the capacity to capture processes of culture contact and *bricolage*<sup>46</sup>—has been theorised as an alternative means to study the impulses behind religious, socio-political, educational, ideological, historical and cultural changes (Kartomi and Blum; Merriam; Baumann). As anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss explains: “[l]e mythe et l’œuvre musicale apparaissent ainsi comme des chefs d’orchestre dont les auditeurs sont les silencieux exécutants”<sup>47</sup> (26).

Within an ethnomusicological framework, music is indubitably perceived as “the site for creative and sustaining cultural responses to the facts of history” and its analysis allows light to be shed on issues of “broader ethnographic significance”

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<sup>44</sup> “Music gives the idea of space.”

<sup>45</sup> Music acts as a record (of collective memories and present experiences of place) which generates and defines communities (Strokes). Because cultural values and social dynamics are articulated through music, it plays an important role in cultural maintenance, relocation and transmission (Barwick et al. 8; Radic 14).

<sup>46</sup> Such as incorporation, assimilation, counter-assimilation, intergenerational differences and reintegration.

<sup>47</sup> “Myth and music then appear like the conductors of an orchestra whose listeners are the silent performers.”

(Barwick et al. 8). In particular—and because of the deep interconnections between sound and social structures—listening to sound offers an outlet to explore and deconstruct power divisions and manifestations. The study of sound has been theorised as a useful indicator in contexts of violence, such as colonisation (McDonald). Sound offers a platform to reveal, hear and understand the past and ongoing presence and effect of this violence. As author Pascal Quignard states: “[l]a musique est simplement là pour parler de ce dont la parole ne peut parler”<sup>48</sup> (113). The polysemic character of musical meaning and the indexical relation of sound to memory and experience (McDonald) are at the roots of the subversive nature of sound—and particularly of music—throughout history (Dolar 42-52). Especially in contexts of unbalanced distribution of power, it provides a way to capture and/or recuperate the buried voices of History to articulate histories. It becomes a means to uncover historicities functioning in the interstices of traditional historiography and to articulate the historically inarticulate experience of both human and non-human entities. It locates what cultural critic Pierre Macherey calls “real history” in the silences and gaps of historical records. Its study thus represents a means of mapping diversity and recording a largely unrecorded history (Ballard; Denning, “A Poetic for Histories”; Hayward, *Sound Alliances* 5-6). As it makes silenced entities audible again in historical discourses, it provides a way to address and subvert colonial bias.<sup>49</sup> It is therefore unsurprising that, in an Australian Indigenous context, music has proved an instrument and vector of decoloniality: while it “cannot reverse the impacts of colonisation”, it has been used to represent and negotiate colonial violence, degradation and legacies (Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 77; Mackinlay).

The study of sound thus suggests and enables me to glimpse other ways to “see” (hear) waters, and to explore how humans and non-humans relate to them. As I listen to watery environments, I can speak to and beyond the silence of literary and visual arts (including cartography); I can hear the noisy twists and twirls of waters, and “unfreeze” them—that is, work with mobile representations of them. Sound

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<sup>48</sup> “Music is only here to express what language cannot.”

<sup>49</sup> A musical focus is particularly interesting in an Australian context because it has been argued that all aspects of colonial life are embedded in the musical record (J. Rose 7-8), and because of the ongoing importance of music in Indigenous cultures (Ellis, *Aboriginal Music*; Breen; Mattingley and Hampton). This musical focus is also particularly relevant because little study has been undertaken on Aboriginal music from the geographical area under scrutiny (as illustrated by the lengthy section of “Aboriginal Traditions” in Whiteoak and Scott-Maxwell 26-37).

goes beyond abstract segmentation and places watery movements back in tension. Through sound, I moor and anchor these movements. I (re)contextualise them. This recontextualisation involves bodies. I delve within data to extract the bodies and the bodily perceptions hidden behind it; I give primacy to the senses. In that capacity, my research hopes to develop the bases for other ways to sense or, quoting Dyson, for “a sense beyond cents” (155). Listening implies envisioning another way to map these waters, outside of monetary considerations.

In particular, I use sound to blur and defy “lines” in favour of “zones”. These lines and zones are conceptual as much as physical: sound allows me to deconstruct the different theoretical categories of space and culture (Harvey). I look in between these spatial and cultural categories to uncover articulations and hinges, tensions and exchanges. Placing sub/objects into dialogue allows me to partially respond to, and achieve, this goal. However, I also wish to go further and use the porous nature of arbitrary delimitations to sketch puddles of transformative encounters rather than fences of separation. This porosity should transpire visually. I repurpose maps to serve this goal: rather than factual maps of physical properties (such as topography or geology), I create maps based on sound and forms of sonority. These do not stop at clear borders. Such maps implement a blurring of boundaries—or a chiaroscuro—reminiscent of Carter’s public artwork *Nearamnew (Mythform)*. In Federation Square, Melbourne, words, languages and visions are crammed together. Each fragment retains its particularities, while somehow blending with its surroundings through physical appositions which forge in-between encounters and dialects. This physically tangible thwarting of linearity creates texts which resist deciphering. The maps I create as part of this thesis function similarly: they are characterised by a non-linear, blot-based approach where layers endlessly and imperfectly superimpose. Such maps stand in opposition to the mosaic mapping of Indigenous Australia, with its languages neatly delimited, whereas in reality contact zones overlapped and moved. Interpreting waterscapes through sound and creating sonic maps of these waterscapes thus allow for the plural, diverse and polyphonic existence of these waterscapes to be visually revealed and celebrated.

## Flow and Resonance

Yet, despite the decolonial reach of an eco- and ethnomusicological orientation, the challenge of *producing a physical body of work*—a thesis—reflecting this reach remains. How to move *concretely*—and not simply theoretically—past the ethno- and anthropocentric nature of my concern for the waters of Lower Murray Country? Academia has long been (and occasionally remains) the bastion of power imbalance; a site of abuse, appropriation and objectification (Diversi and Moreira; Battiste; Tuhiwai Smith; Te Awekotuku; Brearley et al.; Kincheloe; Grossman). Under these circumstances, academic methodology and language appear more like the institutionalisation of a cleaving barrier, rather than a potential bridge and/or merger. I gather inspiration in the waters themselves; in their imaginary and physical properties. Two notions in particular—that of flow and resonance—give rhythm and tone to the entire thesis.

### CORPOREALITY (rhythms)

#### **Waters flow.**

Moving through currents, waters run and circulate through Country; they converge and diverge, in a sinuous calligraphy of bodies meandering over and retracting from the land. Their flows are inherently rhythmic: etymologically, rhythm means flowing, moving in time.<sup>50</sup> Waters have and are rhythms; and they carry these rhythms onto Country, giving it a tempo.<sup>51</sup> Carter argues that the ground on which we walk is composed of rhythmic variations which inform and delineate our movements. He writes that “[r]hythm is the contraction of movement into physical forms; it makes sense of both movement and stasis” (*Dark Writing* 15).<sup>52</sup> Discussing the role of the body in watery knowledge acquisition, production and

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<sup>50</sup> From the Greek *ρυθμός* and the Latin *rhythmus*.

<sup>51</sup> This aligns with the *Oxford Companion to Music* which defines rhythm (tempo) as embracing everything to do with both time and motion, where motion always happens in space.

<sup>52</sup> In more detail, rhythms express the ways in which entities share spatio-temporal interrelations which translate in practice into intervals of motion and repose (Carter, *Dark Writing* 274; Chen 534). In that sense, rhythm is “the formalisation of the eido-kinetic intuition” (that is, the “inherent sense mobile subjects have of their relationships with their surroundings”) and such intuition is both “inscribed in the constitution of place” (Carter, *Dark Writing* 168-74) and submerged in lived time (Chen 533).

transmission, Somerville writes that “[t]he body is the vehicle, the means of carrying the flows of water knowledge. The materiality of our human bodies is linked to the body of places” (182). As such, thinking through flows—through rhythms—equates with emplacing and involving bodies. Thinking through flows means engaging in what is defined as “rhythmanalysis”.



Photograph 3. Windy Path on Sand

Coined by philosopher Lucio Alberto Pinheiro dos Santos in 1931, the term “rhythmanalysis” was expanded upon by philosophers Gaston Bachelard<sup>53</sup> and above all Henri Lefebvre. Inspired by his predecessors, Lefebvre articulates his incursion into rhythmanalysis as aiming “to found a science, a new field of knowledge [*savoir*]: the analysis of rhythms; with practical consequences” (*Rhythmanalysis* 3). The *Oxford Dictionary of Human Geography* explains that his approach focuses “on the effects of rhythms on people and the places they occupy ... [and] on the cyclical and linear rhythms that structure the body and everyday behaviour” (“Rhythmanalysis”). Rhythm is not simply reduced to the

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<sup>53</sup> Most notably in *La Psychanalyse du Feu* (58) and *La Dialectique de la Durée* (129-50).

ob/subject of analysis; it is also turned into a mode and a tool of analysis (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* xii). The analysis begins through the rhythmanalyst's own body, "for rhythm is heard only when the subject prevails" (Bedetti 431). Lefebvre writes:

**Rhythm** reunites **quantitative** aspects and elements, which mark time and distinguish moments in it—and **qualitative** aspects and elements, which link them together, found the unities and result from them. Rhythm appears as regulated time, governed by rational laws, but in contact with what is least rational in human being: the lived, the carnal, the body. (*Rhythmanalysis* 8-9, original emphasis)

In this configuration, the body of the rhythmanalyst acts as the metronome: a subject and first point of analysis, through which all subsequent analyses are shaped (19), and through which to explore the different sites of rhythms (be they social, biological or physiological) that interrelate in space and time. Rhythmanalysis therefore corresponds to a mode of analysis, rather than representing the sheer analysis of rhythms *per se*. This echoes with Serres who argues that the body is the mediator between language and the sounds of the earth (*Les Cinq Sens*). It is through the body that these sounds can first be apprehended and then emerge as language—are translated into language—such as music. The elemental role attributed to the body is enclosed in Lefebvre's title in the earlier French publication of some of the text ("elements of rhythmanalysis"), which echoes Bachelard's description of elements<sup>54</sup> as the building blocks of the world, as well as its constituents or basic principles (*L'Eau et les Rêves*). And rhythmanalysis indeed implies that the body plays on these many different levels.

Through rhythmanalysis, time stops being calculable: it resists abstracting generalisations such as clock time<sup>55</sup> to become "lived" (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* xi)—almost "turbulent", to use philosopher and sociologist Bruno Latour's terminology (*We Have Never Been Modern* 73).<sup>56</sup> Lefebvre was himself an amateur

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<sup>54</sup> That is: earth, fire, air and water; the latter being the primary element as it leads to exchanges and transformations.

<sup>55</sup> In that respect, Lefebvre's understanding of time is close to a Nietzschean sense of change and cycle. I read clock time as the temporal equivalent of the Cartesian reduction of space through mapping. My use of maps also challenges this bias as it rests on the layering and mixing of different temporalities.

<sup>56</sup> Latour uses the term turbulence to describe how time no longer flows linearly and continuously. Such a term marks his understanding that we have come to the end of the passing past, and that the

musician, and music figures as an inspirational source in his work: “an alternative to purely mathematical models of calculation and measure” (xi). Sound indeed carries an inherent rhythmicity: it happens in place and time. Music offers a threefold way to apprehend time: through melody (a sequence of notes in temporal succession), harmony (notes sounding at the same time) and rhythm (placement of notes and their relative length). The latter is particularly important within my thesis because, “[a]s music demonstrates, the question of rhythm raises issues of change and repetition, identity and difference, contrast and continuity” (xii). There is an ethical dimension to rhythm as it “implies a relationship—a direction in space and a position in time” (Carter, *Ground Truthing* 222; see also Carter, “The Forrest in the Clearing” 142).

Yet, despite its potentialities in terms of listening to our acoustic environment, rhythmanalysis is rarely (under)taken outside of urban areas. Drawing on Serres, Dyson argues:

Isolated in houses and buildings, with cities domed by data clouds, we have become deaf to the sounds of the earth, and as a consequence now lack the ability to sense, and this is pivotal to the sustenance of common sense. All that we hear, all that we can listen to, is the racket of our own voices—arguing, legislating, pronouncing, warring, and transferring power. What happens when “the racket” substitutes for the environment? (14)

This racket is the result of the (unsustainable) mythologies imposed on the waters. Through rhythmanalysis, it becomes possible to go beyond the “racket” and perceive the rhythms of waters—and how these are humanly translated—within and beyond (pre)supposed arrhythmia. By focusing on the sonic shifts occurring within and in between mythologies, this thesis is thus consistent with Barthes’ argument that “there is no fixity in mythical concepts: they can come into being, alter,

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past instead reverberates and echoes through both the present and the future. He writes: “This beautiful order is disturbed once the quasi-objects are seen as mixing up different periods, ontologies or genres. Then a historical period will give the impression of a great hotchpotch. Instead of a fine laminary flow, we will most often get a turbulent flow of whirlpools and rapids. Time becomes reversible instead of irreversible. ... The proliferation of quasi-objects has exploded modern temporality along with its Constitution” (*We Have Never Been Modern* 73). Time has become continuously turbulent—similarly to waters.

disintegrate, disappear completely. And it is precisely because they are historical that history can very easily suppress them” (*Mythologies* 119). Sounds that were masked, whether because unwanted or silenced, are made audible by listening through the body—beyond the limitations of mythological frameworks. As such, rhythmanalysis offers a way to transition from hard to soft sounds: as sound passes through the body, it acquires (it becomes) meaning, and this filtering makes it bearable—that is, understandable (Serres, *Les Cinq Sens*). As such, rhythmanalysis means that I explore waters as and through bodies—or, to emulate Lefebvre, I listen to waters as if they were an opera (xii).

Undertaking an analysis through the body also makes the bias of the researcher obvious. Rhythmanalysis implicates my bodily subjectivity, as paying attention to acoustic environments stimulates affect and engenders affective responses (Duffy). Literary and cultural studies scholar Anna Gibbs argues: “[r]hythm, I think, is a critical key to thinking writing as an affective methodology” (“Writing as Method” 227). In this thesis, affect shines through my bodily subjectivity: meaning comes from my perception and interpretation of the world around me. As the body of the researcher—my body—acts as the “filter” (or prism) through which the analysis arises, then rhythmanalysis prevents me from distancing myself as a critique: it emplaces me within the very acoustic environments that I am exploring. It is rhythm which links me to them and which determines how I perceive them. Lefebvre highlights this relativity of rhythms as he states that “[e]very study of rhythms is necessarily comparative” (*Rhythmanalysis* 91). As sound connects me to watery environments through my body, my thesis is written in the affective register. Imagining and feeling fuse: I (re)embody these waters within my own bodily sensibilities. My “sensuous experience ... informs the imaginaries of the world” that I expose (Kullberg 980). And as anthropologist Michael Jackson summarises: “[t]elling a story about one’s experience effectively substitutes words for the world. Words are more accessible and manageable than the world” (122).



## EMBODIMENT (tones)

### **Waters resonate.**

Running deep, waters carry the memories of Country. To paraphrase poet and playwright Derek Walcott: they are history. And the memory of waters is ineffable.

Author Toni Morrison writes:

You know, they straightened out the Mississippi River in places, to make room for houses and livable acreage. Occasionally the river floods these places. “Floods” is the word they use, but in fact it is not flooding; it is remembering. Remembering where it used to be. All water has a perfect memory and is forever trying to get back to where it was. Writers are like that: remembering where we were, what valley we ran through, what the banks were like, the light that was there and the route back to our original place. It is emotional memory—what the nerves and the skin remember as well as how it appeared. And a rush of imagination is our “flooding”. (99)<sup>57</sup>

Waters are (silent) witnesses. Saturated with unarticulated memories, they struggle against colonial limitations. Sometimes, this saturation can no longer be contained: the memories that they carry burst out of their colonial bonds and scream across the land. The physicality of these waters connects memory and body. As my ears are buzzing with histories, the physiology of sound implants these watery memories deep within my own body. Sound carries the memories of waters under my skin, and affect synchronises rhythms. Waters flood histories and trigger a rapid rush of blood to my head. Bodies respond to each other. My breathing is cyclical; it is timed with the passage of each row of waves, each tide.

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<sup>57</sup> What interests me at this stage is primarily the first half of the quotation. However, the relevance of the second half will become clear as I progress further through this introduction to my thesis.



Photograph 4. Waves on the shores of Lower Murray Country

What the body perceives and transcribes through rhythmanalysis is also a continuous reverberation of memories across a space-time continuum shattered by watery eruption. The memories of waters are indeed temporally disparate: waters are “transformative archives of multigenerational memories” (Chen et al. 18; see also Abdulla et al. 8-23). Layers pile on top of, and melt with, each other as time flows. Each current contributes to compressing and extending spatiotemporal distances. Floods regurgitate everything simultaneously and, as the waters retreat, everything is taken back within its folds. These transformative back-and-forth movements multiply sonic meanings: environments and sonorities that have been muted by the colonial racket are sounded and resounded (Dyson 157), that is, endlessly revisited and (re)interpreted. Such a process of resounding enables me to use my body to go past the mechanical rhythms that have obliterated and overwritten the organic ones. Rhythmanalysis then appears as a way to re-member<sup>58</sup> by following the memories of waters. Writing a rhythmanalysis becomes analogous to writing memoirs: it implies (re)sounding waters, and wider watery environments.

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<sup>58</sup> Once again, following Carter’s idea of dis-membering.

The rhythmic memory of waters guides the writing hand.<sup>59</sup> It gives it its tone. Tone is used here to describe the quality/nature of the sounds as they fall into rhythms and blend/superimpose to generate a rhythmic (or acoustic) environment: an ambiance. In that respect, rhythmanalysis joins with an ethics of remembering: it gives voice to an emotional ecology which focuses on perception to acknowledge and (re)invent rhythms beyond arrhythmic degradation. My body responds to its duty: the past is never forgotten, but constantly and selectively—that is, subjectively—(re)interpreted (Derrida, *Specters*).

Throughout this thesis, I use these physical and metaphorical movements of flows and resonances in an attempt—even if imperfect—to challenge the implicit crystallisation of academic writing within the “epistemic violence” of an ethno- and anthropocentric system of representation (Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak?*). I aim to decentre the hegemonic voice of the (non-Indigenous, human) researcher and deconstruct this “storehouse” in an answer to both education scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith—regarding Indigenous peoples (44)—and anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose—regarding environments. Concretely, though, how will I proceed to enact abstract concepts such as rhythmanalysis and resounding; and to transpose their associated watery movements within the thesis—especially since “[l]’écrit suppose le non-mouvement : le corps n’y accompagne pas le flux du dit”<sup>60</sup> (Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* 237)?

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<sup>59</sup> The analogy with writing is developed later in more depth, along with the importance of the act of writing in this thesis.

<sup>60</sup> “Writing implies non-movement: the body does not follow the flow of the spoken.”

## Watery Methodologies: Waters and Relations

Thinking in terms of flow and resonance implies thinking (with) waters, that is, imagining and following watery rhythms not only in content, but also in form. “Thinking waters” then means that waters speak through both of these non-dissociable and indivisible aspects of the thesis. It means that the geo-temporal fluidity and porosity of waters becomes a model to destabilise imposed (academic) frameworks in an attempt to speak, conduct, and present research in a different way.<sup>61</sup> Using such a model means that waters become both the sub/object and means of study: a physical and metaphorical element-entity-space that informs the way I conduct and present my research.<sup>62</sup> In order to achieve this, I transform waters into a guiding leitmotif which enables me to weave my investigation together, as I move in between theoretical and physical spaces to bring people and their watery environments into dialogues, both at the local and global levels. I therefore proceed to a form of academic translation, turning a particular environmental entity into a conceptual framework, to design a thesis that is cognisant of waters’ movements and behaviours: fluid, malleable, opaque: boundless.

In the context of this thesis, “thinking waters” is undertaken through “thinking relation”. Such an approach (the articulation of a theoretical turn) is guided by the work of Martinican philosopher and poet Édouard Glissant (1928–2011). Glissant dedicated his lifework to exploring the formation and evolution of the cultural landscape of his home island. Despite this specific geographical positioning, his work has broad reach and implications in global post/decolonial discourses as he articulates theories which can be applied to any landscape to comprehend the multitude of interactions between the multiple forces at play within (formerly) colonial contexts. In particular, using Martinique as a primary ground for inquiry, experimentation and analysis, Glissant develops the notion of “Relation”<sup>63</sup> in

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<sup>61</sup> This deconstruction of the “storehouse” is always limited, as postcolonial concepts are themselves academic constructs, and it is hard to free them from imposed frameworks (Tuhiwai Smith).

<sup>62</sup> I use the term “model” in the sense developed by computer scientist Jean-Gabriel Ganascia: a model represents an analogical and/or correlating simplification of the real which acts as an intermediary between the researcher and the researched (82). It is a tool of investigation which enables the researcher to comprehend the researched.

<sup>63</sup> The noun “relation” has its roots in the Latin *relatio*, which means story or narrative. Its meanings later developed to encompass the idea of the link between two things or phenomena.

regard to a poetics he theorises to imagine and describe the wide range of connections and interactions between cultures—and their effects—in our age of (liquid) modernity.<sup>64</sup> Relation is cultural movements—cultures in movement—and it figures at the core of Glissant’s entire oeuvre. Through Relation, Glissant proposes a working model for a cultural inquiry on a gigantic scale and, as such, his definition of this notion is all-encompassing:

Relation is not to be confused with the cultures we are discussing nor with the economy of their internal relationships nor even the intangible results of the intricate involvement of all internal relationships with all possible external relationships. Nor it is to be confused with some marvellous accident that might suddenly occur apart from any relationship, the known unknown, in which chance would be the magnet. Relation is all these things at once. (*Poetics of Relation* 170-1)

Relation is simultaneously continuity and opening through voluntary or involuntary listening and contact. It is everything and everywhere; it is positioned as key to apprehending all facets of cultural production, transmission and alteration. Francophone studies scholar Anjali Prabhu summarises this notion as the “ways in which different cultures encountering one another in contingent historical circumstances transform themselves and each other into new and unforeseeable entities” (76). Relation is a dynamic and fundamental “measuring tool” of any and all cultural movements. Yet, despite the universal reach of this notion of Relation, Glissant never loses sight of his geographical positioning. He remains firmly anchored in the Caribbean archipelago at all times. And constantly and repeatedly, these archipelagic roots and routes surround him and his work with waters. This centrality of waters for/in both the man and the oeuvre is reinforced by a violent history of movements over waters for Martinique: colonised by the French in the seventeenth century, brutally emptied of its entire Indigenous population, and then (re)built on slavery and trade, Martinique remains an overseas French region and department.<sup>65</sup> It is an island defined and constructed by waters, which do not act as

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<sup>64</sup> I extrapolate the adjective “liquid” from sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman’s concept of “liquid modernity”, which designates the unstable, mobile and constantly changing nature of relationships and identities in contemporary societies.

<sup>65</sup> Glissant is extremely critical of the harmful influence of France on the cultural and economic development of Martinique, denouncing the resulting uprooting of the Martinican imaginary. He

connectors (as in the Pacific), but as markers of distance and dislocation, as a physical manifestation of the colonial difference. It is a place where waters represent the lost cemeteries of memories, the removal from the African motherland; where waters carry both the sunken slave ships and the colonial ideal; the “here-now” and the “there-then”, forever joined in the tumults of the aqueous abyss, and yet never truly meeting on the flattened land. Glissant’s Relation stretches around waters, across waters, within waters: it is full of waters. It is itself watery: fluid, malleable, opaque: boundless.

Such a notion of Relation, which functions in harmony with waters and watery movements, thus seems to provide a pertinent way to explore these entities and the cultural evolution of human interactions with them. As Relation and waters move symbiotically and respond to each other, analysing one becomes a way to explore the other: I (re)imagine Relation through waters, and vice versa. As such, I use Relation as an intellectual liaison—or hyphen—to join waters and/with my thesis; to bring water in my thesis; to allow me to “think waters” as I construct and write this thesis.

Globally, the links between waters and Relation are as deep (and impenetrable) as Glissant illustrates in the Caribbean context. If, as philosopher Pierre-Jean Labarrière writes, “au commencement est la relation”<sup>66</sup> (124), it is equally true that at the beginning is also water: it “precedes every form and sustains every creation” (Eliade 151). Without waters, there is no possible relation; there is no life. Waters make and define relations.<sup>67</sup> As Bachelard argues, water is the primordial element—both imaginarily and physically: the element of transactions, transformations, exchanges and mixtures (*L’Eau et les Rêves*). Depending on where we stand, waters appear as an element, an entity, a space. They belong to a fluid category, breaking disciplinary boundaries and earthly dykes alike. They make

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equates times of poverty because of halts in French imports due to war with the only times of freedom and (re)connection for the island and its inhabitants.

<sup>66</sup> “at the beginning is relation”.

<sup>67</sup> Even when formulated in political and economic terms, most corporate bodies now tend to see waters in light of a form of positive relationality (a relational potential). Waters are articulated as “a source of cooperation, peace and development for all countries committed to sustainable development” (“Budapest Statement 2016”). They are seen as favouring connections, and no longer as a source of conflict and tension.

separate worlds—such as academia and Country—porous. Waters are indeed prime zones of contacts and transformations; they favour movements and exchanges: colonisation starts with, and happens through, them. Throughout the history of European colonisation (both in Australia and elsewhere), there is an abundance of stories relating how Indigenous peoples helped the newcomers to locate water so that they could survive; and describing how the “taming” of this water played an instrumental role in the success of their settlement (Dunlap).

Glissant’s poetics of Relation can thus be equated to a methodology of waters—an aqueous, or humid,<sup>68</sup> methodology—designed to unveil and respect flows and resonances. Through thinking waters as Relation, I design and implement stylistic devices and rhetorical strategies to support and allow for (to respect) the textual manifestations or restorations of these watery movements: I draw on narrative styles which acknowledge and follow their rhythms. As Bachelard states: “[l]a liquidité est un principe du langage ; le langage doit être gonflé d’eaux”<sup>69</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 258). In particular, flows inspire me to play with (fluid) positionings (of the researcher, and the research/researched) within the thesis; and resonances provide inspiration for my methods.

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<sup>68</sup> I am here diverting and reusing Carter’s terminology, arguing for a concrete application of his concepts of “humid” and “dry” thinking. “Dry thinking” represents the opposition to uncertainty, instability and non-linearity which shaped Australian place-making practices. It has enabled the settler state to gain and retain control of Australian spaces through the creation of a rational *terra firma* (*Material Thinking* 107-9). Humidity—as exemplified by swamps and morasses—stands for the opposite values: it goes beyond what is visible, and acts as an incubator to recollection, imagination and invention. “Humid imaginings” represent “life-giving zones of creativity” which are characterised by their intermingling nature as much as by their lack of determinacy and finitude (*Ground Truthing* 11-12). Carter argues: “The desiccation of the planet may be partly due to anthropogenic environmental practices, but it is legitimated by a dry thinking that assumes that the only good ground is dry and flat” (12).

<sup>69</sup> “Liquidité is a principle of language; the language must be swollen with waters.”

## Flows and Relation: Positioning the Research/er

Relation runs parallel to waters; it follows and emulates watery rhythms. It can also be defined through flows (flowing movements); it is made of these movements. It *itself* is flows. Glissant writes Relation “relie (relais), relate”<sup>70</sup> (*La Poétique de la Relation* 187): it does not simply inform what is relayed, but also the relative and the related (*Poetics of Relation* 27). He develops this idea:

Parce que la poétique de la Relation est donnée dans un labour d’évidences dont la conjonction fait la force, et dans un champ d’inaperçus dont nous sommes le fond chahuté. Entassement de lieux communs et défrichage d’obscurs relatés, la Relation n’est sans cesse que relais.<sup>71</sup> (*Le Discours Antillais* 252)

Relation is perpetual motion: it represents movements of connections and disconnections between cultural entities. Relational flows place these entities in contact, potentially linking them. Relation goes from one to the other; it adds the one to the other, the one *in* the other, and vice versa. Like individual water molecules which come together to form larger, moving bodies of waters, the flow of Relation is made of conglomerating entities; of confluent streams and rivers of cultures which (re)join, travel together, and reach oceans of budding cultural potentialities in-becoming. Yet, Relation is not undifferentiated magma. The ocean does not hide the tide; it does not negate the individual water molecules that compose it in favour of its entirety. Rather, Relation is made of an indefinite number (an infinity) of cultural strands—voices—which, like individual water molecules, combine (to form an open, endless totality) but retain their integrity. These voices are in (constant) movement, and yet clearly located at any given point; these voices interact and respond to (or choose to ignore) one another.<sup>72</sup> Contacts leading to consensual, reciprocal and respectful exchanges are the articulating point around which Relation is wrapped. Glissant writes:

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<sup>70</sup> “links (relays), relates”.

<sup>71</sup> “Because the poetics of Relation is given in a furrow of evidences rendered strong through conjunction, and in a field of unseens of which we are the heckled bottom. Accumulative pile of commonplaces and decoding of obscure related entities, Relation is forever relay.”

<sup>72</sup> As such, some parts of this thesis focus on the failures of Relation: on missed encounters with a place and its people; while others relate (more or less successful) attempts at Relation.



La poétique de la Relation n'est pas une poétique du magma, de l'indifférencié, du neutre. Pour qu'il y ait relation il faut qu'il y ait deux ou plusieurs identités ou entités maîtresses d'elles-mêmes et qui acceptent de changer en s'échangeant.<sup>73</sup> (*Traité* 67)

Disjunctive experiences form the prerequisite of and for Relation. Relation rises out of the productive and transformative encounter with otherness in place—that is, an encounter (and not the incommensurable parallel existence of radical difference). As a result, places of encounter, of connivance, of passage (such as trading posts and former colonial countries) represent a natural illustration of this concept of Relation.

In this research, I extend/expand Relation. I present an augmented version of Glissant's notion; an extended/expanded Relation which spreads beyond and within human-to-human relationships. When I discuss Relation, I am not simply referring to the movements from one culture to the other; but also from one culture in regards to its environment. I include non-human (more-than-human) relationships within my understanding of Relation; granting this environment—and particularly the waters—an agency of their own, against which all other R/relations come to measure and define themselves. Under such an understanding of Relation (and in line with Aboriginal understandings of it), Country is not simply a backdrop—or a *décor*. It is animated, alive: a shimmering tapestry within whose waving folds human protagonists (actors) meander and develop;<sup>74</sup> a meandering and development shaped, conditioned, determined by these folds.

Yet, the impact is reciprocal (relational): these folds which shape humans are also made and unmade by (other) humans. Humans fold and unfold, fold and unfold, fold and unfold again. Relation consists of the strings and needles which define and (de)form the grand tapestry of Country, giving it its rhythms; the rhythms through

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<sup>73</sup> “The poetics of Relation is not a poetics of magma, of the undifferentiated, of the neutral. For relation to occur, there must be two or more identities or entities which remain in control of themselves, and which agree to change by/while exchanging.”

<sup>74</sup> The French *évoluer* is closer to the meaning I want to imply here: it conveys the idea of both physical and psychological movement and change.

which it is constantly (re)woven, torn, patched up.<sup>75</sup> This tapestry is woven in and through Relation. And in the context of Lower Murray Country, the rhythms of Relation's flows are similar to the rhythms of watery flows: Relation happens around waters.

Exploring the fabric of Country is contemplating—and taking part, stepping in—this tapestry of water-borne Relation. This consideration of cultures in regards and in relation to each other is particularly important because such analysis leads to “a better approach to components of each of the particular cultures considered” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 170). Applying the frame of Relation to this research indeed allows each cultural manifestation (and by extension, each culture) to be thoroughly explored not only from within, but also—and maybe even primarily—in regard to each other and to Country. It allows for these manifestations to be perceived as flows, crisscrossing and imprinting Country: dialoguing with(in) Country. These dialogues—as any (true) dialogue—imply and are vectors of transformations (D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Carter, *Material Thinking, Meeting Place, and Places Made After Their Stories*). And according to Glissant, so is the experience of entering in Relation: entities and identities must accept to change while exchanging. He develops this point:

Relation neither replays nor links afferents that can be assimilated or allied only in their principle, for the simple reason that it always differentiates among them concretely and diverts them from the totalitarian—because its work always changes all the elements composing it and, consequently, the resulting relationship, which then changes them all over again. (*Poetics of Relation* 172)

Relation is a constant exchange process. It is never ending, and so are the transformations it brings about. Relation is a working model which allows me to imagine some aspects of the endless internal and external relationships of the located (structural) components of cultures. Relation is particularly powerful and relevant to revisit the connections between water and music practices within Lower

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<sup>75</sup> Here, I am not implying that Country is my concept(ion) to play with; I am simply highlighting the reciprocal evolution of humans and the places that they inhabit. As I write about Lower Murray Country, I project myself in it and, as such, write from my situated perspective.

Murray Country precisely because it represents a living, dynamic, moving and changing theoretical concept, “active within itself”, which does not tolerate unnatural static and often essentialist observations and interpretations (*Poetics of Relation* 171-2). By opposition to totality, which Glissant argues to be “in danger of immobility”, Relation is “open totality” and “movement” (171). It is constantly reinvented through the act of changing, exchanging, relating. It is “perpetual revolution”<sup>76</sup> (Prabhu 89). These dialogical movements, essential to watery Relation, are what I want to preserve within the thesis: I want this thesis to reflect them, as a form of decolonial research.

Yet, colonisation has disjointed/unstitched (*décousu*) the fabric of Country: it has attempted to stop waters and Relation from flowing and speaking. Through dams, barrages, assimilation and paternalist policies, it has attempted to halt, break and block speeches. Rhythms have been constricted and turned arrhythmical. In Lower Murray Country, colonisation has acted as a counter-current to the watery impulses of Relation: it has produced a static tapestry, which, rather than being draped over a moving Country, is hung on the cold walls of a governor’s office and left there, unchanged, from and to time immemorial. Colonisation has represented the attempted erasure of convergent and divergent polyrhythms for the purpose of imposing a single rhythm. It has tried to destroy watery connectivities and polyvocalities. Colonisation has negated the dialogicality<sup>77</sup> of both waters and Relation. I am concerned with how to recuperate (or acknowledge) the flows that have been halted and shattered by colonisation and to account for the impeded connectivities and polyvocalities in the thesis. I aim to explore how to textually<sup>78</sup> transcribe (or reimagine) the tapestry in its polyphonic glory.

The answer comes through a concrete re-enactment of emplaced dialogicality, that is, by presenting and weaving together a plurality of non-unified textual voices. As Glissant summarises, Relation “suppose la voix de tous les peuples, ce qu’il appelle leur opacité, qui n’est à tout prendre que leur liberté. La transparence de la fausse

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<sup>76</sup> Interestingly, the term “revolution” also conveys the idea of cyclicity.

<sup>77</sup> I use “dialogicality” in the sense developed by literary critic Mikhail Bakhtin: every element belongs to a complex network and is constantly being shaped in light of past and future elements.

<sup>78</sup> Visually, I have already mentioned that I am drawing on maps.

mimésis est à dépouiller d’un seul coup”<sup>79</sup> (*Le Discours Antillais* 467). By capturing vivacious speeches—or *paroles vives*—I avoid the authoritarian monumentalisation of the academic voice, and therefore question and challenge the status quo of this same voice. The relationality of empirical research turns writing into an ongoing process of negotiation which aims to give an empowering “living voice” to research subjects (Gibbs, “Writing as Method” 224). Philosopher Mladen Dolar writes: “There is no assurance or transparency to be found in the voice—quite the contrary, the voice undermines any certainty and any establishment of a firm sense” (51). Through dialogicality, I let go, to a certain extent, of purely demonstrative and argumentative logic. This reveals the progression behind my academic reflection (the fabric of my reasoning) and makes this material process of thesis construction<sup>80</sup> as important as the outcome/conclusion—which is to remain open. Additionally, I believe that this plurality of voices is necessary for speech—whether oral or written—to exist. As philosopher Jacques Derrida writes: “Plus d’un, je vous demande pardon, il faut toujours être plus qu’un pour parler, il y faut plusieurs voix ...”<sup>81</sup> (*Sauf Le Nom* 15). Alone, one voice cannot speak; it cannot say anything. If different voices speak in this thesis, it is so that it can come to life. “[L]e je de l’autre”<sup>82</sup> is required (Glissant, *L’Intention Poétique* 55).

Within this fluidity of voices (or vocal bodies<sup>83</sup>), sometimes competing, sometimes joining, sometimes ignoring one another, several specific voices emerge and fill the thesis.

The primary voice remains that of the researcher—the “I” voice, my voice. This is congruent with the rhythm analytical inclination of the thesis: my bodily subjectivity is implicated. The researcher stands (I stand) at the centre of analysis. Dolar argues:

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<sup>79</sup> Relation “presumes the voice of all peoples, what is called their opacity, and which, all in all, is nothing else than their freedom. The transparency of false mimesis is to be stripped in one single go.”

<sup>80</sup> This also confirms my approach to the writing process as a form of design, and to the thesis as a curated object.

<sup>81</sup> John P. Leavey Jr. translates this as “Sorry, but more than one, it is always necessary to be more than one in order to speak, several voices are necessary for that ...” (Derrida, *On the Name* 35).

<sup>82</sup> “The I of the other”.

<sup>83</sup> I use the phrase “vocal bodies” to insist on the fact that the voice comes through the body—it denotes a physical presence.

In isolation, in solitude, in complete loneliness, away from the madding crowd, we are not simply free of the voice—it can be that this is when another kind of voice appears, more intrusive and compelling than the usual mumbo-jumbo: the internal voice, a voice which cannot be silenced. As if the voice were the very epitome of a society that we carry with us and cannot get away from. We are social beings by the voice and through the voice; it seems that the voice stands at the axis of our social bonds, and that voices are the very texture of the social, as well as the intimate kernel of subjectivity. (14)

If my being-in-the-world is mediated by the voice, then so is—so must be—my thesis. I write this thesis in the first person singular: I am its sole author, responsible and accountable for what is said within its pages. This “I” voice is purposefully loud: I speak, I show through every word and page. There is no referential uncertainty. Locating and indicating the position of the narrator implicitly materialises my own ethnocentric orientation and bias. It also represents a strong stance against a universalist tendency which, too often, has been complicit with the colonial position, towards peoples and environments alike. In light of minority, Pacific and environmental studies, I steer clear from an all-encompassing and essentialist “we” or a detached and removed “they” which allow the author to disengage from the content of their writing while presenting it as absolute (objective) Truth. My thesis is not about Truth: it is about my interpretation of the multiple historicities of Lower Murray Country’s waters: “Là où les histoires se joignent, finit l’Histoire”<sup>84</sup> (Glissant, *L’Intention Poétique* 215; see also Fraser 32). I agree with cultural studies scholar Katrina Schlunke: the past emerges via the writer. Within these pages, the way I write embodies the presence of this (my) past. Schlunke uses the term “autobiography” to describe her relationship to, and involvement within, the events and landscapes that she narrates into being (14). This term “autobiography” denotes the “possibility of an ethical, embodied relationship with the past, not a final story”. She continues: “We know we can never know all the conditions that make a particular past possible. Here the spectral ‘I’ of autobiography offers what is understood in musical terms as an irresolvable dissonance. A dissonance that resonates.” This “dissonance that resonates” enables and bears witness to the (re)sounding of Lower Murray Country’s waters that I

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<sup>84</sup> “There where stories connect, History ends.”

undertake as I explore their musicality. This overpowering first person voice thus reflects the ethical duty to acknowledge the lens orienting the research: my selection of voices to be included is subjective; and so is the manner in which I assemble them. I choose how and when to weave these voices around and within my voice.

In particular, I interlace my voice with other academic voices, upon which I draw to complement and consolidate (reaffirm) my own voice. Besides Glissant, another strong presence is that of philosopher, spatial historian and artist Paul Carter, whose British-Australian identity also spreads across waters. Other researchers will be introduced as they appear in my pages.

I also draw on the voices of several Ngarrindjeri people. I present these voices through quotations<sup>85</sup> which, at times, I position hanging in the margin, outside of the academic text; quotations which burst and overflow from the text—are larger than the text—as representations of a world larger than the academic world. Such a design partially answers the ethical challenge of “(re)presenting the stories of others” (Ballengee-Morris et al. 60), and feminist scholar Patti Lather’s query: “how can writing the other not be an act of continuing colonisation?” (13). Yet, spatially representing the “vocal bodies” of some Ngarrindjeri people within/without the text—and giving them a “chiasmic visibility” (Hatley 256)—seemed insufficient, and, on its own, somehow counterproductive. To partially overcome these (re)presentational limitations, I have also built an overlaying rhetorical frame which reflects my awareness of Lower Murray Country’s strata of cultural meanings. While I mostly focus on settler imaginary and physical interpretations of Lower Murray Country’s waters, I indeed want this thesis to convey in its proceedings that this interpretation does not land on a blank canvas, but on a place (pre)filled, and still filling, with Aboriginal interpretations. This rhetorical frame thus attempts to signify Ngarrindjeri presence—to weave it within my thesis’ rhetorical fabric—making this presence non-dissociable, at any given moment and point, from the discussion. For this purpose, I draw on stories which

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<sup>85</sup> These quotations are extracted from widely available sources produced by the Ngarrindjeri people, primarily for non-Indigenous people. I initially planned to engage with the Ngarrindjeri community directly and conduct open-ended interviews with relevant people. Quotations would have been sourced from these interviews, which I would have approached as community consultation for the master planning required to design and build my thesis. Unfortunately—and despite gaining ethics clearance—I failed to achieve this goal due to my lack of contacts within the Ngarrindjeri community, and of time to develop and build these contacts.

embody the voice of a community rather than of a single individual.<sup>86</sup> As I integrate these signposts within the thesis, my intention is for them to speak of Aboriginal struggle against and beyond the colonial boundaries; and to acknowledge and preserve Aboriginal custodianship of Country without appropriating it. More precisely, as I travel from the Mallee to Kangaroo Island, I embroider my text around Ngarrindjeri watery Dreamings and Songlines. Those Dreamings and Songlines give this text its shape: they structure and bring it to life.<sup>87</sup> I consider this omnipresent yet omniscient form of acknowledgement complementary to the periodic and anecdotal (re)presentation of Ngarrindjeri voices in the textual margins of the thesis. In this manner, Ngarrindjeri presence shines through the text despite the sometimes blatant (temporary) absence of individual Ngarrindjeri voices, echoing the colonial process while pivoting its conclusion: the pre-supposed absence of Aboriginal presence—the official *terra nullius*—is not simply a false interpretation, a Darwinian blindfold, the reflection of an era. It also and above all demonstrates the unavoidable presence of Aboriginal peoples who, despite their invisibility in the colonial gaze, remain rooted in, and never stop shaping, the very fabric of the country under colonial (trans)formation.

Other voices present in my thesis are those of the waters. As Glissant argues: “Traversé et soutenu par la trace ; le paysage cesse d’être un décor convenable et devient un personnage du drame de la Relation”<sup>88</sup> (*Introduction* 25) The watery environments that surround us are not passive: crucial to human actions and dwelling, they are participative entities, characters in the story of human lives. They figure as characters in this thesis as well: however ventriloquially, watery voices shine through the text.<sup>89</sup> While these watery voices remain subjugated to (contingent upon) my voice,<sup>90</sup> their presence nonetheless denotes a watery environment-centred approach, that is, a promising way to question (at the very least) and shift (however partially) the usual anthropocentricity of the academic

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<sup>86</sup> Individual authorship is indeed a predominantly western category and concept (Unaipon xvii; Muecke 44-6).

<sup>87</sup> Similarly to the way that they bring Country into being (Somerville 142).

<sup>88</sup> “Crossed and carried by the trace, landscape is no longer a suitable decor and becomes a character in the drama of Relation.”

<sup>89</sup> Author Jean Giono, and particularly his novel *Le Chant du Monde*, was a source of inspiration, along with Glissant’s work: the environment is at the heart of his theoretical reflexion and creative poetic writing.

<sup>90</sup> Giving waters a voice of course has its limits: while it grants them directionality and agency, it also imposes a very anthropomorphic form of sentiency, which, rather than being primarily based on networks of connectivities, finds its roots in a form of poetic lyricism.

position and writing (D. B. Rose, “Writing Place”). It also bears witness to the fact that voices that could previously be silenced can no longer be: worldwide, water crises are forcing us to hear these watery voices, forcing us to realise that waters *have* voices. Serres writes:

The mute world, the voiceless things once placed as *décor* surrounding the usual spectacles, all those things that never interested anyone, from now on thrust themselves brutally and without warning into our schemes and manoeuvres. (*The Natural Contract* 3)

It is no longer possible to ignore the voices and agency of waters when writing about them. Writing watery voices provides a textual space where waters, which do not easily accept colonial reduction and domination, reply. I have chosen to follow Serres’ turn of phrase—I insert them “brutally and without warning” within my thesis. I design these watery voices by compiling environmental data, topological and geographical reports, maps, photographs and my own subjective perceptions. I then use this compilation to stage the degradation of these waters in a narrative that is both textual and visual. More precisely, I use the poetics to be found in words, numbers, tables, graphs and musical symbols, and repurpose these (loaded) modes of representation to transcribe and display waters on pages. The manipulation of these visual and rhetorical signs translates movements, and particularly waters’ ongoing trespassing of colonial boundaries, their bubbling in interstices, and their constant push back within the colonial rule, within containment. This diversity of representational practices reflects waters’ ability to shift and mutate; to travel and return.<sup>91</sup> It is important to act on the “material relations of language” with the environment; to remember the “co-constitution of water as a substance and water as poetics” (Chen et al. 9). There is a form of cyclicity in the layers of texts and visual aids that I build. Bachelard writes:

les voix de l’eau sont à peine métaphoriques ... le langage des eaux est une réalité poétique directe ... organiquement le langage humain a une *liquidité*, un débit dans l’ensemble, une eau dans les consonnes. ... Ainsi l’eau nous apparaîtra comme un être total : elle

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<sup>91</sup> All actors are characterised by these multiple forms and capacities, by these exchanges of properties (Latour, *Facing Gaia* 57).



a un corps, une âme, une voix. Plus qu'aucun autre élément peut-être, l'eau est une réalité poétique complète. Une poétique de l'eau, malgré la variété de ses spectacles, est assurée d'une unité.<sup>92</sup> (*L'Eau et les Rêves* 22-3, original emphasis)

As such, waters in my thesis are not abstracted: I compile so that watery voices regain their locality (within my thesis, through my body). It is my attempt to answer Serres' injunction: "Our voice smothered the world's. We must hear its voice. Let us open our ears" (*Times of Crisis* 42).

The last voice is the reader's voice. This voice manifests itself through the reader's interpretation of the visual representations scattered throughout my thesis.<sup>93</sup> Displayed alongside the text, these visual components become text themselves (Denning, "Writing"): they provide another reading ground and their presence further influences and orients the reader because of the expectations of truthfulness and objectivity commonly attached to photo-reportage. These seemingly innocuous illustrations also contribute to further disrupting the expected linearity of the reading experience by requiring yet another type of engagement from the readers. Readers are wanderers, left didactically unguided to navigate between texts, maps and photographs, building their own paths and connections; creating their own journey through the thesis. These have neither clear beginning nor end but happen as part of a continuum. The physicality of the thesis is essential: it is a designed object. Its content is to be experienced physically. As readers transition between textual and visual elements—and unconsciously translate one into the other—they engage their responsibility: they themselves are bringing a vision of Lower Murray Country into being. These visual components provide extra decor (or another layer of decorum) to the research. The exponential echoing of reading voices transforms readers into instruments: it amplifies my argument and gives a status to the many voices present within the pages.

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<sup>92</sup> "The voices of water are barely metaphorical ... the language of waters has a direct poetic reality ... organically, human language has a *liquidity*, an overall output, water in its consonants. ... As such, water appears as a total entity: it has a body, a soul, a voice. Maybe more than any other elements, water is a complete poetic reality. A watery poetics, despite its variety of forms, is guaranteed to be unified."

<sup>93</sup> As well as the maps, I have also inserted a set of photographs that I took during my PhD candidacy.

This tapestry of voices—reminiscent of, and inspired by, the possibilities offered by a theatrical form<sup>94</sup>—is designed to place dialogicality back at the heart of academic discursive construction. My approach to voices is thus different from Michel de Certeau’s “heterology” where “writing the voice” often leads to neutralisation or appropriation. Rather, it draws close to fictocriticism, which “allow[s] the voice of the other to interrogate both the preconception of the researcher and the voice of theory” (Gibbs, “Writing as Method” 223).<sup>95</sup> My use of voices directs the power of my hegemonic positioning toward the deconstruction of the “storehouse”. It destabilises my authority, nearly positioning me as a “scripter”: here to reassemble and present different knowledges, peoples and places on different terms. Maybe it even somewhat tends toward Barthes’ concept of neutral writing: refusing to impose assertive and implied meanings (*Writing Degree Zero*, *The Pleasure of the Text* and “The Death of the Author”). Or, I would argue that it incidentally produces so many meanings that the very notion of meaning itself is challenged, and that it is the resulting plurality which fully decentres representational practices by fostering a multidimensional bricolage scholarship (Kincheloe). Beside the re-enactment of the polyphonies of the tapestry of Country, the textual and pictorial presence of these different voices also aims to give and bring something beyond validity to the research. Following social scientist Paula Saukko, it aims to give it *validities*, in the plural: away from totalitarian and pseudo-objective research, this thesis is based on dialogical and contextual validities. As it engages in processes of self-reflexivity and polyvocality, it attempts to capture the lived world of (my) Lower Murray Country. Validities also speak through the plurality of *methodological approaches* (rhythmanalysis, eco-musicology and Relation interact, dialogue with, complement, nuance and answer to each other); and *spaces*: similitudes between waters (physical entities, elements, spaces) and Relation, which Glissant articulates through abstractions, imaginaries—as conceptual spaces (which are made of physical spaces, of waters). Such a mixing

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<sup>94</sup> Coincidentally, a theatrical form also represents a point of commonality between western and Aboriginal traditions: despite the different rhetorical tactics, both share a dialogical dimension (even if the accepted answer was silence; the unvoiced reception and acquisition of knowledge), and this is a way to create potential points of convergence or non-convergence by bringing academic reality into this coincidental commonality. As such, dialogicality is also pertinent because it comes to represent my acknowledgement of—and tribute to—Aboriginal traditions of storytelling as a way of learning and transmitting knowledge.

<sup>95</sup> Overall, there has been much debate about the inherent fictionality of any non-fiction narrative (Griffiths; White; Berkhofer).

of methodologies and spaces creates movements between localities and temporalities: local and global rejoice; past, present and future superimpose. It is humid, to draw on Carter again. As my writing flows between these different methodologies and spaces, I become able to dive deeper into the flows of Lower Murray Country and capture resonances textually.

## Resonances and Relation: Conducting and Writing the Thesis

Similarly to waters, Relation runs deep; it lives and nourishes itself upon waters and watery resonances: flooding memories that both mix and protect its elements. Exploring watery Relation in Lower Murray Country means journeying within the constantly modified workings of cultures' inner structures which are expressed through relay or flash agents, themselves inscribed in a larger "network of similarity or osmosis or rejection or renaturing, that formed, manifested itself, cancelled itself out" (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 166). Glissant argues:

Each particular culture is impelled by the knowledge of its particularity, but this knowledge is boundless. By the same token, one cannot break each particular culture down into prime elements, since its limit is not defined and since Relation functions both in this internal relationship (that of each culture to its components) and, at the same time, in an external relationship (that of this culture to others that affect it). (169)

Relation emulates waters, and constantly transforms through contact. It is characterised by the eternally temporary states of its components. All memories are contained in each single exchange between these components (Glissant, *La Poétique de la Relation*; Chamoiseau). Glissant continues: "It is at their undefinable limits, through 'precipitate contact', that cultures move" (*Poetics of Relation* 163). Precipitate contact is where creation happens: it is where Relation takes place. In this thesis, I embrace the movements and rhythms in between and within the heterogeneous entities under scrutiny, thus enlarging Glissant's focus on culture to encompass (imagine) sonic "precipitate contact" rising from the potential movements and rhythms (relationships) of both the human and the more-than-human. Resonances fill watery environments.

Yet, these resonances have been frustrated by colonisation. Channels have been built and waters can no longer flood to remember. This canalisation of waters goes hand in hand with the rationalisation of sound. Depth and ineffability are lost through abstraction: transparency dominates. Mathematical relationality comes to govern acoustic and watery relationships, in a scenario where there is an

equivalence between numbers and movements as part of a pre-defined (western) notion of harmony positioned as “a manifestation of divine order” (Dyson 3). Rationalised, sound is colonised, and thus usable by colonising powers. Like water flows, it becomes engineered. This mechanisation has denied organic rhythms and watery memories have been erased and/or deterred from resonating. There is a silencing of both waters and Relation. In this thesis, I am interested in how to recuperate (or acknowledge) the resonances buried (with)in waters in Lower Murray Country, when flows and floods no longer exist. I am interested in how to account for silences (the unsaid or the unsayable) and foster textual spaces for these silences to become tangible, if not audible; spaces where/within which silence no longer coincides with invisibility.

Opacity (as understood by Glissant) comes as the answer for me. Opacity represents the primacy of the plural, of plurality, over fusion (which closes and standardises, and thus opens to essentialisation and appropriation). Through this focus on plurality, opacity simultaneously assembles and singularises. It assembles through a relativising imagining of totality which is driven (and stretched) by appositional richness rather than by reducing similitudes. And it singularises through never abdicating the particular and refusing dualist opposition and identification which confound or merge the “Other” in “reducible transparency” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 53, 67-8, 208). Opacity is what brings us together and makes us see in confluence while making us permanently distinctive (194).

Opacity offers me a creative way to dissociate academic writing about the environmental, individual and cultural “Other” from centuries after centuries of colonial practices, ranging from denigrating essentialism through to celebratory appropriation/romanticisation. It can be perceived as a fundamental duty and right for any researcher. Yet, opacity, within academia, is often understood as a default or a failure which should be vanquished.<sup>96</sup> Drilled, deep down, is the idea that scholars must explain things—be it a stanza or a formula—and translate this understanding into the standard format of the academic text. While it is indeed

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<sup>96</sup> While opacity offers a richness traditionally left untapped in academia, an ever-growing number of scholars are engaging in activities which are consistent with this line of thought (Schlunke; Carter, *Mythform*).

important and interesting to engage in these explanatory and translating activities, I feel that the primacy granted to the performance of such activities is limiting: both my interpretation and creativity are bounded by utopic expectations of universal clarity and objectivity. Researchers are generally refused the opportunity to address and make, rather than explain. This “institutionalisation of interpretation” (C. Bernstein 157) sustains what I perceive as severe interconnected limitations in terms of representational practices.

Opacity applied to academic writing challenges the lack of creative freedom granted to researchers and it also—and maybe primarily—opens a pathway to hear the voices of the silenced. It unsettles my writing position as a researcher. It pushes me to reflect on the never-benign act of writing and on my style of writing, following in Barthes’ path once again. Such reflection encourages me to investigate and potentially integrate other modes of inscription and knowledge transmission, perhaps less linear or abstract (Muecke; Schlunke). These modes could be better suited to preserve what can only be grasped in the gaps between words (Merleau-Ponty, *The Prose of the World*). Opacity indeed disrupts the concept of absolute and finite truth (Glissant, *L’Intention Poétique*).<sup>97</sup> It encourages collaboration and “power-sensitive” conversations, effectively transforming monologues into dialogues (Haraway 192-6). Understanding is no longer possessive; rather, it becomes a reciprocal and transformative process of unveiling where the “gaze” can be—and is—returned (Pratt). Unveiling, then, is not so much about reaching a truth as about maintaining an anxiety or dizziness: a productive tension. As such, opacity turns academic writing Baroque, that is, rebellious, decolonising, creative and relational. It allows me to move in between, and play with, sonic boundaries by opening research to imagination and creativity. Carter argues:

If research involves finding something that was not there before, it is obvious that it involves imagination. If it is claimed that what is found was always there (and merely lost), still an act of creative remembering occurs. As a method of materialising ideas, research is unavoidably creative. ... Yet, while “creative research” ought to be a tautology, in the present cultural climate it is in fact an oxymoron.

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<sup>97</sup> Within academia, understanding and knowledge are indeed traditionally understood as bounded: both are approached as something which is—and should be—complete.

A research paradigm prevails in which knowledge and creativity are conceived as mutually exclusive. (*Material Thinking* 7)

Researching and writing implies remembering, but this remembering cannot be disconnected from creating: it is a creative act of local invention (195) which comes as a “rush of imagination”: a “flooding”—to re-use Morrison’s metaphor.<sup>98</sup> Introducing opacity to my words means that my writing becomes “a critical form of resistance to important aspects of the present, including the injunction to communicate in ways codified by the academy” (Gibbs, “Writing as Method” 222). In particular, I create textual chiaroscuro by using intentional and deliberate gaps and creative (re)interpretations which undermine the causal spatiotemporal boundaries of the colonial narrative. Writing (of) watery Relation indeed involves more than “simply” using the voice to create meaning: these voices must be included within a methodological framework to acquire a purpose. Dolar writes:

The voice is the instrument, the vehicle, the medium, and the meaning is the goal. This gives rise to a spontaneous opposition where voice appears as materiality opposed to the ideality of meaning. The ideality of meaning can emerge only through the materiality of the means, but the means does not seem to contribute to meaning. Hence we can put forward a provisional definition of the voice (in its linguistic aspect): it is what does not contribute to making sense. It is the material element recalcitrant to meaning. (15)

As part of my watery approach, flow represents the voice (the vehicle) and resonance represents meaning (the goal). While my use of voices translates the materiality of the vocal body, I play with the ideality of a resonance-inspired methodology to preserve the voice’s opacity (to preserve, produce and contain opacity through the voice). Writing indeed shapes and produces the research as much as what is researched in itself: writing *is* research, that is, “a mode of inquiry in its own right” (Gibbs, “Writing as Method” 223; see also Gibbs, “Fictocriticism, Affect, Mimesis”). It is therefore important to develop a writing practice suitable—

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<sup>98</sup> As Schlunke states: “The art of the past is to remember that it is always told in the present” (22; see also Olick 383; Bennett 43-4; Prager; Chartier). I continue her sentence and add: in view of a future (Kiem 107; Harvey 324, 331); and that is precisely “what stories are for. Stories are for joining the past to the future” (O’Brien qtd. in Jackson 176).

and even complementary—to the objective and subject of the research. As historian Tom Griffiths summarises:

you will discover what you want to say, and how to say it, through the writing process itself. You don't have to come ready and finished to the page. You are not "writing up". You come to the page prepared to explore, to imagine, to journey. It is your workshop, your office, your chopping block. Your words will be like splintered wood, the casual by-product of your engagement with the page.

My writing attunes and answers to Lower Murray Country's watery rhythms: I simultaneously describe and perform these rhythms (Denning, "Writing"). As such, while flows positioned the researcher (myself) within the research, resonances shape my methods, and the way I approach/conduct this research. In light of resonances, I write in an attempt to create meaning through a self-reflective methodological loop: I apply a process of resounding to the thesis. This application follows three stages:

- 1) collection;
- 2) imagination;
- 3) creation.

This three-stage process illustrates the triple aim of this research: to unearth musical pieces to form a corpus; to dive into this corpus and analyse it; and to write this analysis in the form of a thesis. For the purpose of clarity, I present these stages in a clear progression. Yet, the contents of each stage keep morphing and these changes nourish and act upon the other stages.

### Collection

The first stage in the making of this thesis is the collection of music to form a corpus. My approach to collection and corpus formation answers Glissant's impulse to



partially “disinviduate Relation”<sup>99</sup> in order to truly ground and grasp the phenomenon itself in its specific spatiotemporal dimensions. He writes:

To disinviduate Relation is to relate the theory to the lived experience of every form of humanity in its singularity. This means returning to the opacities, which produce every exception, are propelled by every divergence, and live through becoming involved not with projects but with the reflected density of existences. (*Poetics of Relation* 195)

Exploring Relation implies enacting it. The advocated return suggests that I have departed. Such a return is physical as much as conceptual: it requires revisiting Relation in both space and time. Disinviduating Relation comes to signify travelling back and forth between theories and lived experiences (between concepts and physicalities), between pluralities and singularities (between Countries and musical pieces). It means being subjected—and subjecting the corpus’ formation—to a constant tidal movement.

Returning calls for a method of collection that both connects and disconnects: I disassemble and (re)assemble a wide-ranging variety of scores and recordings.<sup>100</sup> I consider and observe each piece of music—each watery composition—as a strand (in)forming Relation in Lower Murray Country; and attempt to untangle each strand from Relation to be able to decipher its unique evolving manifestation, while yet never losing sight of its relationality, as it only exists in Relation. This idea of return turns collection into a *cumulative* process that favours perpetual self-actualisation: newly collected musical pieces (re)actualise

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<sup>99</sup> I prefer to use this concept of “disinviduation” rather than deconstruction as I draw mainly on the work of Glissant, and not on that of Jacques Derrida or other literary post-structuralist theorists. This notion of disinviduation reflects better the fluidity, *mouvance* and connectedness in between the different components behind the deconstructing process I will undertake. If disinviduation enables me to look at individual aspects, it is not to separate and segregate them. They cannot live on their own, they make no sense on their own, and it is only in context that they may take on their full meanings. An “intervention in Relation” can only happen “in a place” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 178). Such a grounding is crucial as it represents strategic anti-essentialism which enables me to go beyond the failure of some strands of postcolonialism.

<sup>100</sup> Because of their great diversity, these scores and recordings are detailed progressively as they come under scrutiny rather than as part of this introductory chapter. I sourced them from the State Library of South Australia, the National Library of Australia, the Australian Music Centre, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the University of Adelaide’s Barr Smith and Elder Music Libraries.

the old ones, and vice versa. I never anticipate the outcome of this actualisation or presuppose Relation.<sup>101</sup>

Returning also implies retracing my steps to follow intersecting trajectories: collection becomes a physical process<sup>102</sup> that requires bodily movements, beside imaginary movements. Returning grounds collection in an array of places and times, that is, in an array of perspectives which shift and amalgamate with each return. This layering of perspectives positions collection as an antidote to the compartmentalisation of cultural and geographical areas. As I move—as I depart to return and return to depart—musical pieces appear alternatively close and far: they oscillate in rhythm. Such a method of collection is *transformative*: it supports and happens (with)in Relation; it *is* Relation, and experiences of the journey come to constantly rewrite and reshape the corpus.

Applying this principle of disindividuation materialises a process of “figurative thinking” (Carter, *Dark Writing* 6). I believe that “figurative thinking” doubles—or reiterates—most aspects of Glissant’s impulse, while providing a more concrete path regarding how to go about such an undertaking, and effectively transcribe (apply) Relation into academic collection. I understand figurative thinking as a manifestation of relational thought, and even of Relation itself, in academia. Positioning it as both a tactic of design and an ethical process, Carter writes:

[Figurative thinking] is to associate formerly distant things on the basis of some imagined likeness. It is to draw together things formerly remote from one another. The line of such thought represents a movement, a dynamic contraction that cannot be adequately represented by the dimensionless line of cartography. To think figuratively is to inhabit a different country of thought. In this, the ground cannot be taken for granted as a uniform and flat plane in which ideal figures of thoughts are incised. The environment of figurative thinking possesses topographical properties: it has points that lie far apart but belong together; it also has surfaces that look close together but in fact never meet. It is a world where the laws governing relationships count, and where the value of passage is recognised. (6)

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<sup>101</sup> As this would influence how I organise and shape the corpus.

<sup>102</sup> It must be noted that, due to time constraints, accessibility and my overall interest in primary materials, this collection process favours and follows specific (subjective) trajectories.

Exercising figurative thinking offers me a path to preserve—to base my work on—grounded movements. It provides me with an adequate collecting strategy to subsequently unravel the fabric of Country and reinvigorate geography by materialising its process (*Dark Writing* 21; see also *The Sound in Between* 168): the return advocated by Glissant becomes palpable. In the corpus, seemingly disparate and remote auditory elements are drawn together through some imagined likeness; and from this imagined likeness, new meanings emerge and (re)create the acoustemic realities of these watery spaces.<sup>103</sup>

### Imagination

The role attributed to imagination in lieu of—or, more appropriately, as—analysis rests on Lefebvre, who argues: “[i]nstead of going from concrete to abstract, one starts with full consciousness of the abstract in order to arrive at the concrete” (*Rhythmanalysis* 5). Imagining becomes an exercise in (applied) theoretics, required to (re)articulate the disindividuated strands of Relation. My imagination feeds off my experience, both physical and intellectual. It is nourished by my field trips as much as by my readings. Through imagination, I am able to dive into the undulating and shimmering layers of sound brought together through my heteroclite collection process. In particular, I imagine movements of connection, friction and disjunction in between these layers; I imagine what takes form there, in interstices. Juxtaposing endeavours do more than blurring and undermining boundaries between aqueous geomagnaries (rendering them porous). Elements of the corpus are placed in contact, and how these elements react is unpredictable: they connect (or repulse each other) in “anachronistic and prophetic” ways (Jolly 514-15). The unforeseeable nature of these encounters suggests and/or fosters, alongside these elements, the presence and development of a flexible and polymorphic “other” space (a space of (my) others), that is, an in-between space born from their

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<sup>103</sup> In that respect, “figurative thinking” and the disindividuation of Relation are also reminiscent of the practice of pairing (or “contingent juxtaposition”) from the New Guinea Highlands, which consists of “the bringing together of previously isolated entities or categories in a way that reveals something theretofore concealed or latent in each” and which represents “a way of creating alternative perspectives on things” (Rumsey 4).

imaginary fusion/friction. In this space, complex layers of spatiotemporalities mingle and respond to one another. This leads to the articulation of an indigenous (as from the place) *longue durée* defined outside of hierarchical judgements of value<sup>104</sup> and cultural notions of time.<sup>105</sup>

In this suggested in-between space of creative frictions, attractions and repulsions lies the possibility of hearing—that is, of (re)imagining—silenced voices. This space represents a materialisation of a disjointedness through which I can be alert to what is not being spoken out loud. Denning explains:

Imagination scares many scholars. They equate it with fantasy. But imagination is not really fantasy. Imagination is catching a glimpse of the end of the trail before we make the first step. Imagination is finding a word that someone else will hear, a metaphor that someone else will see. Imagination is seeing what's absent, hearing the silence as well as the noise. Imagination is taking the *cliché* out of what has been said over and over again. Imagination is taking the purpose of the rules that confine us and running with it. Imagination is working the fictions in our non-fiction the better to do what we want to do with our writing. (“Writing”)

Without imagination, there is no hearing different levels of sonority. It is impossible to listen. Imagination reminds me of *Gulpa Ngawal*, which has been translated as “Deep Listening”: a Yorta Yorta “process of listening deeply and respectfully in ways that build understanding and a sense of community” (Brearley et al. 4). Deep listening requires an attentiveness to silence as much as an awareness of what is audible. And it is through imagination that I become able to hear silence; and

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<sup>104</sup> There, different cultures are held on equal footing within the same frame of inquisition, where none is considered a prime element. Glissant writes: “beyond decisions made by power and domination, nobody knows how cultures are going to react in relation to one another nor which of their elements will be the dominant ones, or thought as such. In this full-sense all cultures are equal within Relation” (*Poetics of Relation* 163). “In this full-sense”, I use this layering of spatiotemporalities to go against and beyond the usual bias towards western epistemologies above Aboriginal epistemologies. Imagination means that juxtaposition is not detrimental to any components; rather, it creates a space that is made of the sum of these components, and that also stretches further—is greater—than this sum.

<sup>105</sup> This in-between space appears essential to the deconstruction of chronologies. Author Vladimir Nabokov writes: “Maybe the only thing that hints at a sense of Time is rhythm; not the recurrent beats of the rhythm but the gap between two such beats, the grey gap between black beat: the Tender Interval. The regular throb itself merely brings back the miserable idea of measurement, but in between, something like true Time lurks” (qtd. in Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* xiv-v).

engage in a form of deep listening to the musicality of waters in Lower Murray Country.

The possibility of subverting the colonial bias also rests in this in-between space. Glissant writes:

Reconnaitre, imaginer, la Relation.  
Entreprise encore, et combine déguisée, de généralisation universalisante ?  
Fuite, en avant des problèmes ?  
Nul imaginaire n'aide réellement à prévenir la misère, à s'opposer aux oppressions, à soutenir ceux qui « supportent » dans leur corps ou dans leur esprit. Mais l'imaginaire modifie les mentalités, si lentement qu'il en aille.<sup>106</sup> (*La Poétique de la Relation* 197)

It is in the imaginary realm that power lies to shift mentalities and behaviours. Transformations begin in imagination (Solnit, *Hope in the Dark* 4). Imagination opens totality: it sketches a totality (never totalising) that is boundless. I can only draw near it, but never reach it.<sup>107</sup> Glissant details the preponderant role he attributes to imagination:

The thing that makes the understanding of every culture limitless is precisely the thing that allows us to imagine, without approaching it, the infinite interaction of cultures. Magma in profusion, tending to empty all thought of ideology, which is considered inapplicable to such an amalgam. ... The accumulation of examples aims at perfecting a never complete description of the processes of relation, not circumscribing them or giving legitimacy to some impossible global truth. ... Description is no proof; it simply adds something to Relation insofar as the latter is a synthesis-genesis that never is complete. (*Poetics of Relation* 172-4)

Imagination makes totality impossible to conquer and control; it stretches a totality through the avoidance of essentialist and global claims. In an academic context, it

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<sup>106</sup> “Recognising, imagining, Relation. Yet another undertaking, thoroughly disguised, of universalising generalisation? An escape, ahead of problems? No imaginary truly helps prevent destitution, oppose oppressions or sustain those who ‘sustain’ in body or spirit. But imagination changes mentalities, however slowly it may go.”

<sup>107</sup> Glissant writes: “[t]otality is not what we said the universal was. It is the finite and realised quantity of the infinite detail of the real” (*Traité* 192).

reminds (and reassures) me: even the most inclusive research cannot pretend to present an exhaustive—let alone a complete or definite—picture of its sub/objects of study. It seems primordial to be reminded of the key philosophical implication of such unboundedness in a world governed by scientific-based models “claiming to catch the movement in the act and translate this in terms of dynamic or energised structures” (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 173). My role is to accumulate examples and to unveil them in a temporary and unstable synthesis-genesis. There is no end to my thesis: it will forever remain a transilient/transitory object which refuses to be bound or bind what it is scrutinising. Imagination scratches out the conclusion. Imagination calls for the wider recognition of an art of the gap; an art of the gap that is a prerequisite for creation, and “reconfigure[s] our world as a place of meeting, of co-existence and sustaining diversity” (Carter, *Mythform* 69).

Discussing her book *Bluff Rock*, Schlunke summarises these different arguments as she writes of her “hope . . . that a gap, a space of improvisation, will be found, where stories emerge that speak of how they have been produced but also evoke something more” (14). Here, she combines both the notion of an imagined, open totality, and the power of leaving/creating interstices—or gaps—where the more-than-textual can be heard. She continues: “To avoid the threat of ‘resolution’ that narrative has, I have chosen excess. Narratives of narratives, narratives on narratives and narrator and narrative comingling so that there is no single home for the writing self” (16). Such a proposition of excess—an excessive proposition—takes me to the third and final stage of my method: creation (through excesses).

### Creation

Excess in my thesis manifests in several ways: through a fluid and flowing positioning of voices, but also through my use of *poetics* as a tool of (academic) freedom and decoloniality, and of *deep mapping* as a visual aid to achieve that goal. In positioning writing as creating, I respond to Martineau and Ritskes’ injunction: to produce “liberatory alternatives”, research should implement change, and not simply document it.

My choice to use poetics is not anodyne. Glissant argues that “il faut combattre partout la transparence”<sup>108</sup> (*Le Discours Antillais* 356). Academic writing is a somewhere; the cultural product of a place and a time: a space where transparency must be fought. It is crucial to preserve and/or produce some opacity in its midst. Using poetics provides me with a diversity of opacifying stratagems.

I use poetics, first, because poetics is always opaque—there is a loveable opacity in the term itself, rich of so many definitions, deliciously unbounded and constantly reshaping, in “structured disequilibrium” (Sheppard). Poet and literary scholar Charles Bernstein imagines poetics “as an invasion of the poetic into other realms: overflowing the bounds of genres, spilling into talk, essays, politics, philosophy ... Poetics as a sort of *applied poetic*, in the sense that engineering is a form of applied mathematics” (151, original emphasis). And indeed, poetics is in turn a field of study, a structuring principle, a concept, a theory, a discipline; it is in turn a tool, a practice, a speculative discourse, an aesthetic claim. The list continues. And this leaves ample room for manoeuvre: a thesis written in/through poetics is polymorphic.

Second, I use poetics because it is personal. Poetics has a human dimension; it accounts for the subjectivity of the writer.<sup>109</sup> As cultural critic and author Ross Gibson underlines, the “poetics of a first-person narration” stands against “the empirics of an encompassing survey” (“Narrative Hunger” 255). This first-person narration grants me poetic licence: it makes me exist; it gives me a body (my body) and it is through this body and its rhythms that I perceive the watery rhythms of Lower Murray Country. This is why, similarly to Glissant (or mimicking Glissant): “J’abuse de bienheureuses parenthèses : (c’est ma manière de respirer)”<sup>110</sup> (*L’Intention Poétique* 50). I also overindulge in em dashes, commas, semi-colons, slashes that both add and divide; in cascading successions of homonyms, rhymes and synonyms. Punctuation and syntax provide me with breathing spaces; spaces where I can transpose in words the rhythmic nuances that I have felt in flesh; spaces

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<sup>108</sup> “transparency must be fought everywhere”.

<sup>109</sup> And, as such, poetics also implicitly crystallises the limits of my claim to decentre representational practices toward the environment. Its human dimension represents a way to acknowledge the imponderable and unavoidable anthropocentric bias of my writing (of everything I do).

<sup>110</sup> “I abuse blissful parentheses: (this is how I breathe).”

where I can preserve their depth and range.<sup>111</sup> Poetics also gives me the freedom to insert and disseminate French in my thesis, whether a word, a line or a (quoted) paragraph (because my body, too, is French-Australian). These scattered French words give rhythm to my thesis. This rhythm is the sensible agency of orality in my writing: it carries traces of corporeal action (Meschonnic). Poetics supports me; poetics translates who I am: I am embodied in words. This muddled (*bigarré*) multilingualism brings to the fore the contextual nature of the experience of understanding. It underlines that the content of my thesis is not fixed: rather, each reader shapes this content through the prism of their own poetics. And these might converge with one another; or might not.

Third, I use poetics because poetics acknowledges the extent to which Glissant's thoughts have influenced and shaped mine. Using the term bears witness to this intellectual debt. Glissant defines Relation as a poetics, and writes:

La poétique ? Précisément cette double portée, d'une théorie qui tâche à conclure, d'une présence qui ne conclut (ne présume) de rien. Non point l'une sans l'autre. C'est par là que l'instant et la durée nous confortent. Toute poétique est un palliatif d'éternité.<sup>112</sup> (*La Poétique de la Relation* 197)

He adds: "Poetics, whatever their fields of application, are thus practices" (*Une Nouvelle Région du Monde* 182). Poetics are comforting uncertainty; or, to paraphrase Glissant: poetics will not save us; it is not its role, which is rather to reveal to us what we cannot see (*Tout-monde* 180).

And finally, I use poetics because it crystallises the creative aspect inherent to any research endeavour. It stands in line with Serres' view that thinking and writing are non-dissociable from invention and creation (*Le Gaucher Boiteux*). Using poetics, I propose to frame research as an exercise of creative weaving: the researcher-narrator is positioned as a scribe-interpreter whose role is to compile and weave histories together through an act of creation. This understanding of the value of poetics in academic writing joins with sociologist and philosopher Bruno

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<sup>111</sup> Or in French: to preserve their *portée* (with its musical connotations as it means both "reach" and "stave").

<sup>112</sup> "Poetics? Precisely this double thrust, of a theory that attempts to conclude, of a presence that concludes (presumes) nothing. Never one without the other. That is where instant and duration comfort us. Every poetics is a palliative for eternity."



Latour's concept of "composition" ("An Attempt at Writing" 475): a form of mending and (re)assembling bricolage that facilitates and generates new connections. Poetics is a mode of recollection: in treating words as resistant material and building sentences that resist deciphering and the cannibalistic logic of clarity, objectivity, causality and assimilation, I position poetics as the cement which binds the empirical bricks.

## DEEP MAPPING

### **Waters illustrate.**

In light of such considerations, it is obvious that mapping in this thesis cannot follow a Cartesian, ocular-centric (surveying) model: it would be counterproductive and undo the decolonial effort of the stylistics and rhetoric implemented in the textual component of the thesis. It would be to ignore flows and resonances, to ignore rhythms. Waters and watery movements invite—demand—imagining different forms of cartographies; cartographies that speak of watery transactions-translations and that remain open (to hope). Similarly to Somerville, I thus seek "to create new maps that produce alternative stories and practices" (3). More precisely, I rely on what is called "deep mapping": a kind of mapping that "aims, broadly speaking, to engage with, narrate and evoke 'place' in temporal depth by bringing together a multiplicity of voices, information, impressions and perspectives as a basis for a new connectivity" (Biggs 6). My choice to use deep mapping arises from concerns about the appropriateness of European-based models—which potentially reproduce the colonial paradigm—to illuminate the relationships between humans, sound and waters in an "antipodean" space. Drawing on deep mapping also accentuates the emphasis that I place on the located specificities of watery environments, as using maps valorises the spatial dimension over all others (Oxx et al.).

Deep mapping finds its roots in the 1950s work of a Marxist-inspired movement called the Situationist International, and was popularised by author William Least

Heat-Moon in *PrairyErth (A Deep Map)*.<sup>113</sup> It is increasingly popular among literary and cultural studies scholars who use it to extract spatial relationships embedded in texts in order to produce novel mappings and explore narrative topographies or spatial imaginaries.<sup>114</sup> In an Australian context, Gibson's *Seven Versions of an Australian Badland* can be seen as a first step toward the implementation of deep mapping in the country because of its strong psychogeographical<sup>115</sup> influence. Carter's notion of intentionality (*The Road* 349-50) is also coherent with the aims and possibilities commonly attached to deep mapping.

Deep mapping is inclusive of “the fragmentary, the anecdotal, the overheard, the mistranslated, the half-understood, the appropriated” (M. Pearson 146). It supports alternative, dynamic—that is, visual and experiential—representations of culture and/in place (Bodenhamer 108; Fishkin 3; Pearson and Shanks 64-5). Theoretically made of an infinite number of interlaced and intertwining layers which superpose on each other (Bodenhamer et al.; McLucas), deep maps emphasise multiplicity and subjectivity, mixing boundaries, not only between researcher and researched, but also between institutional and wider worlds, between science and fiction (Pearson and Shanks 131). With their conflicting and confluent strands, they are not fixed or framed as statements of repulsive or attractive dualities, but are rather a form of conversation (McLucas; Bodenhamer et al. 174). They design a dialogical “between-space”<sup>116</sup> (Bishop 9) in which to contest “given categories and concepts” (Biggs 13). Deep maps are thus projects rather than products; they represent an

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<sup>113</sup> Deep mapping can also be linked to the North American tradition of environmental writing, through which prototypical deep maps were often produced. These writings range from Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* to Wallace Stegner's *Wolf Willow*.

<sup>114</sup> Recent examples of this include projects such as Lancaster University's *Geospatial Innovation* (2015–18) or, in an Australian context, the University of Queensland's *Australian Cultural Atlas* (2011–13).

<sup>115</sup> The term “psychogeography” was first defined in 1955 by writer and revolutionary Guy Debord as “the study of the precise laws and specific effects of the geographical environment, consciously organised or not, on the emotions and behaviour of individuals”. Although Debord designed this definition in relation to functionalist urbanism and then applied it strictly to urban areas, I feel this introductory statement is also pertinent when applied to rural contexts. In the case of Gibson's study, it represents a fair summary of his approach and his analysis of the impact of the “Horror Stretch” on the behaviour of people inhabiting or crossing it.

<sup>116</sup> This vision of deep maps as between-space responds to architect and historian Kenneth Frampton's notion of a “place-conscious poetic”, in that, exceeding an architectural frame, they seek “to mediate between the impact of globalisation and the concrete particularities of a particular place” (Biggs 16). This notion is derived from the concept of “critical regionalism”, coined by architectural theorists Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaviere.

inherently unstable and responsive work-in-progress (Fishkin 3): a vivid visual translation (or recreation) of open totality. Deep maps are themselves a poetics; or a supple illustration of my use of poetics as a tool of decoloniality.

In this thesis, deep maps bring together the poetics of the textual voices in a number of visual representations. They provide a space in which to materialise a simultaneity of thoughts and arguments that is impossible to achieve through writing, as reading follows a linear progression. Such deep maps act as a visual aid to facilitate what Glissant describes as “draw[ing] near Relation” and grasping it as a system, thus “acknowledg[ing] our presentiments of how it works” (*Poetics of Relation* 195). As I cast watery sonic aesthetics and poetics in visual terms, I develop a form of allegorical cartography. My deep maps evolve, and I use a variety of cartographies to suit the poetics of the textual components: I progressively move away from surveying, and into imagining, to generate composite and polyphonic visual representations of Lower Murray Country’s waters.<sup>117</sup> Such maps chart connective journeys across the waters—watery choreographies and traces. They operate as legato catalogues of shifting and mutating watery movements—movements of and around waters. Their wildly different typologies sketch labyrinthine imaginings of space and time; and, as such, are counterpoint cartographies of colonialism.

Drawing on deep mapping is indeed a form of disruption to the colonial legacy of cartography as a planar “invariant abstraction” (Gibson, “Narrative Hunger” 251). Semiotician Walter Mignolo argues that “the map ... was the first step of the imaginary of the modern/colonial world” (726). Mapping has been instrumental to the implementation and success of the colonial/imperial project in Australia (Carter, *The Road*; Dunbar-Hall and Gibson 213-14, 223; D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Gibson, *South of the West*; Somerville 3) and elsewhere (Malkki; Gellner; Alonso; Harley). It remains instrumental, particularly when it comes to water management (Weir). Formal and official mapping processes establish, justify, legitimate and perpetuate specific (and generally western) power structures and memories (Wood). The visual device of the map encloses, measures and commodifies space (Alonso 382; Harley

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<sup>117</sup> This progression reinforces the idea of wandering (the reverie) of the reader. My deep mapping choices are detailed and justified in the introductory section to each analysis.

284-5; Westphal). It is also key in the production of national territory, as it links identities to specific and well-delimited geographies to be synthesised in a seemingly legitimate manner (Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism*; Malkki 62; Bodenhamer 99). The carefully calculated purpose of such maps is to appropriate, control, dominate, possess, legitimate, objectify, empty (of meaning and of people), and to open for exploitation and destruction. These maps close all possibilities for sustainability, dialogues, exchanges. They are designed to freeze, congeal and set Relation in place and in time.

Deep mapping implies re-purposing such a tool of colonisation to (re)imagine waters, and human relationships with waters. Through different cartographic typologies, its aim is to put an end to objectification, to remove concepts of legitimacy and domination from the table. It is to draw maps issued from imagination as opposed to dominating elite iconographic practices. It is to create alternative maps, maps which do not contribute to reinforcing power imbalance and common antagonisms and dualities, but destabilise existing presuppositions by (re)sounding the environment. Designed to be unsettled, they are inter(re)active, and change with context and consultation: they contribute to disturbing the definition of cartography. Geographer Mei-Po Kwan describes this as a switch from “canonical geography” to “hybrid geographies”. As I reroute mapping, I divert it from the circle of abuse and denial brought by colonial mapping.

## Watery Plan: Four Visions of Waters in Lower Murray Country

J'écris par vagues.<sup>118</sup>  
Édouard Glissant  
(*La Poétique de la Relation* 60)

This thesis is built on the “accumulation of examples” advocated by Glissant.<sup>119</sup> The words that I write refuse to conglomerate into chapters: chapters carry connotations of linearity, finality and purpose.<sup>120</sup> Rather, I conceive the different sections of this thesis as *tableaux vivants* or visions: furtive, partial, oriented, and not necessarily connected with one another.<sup>121</sup> They are fragmented fragments (or snippets) of Relation. My visions are analogous to Lefebvre’s moments (*Rhythmanalysis*). Moments do not require transitions. They value and privilege instants over duration.<sup>122</sup> They account/allow for ruptures, disruptions, discontinuity and continuity: they carry their own rhythms of the collision between past and future in their midst. Moments are also paused in time: my visions are written, immobilised on paper. They denote times of particular significance; times open to challenge; times of hinges and articulations where radical alteration (can) occur.

This introductory chapter can be comprehended as a foundational vision—I live within these pages, I am these pages. The following imagined, future visions rest on it. I develop four of them: four visions of waters and watery movements in Lower

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<sup>118</sup> “I write in waves.”

<sup>119</sup> D. B. Rose’s *Country of the Heart* is another source of inspiration.

<sup>120</sup> In particular, I refuse to write in chronologies, which are “héritières passives du passé” (“passive heirs to the past”) (Glissant, *Le Monde Incréé* 8).

<sup>121</sup> This approach is also reminiscent of U’Alayil (Yuwaalaraay) researcher Chrissiejoy Marshall’s methodology, called “thinking through Country” as explained by Somerville. This methodology indeed underpins Somerville’s *Water in a Dry Land* (xi). It is a combination of visual, oral and written forms which combine and answer to each other to generate clusters of meanings (13), clusters which correspond to visions in my thesis. Marshall also presents the visual components in her work outside of an artistic framework. They are not designed as art, but as “a medium to express and communicate complex ideas, as much for herself as for her viewers” (13). Again, this resonates with the role of maps in my thesis. They work in a similar fashion, providing both myself—the researcher—and the reader with a way to comprehend the acoustic environments under scrutiny from a different perspective.

<sup>122</sup> This is also congruent with Bachelard’s understanding of duration as fragmentary and composed of disparate elements, rather than being cohesive and unitary (*La Dialectique de la Durée*).

Murray Country—four visions written as a prelude to an infinity of potential others.<sup>123</sup> When combined, these visions sketch a picture of something bigger. It is fragile—unstable and open—incomplete. It is never to be finished. I attempt to imagine (grasp) something which does not exist: a totality that could be representing, that would tend towards this representational ideal. Throughout the following pages, I imagine an impossibility whose negative can only forever be glimpsed or gazed at, skimmed. The exercise sounds like an aberration: I am composing such a text.

## VISION 1

### Austral Waters

Vision 1, entitled Austral Waters, focuses on descriptive non-Indigenous (or settler) music.<sup>124</sup> This vision focuses on the sonic colonisation of Lower Murray Country's waters. It aims to demonstrate how rhythms are a source of power and how acquiring control over these rhythms is crucial to the colonial (and imperial) enterprise. In particular, I follow watery meanders to explore the mythological reduction that has led to the transformation of humid and lived terrains into a d(r)ying site-stage: a space which can be—and is—manipulated and twisted to suit the constant performance of the colonial act of “discovery”, both imaginarily and physically. I look at plastered rhythms and imposed monological supremacy to show how Lower Murray Country's waters have been musically construed and constricted to accommodate settlers' codes and practices; and how this change has altered their metrical nature. As it unfolds, this vision also touches upon the identity

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<sup>123</sup> Bachelard writes: “[l]’historien choisit *son* histoire dans l’histoire” (“the historian chooses their *own* history within history”) (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 26, original emphasis). Writing the thesis involves subjective selection, inclusion and assembly: it is one (re)telling of Lower Murray Country's waters—among an infinity of others. An infinite number of visions could be researched and written (imagined), but I selected these four particular visions because of their significant and preponderant place within an imagined totality of watery spaces and movements in Lower Murray Country. The notion of visions also highlights, once again, that totality can only be imagined and never complete: its components are under constant transformation. It is bound to remain open. Finally, “vision” underlines my subjective selection and interpretation of what is being discussed: it once again locates the speaking position. As author Pierre Bergounioux states: “[i]l y a autant de visions, de versions du monde qu’il y a de monde” (“there are as many visions, versions of the world as there are people in the world”) (17).

<sup>124</sup> The specific part of the corpus under exploration is detailed in the visions themselves.

development which stems from such (trans)formation and contrasts it with the emergence and construction of colonial identities at the riverine, national and global levels.

## VISION 2

### **Bodies and Spirits and Waters**

Vision 2: Bodies and Spirits and Waters explores the semiotics<sup>125</sup> around a revived Aboriginal river ceremony, *Ringbalin*. This vision journeys through languages and movements to explore instances of rhythmic continuities and ruptures. I am interested in how rhythmic perceptions and performances are understood and used as a source of healing, as bodies—both human and more-than-human—(re)connect with one another. I use my own experience of these (re)connecting bodies during the 2017 edition of *Ringbalin* to develop an academic argument around the intrinsic inclusiveness of a rhythmic (body-based) approach to environmental care.

## VISION 3

### **Translated Waters**

Vision 3 is entitled Translated Waters. This vision explores how several composers, sound artists and performers use music to reimagine and transform our relationships with watery areas near the Murray Mouth. By engaging in composition processes which require exchanges and interactions across and beyond ethno- and anthropocentric boundaries, these artists redefine musical creation as a form of recuperative and restorative collaboration. Sounds become memories, and musicians are historians tasked with retrieving residues and shards of acoustic meanings in profoundly disfigured (arrhythmic) areas. As they hear (recover) resonances and echoes, these musicians consequently reveal and expose polyrhythms with which to compose beyond the exploitative shadows of areas

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<sup>125</sup> I am not focusing on sound *per se*, because I do not have the authority (as a non-Indigenous person), nor the training (as an ethnomusicologist). What interests me is how sound is used, and what is achieved through forms of sonority. I do not discuss the qualities, characteristics or evolution of the sonic productions under scrutiny.

devastated by salinity. Such compositions invent and sustain new languages of awareness which are cognisant (rather than defiant) of salinity. These languages do not occupy space, but (re)compose and nurture it through rhythmic accumulations and proliferations of ontological significance, as both the environment and its traditional custodians contribute to their formation.

## VISION 4

### *Toute-eau*

Vision 4 is entitled *Toute-eau* (*Whole-water* or *All-water*) in reference to Glissant's *Tout-monde*.<sup>126</sup> In this vision, I use the shifting music of waters, both intrinsic and human-produced, to (re)trace past and future journeys, and materialise humid sonic geographies: I create an amalgam—*un mélange entrecroisé*—of all previous visions to imagine a potential sonic totality for Lower Murray Country's waters. I explore Ngarrindjeri and settler music; collaborative music that crosses ethno- and anthropocentric boundaries; the silence of the Murray River's dried mouth with its brace-barrages, and the compensating loudness of atmospheric rivers—rivers in the sky. Drawing on reciprocities and antagonisms (sky–earth; Austral–Oceanic; humans–environments; imaginaries–realities; cyclical–linear; roots–routes; overabundance–absence), I follow relationships and passages defined/informed by watery rhythms. I embrace unity-diversity and compose with movements to offer a chorographic tale of these waters, positioning them as (performative) contact zones between peoples, cultures and ecologies; as zones of cohabitation, interaction, confluence, repression and repulsion. These construing and actualising movements of remembrance and creation orchestrate sonic interstices for imagining sustainable futures, lying in wait, somewhere within these in-between waters.

Please consider even that which will come now, as attempts to swim on  
dry land.  
Paul Celan  
(186)

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<sup>126</sup> This concept is developed in the vision in question.



# Vision 1—

**Austral Waters: From Humid Terrains to  
D(r)ying Site-Stage**

Le langage n'est pas la vérité. Il est notre manière d'exister dans l'univers. Jouer avec les mots, c'est simplement examiner les modes de fonctionnement de l'esprit, refléter une particule de l'univers telle que l'esprit la perçoit. De même, l'univers n'est pas seulement la somme de ce qu'il contient. Il est le réseau infiniment complexe des relations entre les choses. De même que les mots, les choses ne prennent un sens que les unes par rapport aux autres.<sup>127</sup>

Paul Auster  
(254)

Initial colonial encounters with the upper east side of Lower Murray Country did not generate positive accounts from the newcomers. This area of Country—now known as the Mallee—was described as “one vast desert of sand, rendering this part of the country quite useless for the purpose of civilised life” (Hawdon, *The Journal* 36). The barren flats unfolding in front of the colonisers’ eyes could not provide enough food for the subsistence of stock (37). The voice of “civilisation” went harsher in its criticism: it decried the lack of viewpoint, the unending similarity, the apparent flatness. It decried a jumble where vision was impossible—because the newcomers were unable to see beyond their “civilised” binoculars (see also Carter, *Ground Truthing*). It was clearly “a matter of eyes”: these were not adapted because they “were still English eyes, and as such simply could not see Australia. English eyes have set ideas about trees and about light and distances” (Ratcliffe 13). These set ideas deterred them from perceiving waters where there seemed to be none: in roots, underground, in seasonal springs and billabongs. The colonial eyes were yet to adjust. The colonial ears did not fare much better. Jumble was inaudible: there was no sound or words vibrating over these lands. Filtered through European

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<sup>127</sup> “Language is not truth. It is our way of being in the universe. Playing with words is simply examining the mind’s functioning modes, reflecting a particle of the universe as the mind perceives it. Similarly, the universe is not solely the sum of what it contains. It is an endlessly complex network of relationships in between things. Like words, things only acquire meaning in relation to one another.”

preconceptions, all of Australia seemed silent—an entire continent deprived of apparent sonority (Cathcart). Sound had to be created; it had to fill the air. Absolute silence is torture.

Vision 1 (Austral<sup>128</sup> Waters) follows the meanderings of Murrundi/Murray River to unveil how successive tidal waves of European settlers have swayed and transformed lived terrains into a site-stage, a monological space which can be—and is—manipulated and twisted, both imaginarily and physically, to suit the constant performance of the colonial act of “discovery”. More precisely, it explores how these waters and their adjacent environments have been musically construed and constricted to accommodate and respond to settlers’ mythological codes and practices; and how this change in the rhythmic character of a portion of river lands has altered their metrical nature.

This first vision emerges from pieces of music that I classify as “scenic” watery music, that is, musical texts which offer descriptive accounts of Murrundi/Murray River’s waters from non-Indigenous (or settler) perspectives. They range from colonial ballads to country songs through to operettas and musicals, and were composed over a span of close to a century and a half (from 1880s to 2010s). Each piece is detailed as it appears in the body of the text. Their primary interest resides in their lyrics and, as such, I tend to focus on the plasticity and rhythmicity of words over sound in this section. These words, though, remain carried across and over the waters by sound: I dedicate particular attention to how this sound supports and empowers the words, extending their reach within and over Lower Murray Country’s waters. In this vision, deep maps are designed to illustrate this emphasis on word over sound: descriptive word clouds come over and obliterate the skies of Country, as plastered words obscure topographical and geological settings.

The aim of Vision 1 is to demonstrate how, through the catalytic action of water, environments are transformed into a theatre set—a site-stage—suitable for the constantly renewed performance of the act of colonising “discovery”; and how this

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<sup>128</sup> I use the term “Austral” (as opposed to “Oceanic” or “Pacific”, which I use later on) to underline the fact that, in this vision, the waters are seen from a European perspective, that is, as “antipodean” waters.

water is consumed in the process, leading to an effective d(r)ying of these environments. This section consists of three parts that progress from cause to effect:

- Part I scrutinises the sonic “discovery” and imaginary interpretation of Murrundi/Murray River’s waters to demonstrate that these plural waters are articulated as a singular essence-water;
- Part II focuses on the larger imaginary impacts congruent with this initial sonic construction to reveal how and why this essence-water is a crucial ingredient in turning the rest of Country into malleable playdough and creating the site-stage; and
- Part III illuminates the physical consequences which accompany such an imaginary (trans)formation, showing how essence-water—used as a catalyser—is consumed in the process of turning terrains into a site-stage; and how this sonic disintegration leads to the self-destruction of the site-stage, that is, to severe environmental degradation.

Throughout this vision, watery voices—an aqua presence positioned in the middle of the page—speak the story of the “discovered” entities.

Besides demonstrative logic, the argument of Vision 1 is also carried through form. A preamble and an epilogue open and close the vision: these introduce the settler-singer; the character performing the “discovery”. The three-part organisation—reminiscent of the three-act canon of theatre—and the deep mapping represent a *mise-en-abîme* that mimics the act of settling. They mirror and concretise the colonially imposed transition from place to stage as the page provides me with a palimpsestic space from which to reproduce (or reiterate)—rather than represent—the colonial application of a form onto lived terrains and their subsequent transformation into a dysfunctional site-stage. Additionally, it reveals how *I also* contribute to this transition by imposing an extraneous layer of academic meaning onto Country. As I attempt to transplant and (re)constitute the physicality of its waters onto the page, I contribute to further detaching and dislocating these waters’ very physicality from their lived settings. My formatting decision thus stems from a desire to give credence to a mimetic impulse of the colonial act, while clarifying the limits of such mimicry by making obvious the partial reiteration of this act engendered through this work. These limits are also highlighted by my limited use of topographical maps. These provide a satire of the colonial act of mapping—as

words cover them (disturbing their supposedly abstract and objective rationalisation of watery environments)—and yet still reproduce this same colonial act. In this part, deep mapping thus speaks of, and mostly mimics, colonial overwriting.

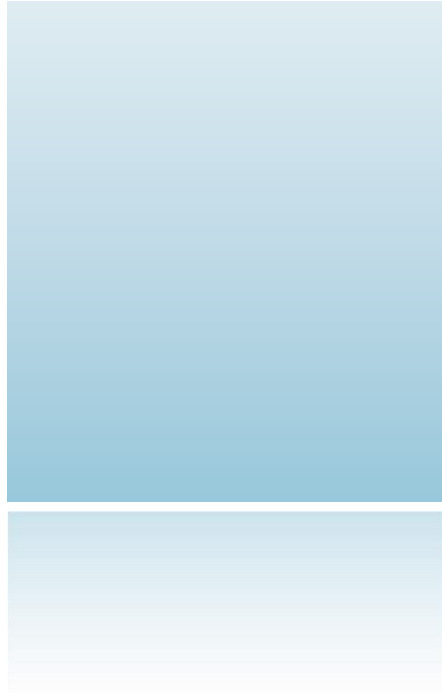
\*

Preamble: beginning  
(setting the scene)

*The voice of settler-singer is generic and unnamed. It is a “he”: an analytical andromorphic third person singular voice interspersed with punctiform bursts of life—quotations. The voice of the settler-singer declaims the official History, the one built from the list of governors and the ratification of legally binding documents. This voice stretches from the beginning of Lower Murray Country’s European colonisation to 2018. For am I not a settler-singer, too?*

The waters are here, shimmering intensely under the explorer’s gaze. At last! The waters are here.

So long had he imaged them: running, carrying him to his fortune and fate; his own source of mobility, development and commerce. He had cursed in frustration and disappointment as previous encounters with these waters had proved treacherous. They had been so difficult to locate and, once located, so deceptive. They never conformed to his expectations. He had cursed as he witnessed them lacking consistence and disappearing prematurely. The musicality of the retreating waters—the danced performance of backward-forward movements pregnant with hopes—had left him cold. They had failed to deliver and rise up to their assumed role; they had been lacking and lagging: America was better (Dunlap). These encounters had been missed encounters. Australian waters had betrayed him. He had stood stunned in the silence left by their absence; stunned, a taste of dissatisfaction in the mouth, each breath he took rasping his throat, gulping ahead as they gulped away and took their promise of riches with them. And yet, his enterprise could not succeed without them. So, he kept looking.



So long had he yearned for them. He had been obsessed, tortured. He had heard them whispering in his restless, choppy sleep, laughing at him, taunting him—leaving him panting, heatstricken, dizzy and disoriented. But his quest was finally over. He had found them. The explorer took stock of what lay in front of his eyes. It was not perfect, but he had nonetheless stumbled upon something that represented an acceptable materialisation of his long-held dream. It was early 1830, and he had just “discovered” and named the Murray River. The abundant physicality of waters empirically substantiated his wildest hopes. Their presence here, no longer hypothetical, was such a good omen! It was easy to notice the pastoral and agricultural potential of their surrounding land. After the Great Bend onwards to Lake Alexandrina, he deemed the space so exquisitely suitable for the projection of his expectations that he immediately recorded it in his journal on 19 March 1838:

We now appear done with the loose sandy country, entering one consisting of open plains thinly sprinkled over with bushes, and producing more grass than I had seen on the journey, except at Swan Hill; but it is a very thin coat, though in the valley of the river there is a good portion of alluvial land for cultivation. (Hawdon, *The Journal* 54)

He was crossing through the north-west of Lower Murray Country while driving livestock down from New South Wales to Adelaide in a business venture. It was speculative, but it worked out for the best: he made a profit of £6700 for the sale of his 335 head of cattle (Maurovic 2-3). Others could and would follow. And so, for their stake, he was prompt to underline this change in the nature of Country again in his report to John Hindmarsh, South Australia's governor at the time:

Leaving the river about the latitude of Adelaide, we were compelled by the ranges to go more to the south, and thus passed near to Mount Barker. In that district, we passed over a beautiful and extensive tract of grazing country, especially that lying between Mount Barker and Lake Alexandrina, which equals in richness of soil and pasturage any that I have seen in New Holland. The valley through which the Murray flows from the junction of the Murrumbidgee varies from one to upwards of five miles in breadth, and is in many places well adapted for the cultivation of grain. (Hawdon, "Importation")

Because of the suitability of this fertile region for pastoral and agricultural expansion, it was swiftly settled. It was surveyed. Country was not listened to, or "felt", but appraised and divided. Plots started to dot its fabric. Monetary values supplanted (creation) stories: a different rhythm progressively unfolded over the land.

The waters are here, shimmering shyly under the explorer's gaze. At last! He has found his set.

Preamble: end  
(stepping on stage)

\*



## Welcoming Us: The Picturesque River

As they had struggled to locate them, European newcomers struggled to hear these “newfound” waters. A damp quietness weighed on the environments that uncoiled before their eyes. Non-European sensibilities and ears could not perceive the sonorities of the “antipodes”. However, along with settlement on the banks of Murrundi/Murray River came composers, performers and their instruments. These people started writing and playing music about the river; they wrote and performed this music so that its waters were rendered audible. Composed by Frank G. King in 1909, “When it’s Twilight on the Murray, Sweet Irene” is a piece for voice and piano whose opening line is “Where the Murray gently flows”. This sets the tone, and throughout the song the river is portrayed as a regular and continuous flow of “gently” rolling waters. Composed by George Bellchambers around the 1940s, “Lazy Murray” is another piece for piano and voice whose lyrics unfold around the river:

Where the lazy old Murray flows down to the sea,  
Through mountains and valleys of sweet mystery  
Often I dream of that whispering stream, as it flows on it’s [its] way  
with a message for me

Roll on, lazy River  
Roll on, to the sea  
Roll on, oh roll on and bring back memories to me  
Roll on, where I played by the sil’vry stream  
Roll on, lazy river and just let me dream.

Where the lazy old Murray flows down to the sea,  
Beneath shady gums and the old willow tree  
Often I played when in childhood I strayed down by the old river  
that flows to the sea.

The colonial imaginary represents the waters as calm (hushed) and lazy (non-intrusive). The river is quiet, so quiet: a “wispring stream” whose waters barely make a sound (Hay).

It started with tectonic  
plates.

They separated in a loud crush. Some as anciently as 500 million years ago; others as recently as 2 million years ago.

Gondwana.

Lakes came and disappeared.

They followed the tumultuous uplifting of sedimentary blocks and covered thousands of square kilometres.

Lake Bungunna.

Rivers gushed through.

They carved tempestuous gorges within the sediments. They eroded land. Salty remnants of ancient lakes endure.

Lake Tyrrell.

Aquifers constructed mazes.

Underground, there are even more rivers and lakes than on the surface. They lap and eat soil away.

Great Artesian Basin.

Floodplains opened up. Swamps and bogs were layered with thick sediments. A great amount of waters

accumulated and  
dampened echoes.  
Barmah Choke.

More Basins formed.  
Murrundi/Murray  
River now belongs to a  
Basin that stretches  
over more than 1  
million square  
kilometres. It is the  
twentieth largest river  
catchment in the world.  
It covers 14 per cent of  
Australia. It contains 22  
sub-basins. Most  
waterways in this basin  
connect to  
Murrundi/Murray  
River.  
Murray-Darling Basin.

In this watery imaginary, laziness and quietness become compulsory qualities, necessary so that waters do not burst into—and disturb—the settler-singer’s dream. This dream propagates. Lyrics invite the audience to join the performer in their reverie-filled *balade*<sup>129</sup> along the banks of the river; to join them as they peacefully stroll, *andante* (King) or *moderato* (Bellchambers; Hay), through the Murray landscapes as though these were English parks (Leigh 169; Newland 3-5). This is because, throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the countryside carried a vivid charm for the newcomers, who were still marked by the era of the development of parks in England (Williams; Dunlap). This period, and the early twentieth century in particular, marked the rise of a renewed intensity in the attention granted to natural beauty as a site of attraction for romantic tourists rather than working country people (Williams 20). Common tropes attached to English parklands fill the lyrics applied to Australian landscapes: the vista is structured by

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<sup>129</sup> This is a play on French homonyms *ballade* (the poetic and musical style) and *balade* (a stroll; a peaceful, often slow-paced and aimless wandering through an environment).

zigzagging waters, and there are scarce and majestic trees<sup>130</sup> among which it is pleasant to wander.

This uninterrupted promenade and its concomitant reverie are not solely carried by lyrics which project the audience into a carefully crafted visual space. They are also conveyed through composition choices and musical styles, both of which are impeccably tailored to suit and fulfil a similar imaginary. The performance in itself belongs to a dreamy, mild world: keys are to be stroked softly; words are to be sung tenderly, smoothly, *mezzo piano* (Bellchambers; Benson). The range of sounds preserves this atmosphere. Most of the notes are located in a non-aggressive middle range and are adjoining (even chromatic). This is particularly true of the accompaniment, which, in the pieces discussed so far, efficiently fills in the occasional leaps in the singer's melodic line. Many of these pieces also bear indications recommending smooth or tender accompaniment. The flow of piano notes stays in its place: behind the singer, not overpowering but supporting them, and never doing anything but. As the waters gently carry the sweet dream expressed in the lyrics, the accompaniment gently carries the settler-singer through their performance, softly doubling the melody in the process. Some of the pieces even include this flooding of imaginary framework within their annotations: the piano is to play in a "dreamy waltz tempo" (Bellchambers) or "flowing along lazily" (Holland). Additionally, the accompaniment's musical lines generally remain unbroken until the end of the piece. There rarely is a perfect cadence until the double bar, and pauses are favoured over rests: they do not stop the flowing of sounds, but rather slow it down, extend and expand it, temporarily immobilising time to suspend the dream in the air, and the dreamer in their state and bubble.

Some of the chosen styles further perform this task. Two pieces composed for voice and piano—"The Murray Moon" written by Reginald Stoneham and C. J. de Garis in 1922; and "Murray Rose" written by Tom King and Jack Fewster in 1928—are (slow) foxtrots; another piece for voice and piano entitled "Back Where the Dear Murray Flows" (composed by Alex Benson in 1919) is performed at *tempo di valse*,

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<sup>130</sup> It is interesting to note that Aboriginal fires, used to shape and control environments, played an important part in the parklike aspect of some parts of Country (Gammage, "Adelaide District in 1936" 7, 19).

while “Koorianda” (composed by A. C. Schroeder in 1889) is a piano piece that has its name subtitled as “waltz”. These styles dictate a specific type of dance. They require dancers to engage in a recursive series of flowing, uninterrupted movements which send them smoothly gliding across the dance floor. And as they revolve on the dance floor, they imaginarily float on and through landscapes of redundant sameness from Europe to America, and finally reach Australia. Dance floors are transposable—and transposed—along with musical styles, taking the dancers with them in the process.

Similarly to a dance floor, these watery landscapes prove particularly adapted to, and supportive of, scenes of romance. In King’s piece, the lyrics unfold:

When it’s twilight on the **Murray**<sup>131</sup> sweet Irene  
We shall wander ’neath the **Autumn** sky serene  
And the **old sweet tales** we’ll tell,  
’Mid those scenes we love so well,  
When it’s twilight on the Murray, sweet Irene

Murrundi/Murray River and its watery sceneries represent a privileged site to serenade women (King and Fewster; King; O’Dea), even if indirectly through the incorporation of a “native” wooing “his dusky bride” within the dream of the protagonist-performer (Stoneham and de Garis). Composed by Alyce O’Dea in the 1930s, “Lazy Old Man Murray” is another piece for voice and piano that displays the same characteristics:

Lazy Old Man Murray I love you  
Down your soft moonlit stream  
Let me drift there and dream  
Paradise for we two  
At close of day in the sunshine golden ray  
Birds call their mates  
There’s a carolling so gay  
With the night shadows falling  
In dreams I am calling Lazy Old Man Murray to you.

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<sup>131</sup> When deemed relevant, the highest notes of the melody (which place accents on certain words over others) are indicated and marked in bold within my transcription of the lyrics.

The rolling waters act as connectors. They are drawn upon to carry and/or incarnate the voice of the bashful lovers (Hay; O’Dea; King and Fewster). They form an imaginary link between lovers and, in the process, they become incorporated in the romantic scene. The lyrics are addressed to the river as much as to the lover; they speak to both, and serenade both. King and Fewster’s piece contains the following lyrics:

Murray moonlight brings to me where the Murray flows  
Thoughts of you, I seem to see little Murray Rose.

Women and river merge to become one and form an image of a longed-for love.<sup>132</sup> This is also the case in “It’s the ‘Coo-ee’ Call”, a piece for voice and piano composed by Al Hay in the 1920s:

Where the Murray River flows  
Where the wild clematis grows  
And the birds are singing all the day  
There’s a sweet voice calls it seems  
Always calling in my dreams  
It’s my sweetheart’s voice and always seems to say  
.....  
I can hear it through the trees  
Floating on the gentle breeze  
Seems like fate that’s calling you and I  
In the evening hour I hear voices calling far and near  
And they tell me that for me you always sigh

These romanticised projections encompass both past (memories) and future (projections): the settler-singers fill the entire stage of the chronological order. Yet, they remain relatively discreet in the present. They never project themselves onto the waters directly in front of them; they never touch them. They survey waters without physically interacting or acting upon them. This contemplative inclination preserves their purity: waters are serene and pristine because they are untouched, out of reach from corrupting human intervention. This distance makes them fit to embody, or become vectors for, the pure intentions of the serenading settler-singer.

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<sup>132</sup> This amalgam is not innocent, and its implications are discussed in more depth in later pages.

It also inscribes them within the strong literary tradition of associating fresh water with purity—to such an extent that it almost becomes a pleonasm to discuss pure fresh waters (Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* 181-99). Developing this lexical field of purity in songs also contributes to preserving the separation between nature and culture that is essential in both romantic and naturalist traditions. The settler is not an actor, but an observer placed in a near-trance state: catapulted out of their normal state of mind and removed from the reality of the described landscape, they become dreamers, passive witnesses to the already fleeting scene unfolding, as if on a stage, in front of their imagination. Stoneham and de Garis' piece goes:

Drooping willows weeping o'er the stream,  
Frame the picture it's a fairy dream

Murrundi/Murray River becomes a fantasy stage which favours periodic visions and epiphanies rather than interactions. Waters are imparted with “mystic” properties; they acquire an aura of “sweet mystery” (Stoneham and de Garis; Bellchambers). The ephemerality of these visions and epiphanies is reinforced and guaranteed by the lighting, which is characterised by transitory lights. There is no harsh Australian sun beaming upon what is described; only the soft caress of transversal and reflected light. In most songs, the scene is set either in the early morning or at night. Scenes are basked in the glory of sunrise and sunset, or occasionally dimmed by rays of moonlight shyly shining between clouds. Hay's piece alternates between early morning and night (“eventide”), between “sweet” and “golden-hued” dreams. Both O'Dea's and King and Fewster's pieces transition from sunset (“At close of day in the sunshine golden ray ... with the night shadows falling” in the former) to night-time (“when the shadows round me fall at the evening close” in the latter). Twilight obviously characterises most of the scene described in King's “When It's Twilight on the Murray, Sweet Irene”. Other songs are primarily set at night, in “shadows of grey”, solely lit by the moon (Stoneham and de Garis) whose rays transform the river in a “soft moonlit stream” (O'Dea). This clichéd lighting also suits the scenes of ethereal romance that fill the settings.

1956.

Queensland's pouring rain gallops down watercourses. Riverine regions go underwater; South Australia is no exception.

1956.

"It all began with rumours and stories. Far away in the eastern mountains of Australia, thousands of kilometres up the tributaries of the Murray and the Murrumbidgee and the Darling, it had been pouring with rain. Gutters were turning into drains, and drains were becoming creeks, and creeks were becoming rivers. There was water cascading down the steep mountain streams, water pouring from cliffs and canyons, water raging white and angry in the gorges. And it was all making for the plains where sooner or later it had to find its way into the Murray." (Thiele 100-1)

1956.

Upstream, downstream, towns flood. The river does not remain tucked in its bed.



1956.

In places, it goes over  
100 km away from its  
usual course.

1956.

For over 7 months, it  
keeps screaming,  
refusing to go back to  
its bed.

1956.

Pubs are open, though:  
boats are tied to the  
balconies of the second  
floor. Fish swim above  
the ground floor.

1956.

Flood markers are now  
scattered across the  
states. They record the  
presence of waters that  
are no longer there.  
Memories of watery  
ghosts stagnate in  
between the gradients.

Illustrations ornamenting the covers of the scores confirm the central place occupied by these ephemeral and transitory lights. The cover of King's piece depicts a sunset reflected in the waters; similarly, the covers of both Hay's and Stoneham and de Garis' pieces offer moonlit sights of the river. These different lights all mark passing and fleeting states characterised by a thawing of rationality: they contribute to nurturing the miraculous chance encounters and visions experienced by the settler-singer as they permit him to leave and dismiss the domain of the real to enter that of the dream, while remaining fully aware of the distinctions between the two. The sets of images attached to the river's waters thus remain superficial. They draw on well-worn, simple pictorial imaginaries and tropes which are commonly attached to waters and watery-adjacent sceneries (both local and foreign) in European perspectives. As such, this easy imagery "matérialise ... mal",

but rather produces idealised images, “des images qui jouent à la surface de l’élément, sans laisser à l’imagination le temps de travailler la matière”<sup>133</sup> (Bachelard, *L’Eau et les Rêves* 15). Some of the lyrics from King’s piece are:

Where the Murray gently flows,  
Where the Wattle blossom grows,  
Where the little lovebird safely builds its nest  
In the stately gum trees’ shades,  
Stands a cottage down the glade,  
'Tis the homestead of the girl I love the best.

Waters are silvery; the trees are large and imposing so that they cast a protective shade; the scent of pretty blossoms is never too far off from the picture; the glade unsurprisingly comes with its affiliated homestead; and so on. All these attributes are repeated on the cover of the score, with added lilies and sunset to emphasise their idyllic qualities even more. A distinct (and monotonous) formula emerges. Bachelard explains that this kind of superficial imagery facilitates and indicates “le passage d’une poésie des eaux à une métapoétique de l’eau, le passage d’un pluriel à un singulier”<sup>134</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 15). And indeed, these summoned images, fugitive and furtive, are applicable elsewhere and everywhere. They do not give much consideration to actual located specifics and mostly discard and ignore Lower Murray Country’s particularly diverse watery entities, ranging from fresh to salty, from stagnant to flowing. They solely graze and grasp these waters, and never truly interact with them. Instead, this easy imagery constructs a pictorial and auditory universal: “magical utopian visions” are created from “selected images [which] stand as themselves: not in a living but in an enamelled world” (Williams 18). A (stereo)typical landscape takes shape, rather than a landscape specific to a locality.

“there was a great earth shock or earth tremor at the source of the Murray. This continued for days, and suddenly the earth was rent tight along where the

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<sup>133</sup> “does not materialise well”; “images which play on the surface of the element, without giving imagination time to work with the actual inner matter”.

<sup>134</sup> “the passage from a poetics of waters to a metapoetics of water, the passage from a plural to a singular”.

Murray now flows, but there was only a small amount of water, just trickling and winding its way to the Southern Ocean.”  
(Unaipon<sup>135</sup> 17)

Yet, this pictorial and auditory universal is not completely detached from the particular. While the metapoetics favours finding the universal in the particular, it also encourages—and even thrives on—the selective inclusion of located specifics within its midst. Lyrics burst with mentions of gum and wattle trees (O’Hagan); endemic birds such as kookaburras and black swans are also easily integrated amidst the words to be sung (Hart; Hale).

“Presently another earth tremor, more severe than the first one, when suddenly there burst forth from the depth of the earth a huge fish, a Pondi, and as it came out of the earth it was followed by a great flow of water, the cod struggling along this narrow stream, acting like those great steam shovels, digging with its head, making the river deep and swinging its powerful tail, causing all bends in the river until it reached what is known as Lake Alexandrina. Then Nebalee, the great prophet, caught it and cut it in pieces and threw the small fragments into the river and named them Tcherie, Thookerri, Pummerrie, Pil lul kie, Ploongie, which are the fishes caught in the Murray and its tributaries.”  
(Unaipon 17-18).

Composed by Fritz Hart in 1927 (based on posthumously published words by William Sharp), the piece for voice and piano entitled “Black Swans on the Murray Lagoons” contains the following lyrics:

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<sup>135</sup> David Unaipon’s transcriptions of Ngarrindjeri mythological stories contain Christian undertones (Hosking 94-5) Yet, I include some of his transcriptions because I am interested in the concept of repetition, both as a teaching technique and a protective mechanism actively used by the Ngarrindjeri people (Roulière). Repetition does not mean stating the same thing several times. Rather, it allows variations to shine through, and layers of meanings and perspectives to burgeon. Such practices of repetition highlight that Country is “a symbolic text through which differing relationships that people have with the landscape are articulated” (Clarke, “Myth as History” 153). As such, it is fascinating to see how Unaipon fuses several mythologies together, and how these can co-exist and even accommodate each other (Hosking 96). Additionally, I integrate some of Unaipon’s transcriptions because “his story is woven with those of others” (Unaipon xii). Despite the authorship attributed by the editors, the stories he narrates remain stories of the Ngarrindjeri community. As I transcribe different versions of the same story, I also create a repetitive pattern (a repetition) coherent with Aboriginal methods of transmission.

The long lagoons lie white and still  
Beneath the great round Austral moon:  
The sudden dawn will waken soon  
With many a delicious thrill:  
Beneath this death and life the cries  
Of black swans ring through silent skies—  
And the long wash of the slow stream  
Moves as in sleep some bodeful dream.

Inclusions of endemic species are tailored so that they *fit within* the pictorial and auditory universal: despite potentially disconcerting specificities at first glance, the particular becomes nonetheless understandable and relatable once inscribed within a European tradition of representation. This inscription draws a link between Murrundi/Murray River's waters and the "known" world. As the particular is firmly secured within the universal, it does not, and can no longer, exist outside of this universal frame. It becomes attached to it; it belongs to it: it *itself*, in all its specificities and idiosyncrasies, becomes an expression and manifestation of this all-encompassing universal.

This technique of universalisation also applies to the treatment of Aboriginal peoples. Stoneham and de Garis' piece goes:

The stars are gleaming, and there's a charm,  
That sets me dreaming, when all is calm,  
The sighing gum trees breath mystery,  
The roving black men, I seem to see  
.....  
And thro' the shadows—  
There's a dusky tribe advancing,  
Wild crys and dancing how fierce they seem,  
By the fire a wild corroboree.

The "roving black men" and the "dusky tribe" belong to the described nature. Among the shadowy gum trees, they form an integral part of the Australian "wilderness". The symbiotic character of their relationship with nature means that the dichotomy between nature and culture does not apply to them: their touch does not corrupt the waters. They are perceived as harmoniously assimilable—and assimilated—to the environment. They are sung into being as pre-modern

Rousseauian “noble savages”, that is, remote, peacefully “uncivilised” and sanitised. Threatening connotations are expunged and replaced with the theatrics produced by fire and shadows to generate a safe and distant stereotype. These “dusky” characters do not deter settlement. They are located at the periphery of the lyrics: present, but never at the centre of the action; more of an ornament to grant depth and character to the depicted sceneries as they blend into an “unthreatening scenic backdrop for the adventures of European tourists” (Eaden and Mares 23; see also Angas 278; Leigh 141-3). As Carter summarises, Aboriginal people “have been moved about the stage of white history with the ease of stage props—in order to create an effect, to authenticate a particular vision” (*The Road* 343-4).

In songs, these Aboriginal figures occupy and take over the role traditionally attributed to “the poor” in the British pictorial tradition. The image of “the rural poor” in particular has been used as a device to construct “natural” scenes and increase the aesthetic appeal of the depicted landscape.<sup>136</sup> Sparingly incorporating Indigenous people and endemic animals serves the same purpose: these components are added to make the composition more interesting and to build a sense of the picturesque, that is, “that which stimulates the imagination to reverie or admiration” (Findlay 21). The accent placed on picturesqueness leads to the incorporation of abrupt variations and iconographic inconsistencies: in Benson’s piece, the gum and wattle trees are described as “naked” in winter, whereas both species are not deciduous; the hills are also presented as being “so green” in December, which corresponds to the middle of summer when landscapes are generally characterised by yellow, burnt grass. Not only are the artists expected to modify the landscape they are describing so that it matches a set of picturesque criteria, but this creative licence does not influence how their works are presented and perceived: as truthful representations of the Austral landscapes.<sup>137</sup> Artist and author William Gilpin writes: “We must ever recollect that nature is most defective in composition; and

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<sup>136</sup> These figures have a formal compositional function, but such representations are also significant from a political perspective. Such minuscule and impersonal representations open Aboriginal figures to the same exploitation as “the poor” (Dutton; see also Eaden and Mares 33). Their distance—their smallness—confirms the audience’s sense of superiority: such remote figures are “in need of guidance and governing” (Findlay 31).

<sup>137</sup> The fact that most of the pieces under scrutiny were composed remotely probably also increased the artists’ creative licence. This displaced composition process was combined with a displaced audience, who were happy that their stereotypes went unchallenged.

must be a little assisted” (67; see also Carroll and Tregenza 3-4). This quest for picturesqueness means that the actual hardships and disorientation linked to colonial settlement are obliterated. The unfamiliar is squashed out of the picture and replaced by a familiar form of exoticism: the “native”, the palm or gum tree in the foreground of the cover of Hay’s and Stoneham and de Garis’ pieces, for example. The imposition of “comforting pictorial universals” renders “the wilderness benign” (Eades and Mares 65) and non-threatening: settlement is, once again, encouraged, as life in the colony—its social and economic reality—is idealised. Settlement along Murrundi/Murray River is a positive, hopeful process: an opportunity for a better life. It is sung as stepping into a life of romantic easiness and aesthetically pleasing natural abundance. Such imagery of unspoiled and pristine Arcadia appears particularly attractive and powerful in light of the moral and aesthetical prejudice regularly sullyng urbanity (Findlay 30; Williams). The lyrics of “Murray Melody” (composed in 1984 by Frank Hinz) unfold:

I am going away from the noise of the city,  
The big traffic jams and smog-shrouded streets.  
I am going far north to the banks of the Murray,  
To sunshine, and air filled with parakeets.

Where once a drover built his roughly-made shack  
To shelter his wife and the growing-up kids,  
And then he went droving the mobs to the railhead,  
Which earned him his tucker and just a few quids.

Where old paddle-wheelers plied their winding course,  
And wood-cutters axed trees for the oxen to haul.  
Where the bullocky’s curse echoed shrill in the forest,  
And ped[d]lers pushed carts with their wares on display.

Where townships expanded and bloomed by the River—  
Romantic Echuca, Mildura, Swan Hill ...  
Where the memories of pioneer settlements linger,  
And men with endurance and will showed their skill.

I am going far north to the banks of the Murray,  
Away from the hustle and bustle, and hurry.  
Where I shall be happy, and find time to dream,  
Relaxing in sunshine by the mighty, old stream.

Lyrics and covers of scores only offer an inviting hint or glimpse at civilisation—the smoking chimney, the pretty cottage, the well-dressed young lady. By presenting both the place and the experience as idyllic, and by singing the praise of the new colony, the lyrics act as propaganda. They project their audience into an enticing world, away from war-torn and poverty-stricken Europe. Composed by Reg Hudson in the 1940s, “I Long to Be at Victor” is a piece for voice and piano which acts in a similar way. The lyrics of its chorus unfold:

I long to be at Victor in the summertime;  
For I belong to Victor Harbor’s sunny clime;  
The breezy southern ocean is beckoning to me,  
It’s given me the notion:  
‘Here’s the place where I should be.’  
I wish that I were surfing down at Victor now.  
I long to bask in sunshine all the while  
I’ll put aside my care and woe,  
Goodbye trouble,  
Here I go  
Down to Victor in the summer time.

Away from trouble, the watery environments along the river are portrayed as welcoming prospective settlers—all the more so since the audience of the pieces under scrutiny was primarily European and urban. The pieces were indeed performed in both Australia and Europe, as part of a touring tradition that connected English theatres and salons to Murrundi/Murray River’s banks; and that transported these banks to European settings—effectively making them “known”, or “discovered”.

This picturesque easiness does not solely apply to the visual imagination carried by the words of the lyrics, but also to the auditory imagination conveyed through both the words and the melody accompanying these words. These lyrics speak of waters that are quietly whispering, of birds that are joyfully chirping away: of sonically pleasing effects for a European ear. Sometimes, entire tunes from traditional songs are also transcribed to ease the (re)constitution of Austral waters according to European standards: old melodies are fitted with new lyrics. Composed by Peter Hale in 2005, “Kookaburras Sing” is an Australian version of “The 12 Days of

Christmas”; composed by Glen Parsons in 2002, “Drunken River Men” uses the tune from “What Do You Do with a Drunken Sailor”. These bend Murrundi/Murray River’s waters into their rhythmic folds. Alongside waltzes and foxtrots, they make Austral waters compliant: new rhythms lead to new behaviours. Whispering waters become a means to trigger specific and predetermined sequences of events, socially acceptable scenarios unfolding in a specific order. For instance, a romance goes from courting to marrying and happiness; there are no other alternatives, and the thoughts of the protagonists always follow the same line of progression. Besides expectations of standardised romance, waters are also the source of expectations of a safe return home while away under duress (especially at war): they foster the evolution of the protagonists according to European standards (Hay; Benson).

Hidden away behind European pictorial and rhythmical folds, Austral waters cease to exist; they cease to sing. They are given a new orientation and purpose: they are overwritten. The use of easy imagery reflects a mythological transposition: a European model of picturesqueness—a celebrated formula—is copied and pasted onto the waters of Murrundi/Murray River in an attempt to (re)constitute and (re)shape them so that these Austral waters become inviting, welcoming for the European settler. The fact that most of the music is written in major keys reinforces this welcoming invitation to step near Austral waters.<sup>138</sup> Composed by Jack O’Hagan in 1923, the lyrics of “Down by the Murray” unfold:

I feel so happy, I’m just jumping with glee  
The world is smiling, and it’s smiling on me  
For very soon once more I know I will be  
Back in the place of my **Birth**  
Although it’s many years since I went away  
I’m going back there **today**

Down by the Murray  
that’s where I soon will be  
Down by the Murray  
just try to picture me,  
with the folks I love so well  
How I’ve missed them words can’t tell

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<sup>138</sup> The primary tonalities for the following pieces are major keys: Stoneham and de Garis (G); King (Bb); O’Dea (G); King and Fewster (F); Benson (F); Hay (F); Bellchambers (G); and so on.



I'll see my Mother,  
and my Dad, & Sis and little Brother,  
then there's the homestead,  
where I milked the cows, and fed the chickens  
I'll see the school-house,  
where I used to play the very dickens, and soon I'll be there,  
where a welcome's always waiting, by that **Murray Shore**.

I yearn to hear a Bush Bird singing his song  
In gum trees down beside a Big Billabong  
I want to be where skies are blue all day long  
Down by that old Murray **Shore**  
I'll see my childhood pals of school days once more  
mid'st all the old scenes of **yore**.

This metapoetics both finds the universal in the particular, and transforms this particular so that it becomes picturesque, that is, not threatening, and even inviting, to the colonial power. This imposed transposition of both pictorial and rhythmical European frames is how the imaginary colonial (trans)formation of the waters is primarily accomplished and set in motion in music. Such a metapoetics of water makes the waters (and their surrounding environments) readable for the settler-singer by positioning them as belonging to an understandable mythological frame. The landscape “assumes the character of a pre-existing thing, a recognisable if unknown landscape on which the agents of European colonisation enact the process of cultural construction” (Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder* 31; see also Fornasiero and West-Sooby). Further than this, this metapoetics dissociates the actual entities—waters—from their imaginary conception, representation and breadth. As such, it effectively transforms Murrundi/Murray River's waters into a formless, transparent, spatio-temporally detached and dislocated mass of interchangeable particles ready for undifferentiated usage. Waters become an imaginary concept, rather than a located entity; an ephemeral projection that is the same everywhere in the world.



## Taking Charge: The Useful River

Such containment is not anodyne. The picturesque acts as a barrier to external mythological and poetic forces. Bachelard writes: “Le pittoresque éparpille la force des songes. Un fantôme pour être actif n’a pas le droit aux bigarrures. Un fantôme qu’on décrit avec complaisance est un fantôme qui cesse d’agir”<sup>140</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 25). Applying the shiny, running colours of European waters onto Murrundi/Murray River’s waters neutralises and tames them. This “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, “Subaltern Studies” 202) renders them controllable by the colonial power. Essence-water is docile. Its identity defined as absolute and delocalised, it is effectively subordinated—a common treatment of the “Other”, whether human or more-than-human, by western powers (Said; Gallagher).

The presence of this metapoetics of water also unites the easy imagery used, despite its superficiality, within a larger narrative framework. This gives it a certain form of depth and, more importantly, credence as it hides this superficiality. Legitimacy does not come from detailed, localised observations and interactions but from a global regrouping which is used to validate general characteristics while discarding unsuitable local particularities or discrepancies from the global norm. In the process of articulating a coherent and cohesive vision of what Murrundi/Murray River’s waters are, the colonial imaginary thus imposes a severe imaginary *cordon sanitaire* around both their aspects and properties. “Other” occurrences—that is, waters which do not fit within, or conform to, the imagery attached to essence-water—are actively constructed as shadowy *badwaters*.<sup>141</sup> Manifestations of these badwaters are relegated to, and confined within, narratives of moral as much as physical depravation—a kind of depravation which is often associated with “primitiveness” and promiscuity. They are presented as “miasmatic” spaces which lead astray. Such badwaters are also condemned from an aesthetic and materialistic perspective.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> “The picturesque scatters the strength of visions. A ghost cannot afford shiny colours to be active. A ghost described with complacency is a ghost which stops acting effectively.”

<sup>141</sup> Here, I divert Gibson’s concept of “badland” (*Seven Versions*), and Plumwood’s concept of “shadow place”. I attach the same connotations to the term I coined, that is, badlands are imaginarily constructed as useless, dangerous, liminal; while shadow spaces are purposefully left out of consideration so that they can be physically exploited. These two often coincide as exploiting a space which is already constructed as “bad” raises fewer objections.

<sup>142</sup> Cf. Arthur’s study of vocabulary (*The Default Country* and “The Eighth Day of Creation”).

Encounters with these badwaters only have one kind of resolution if one is to resist and not succumb to their corrupting and debauching call: they must be turned “good”, that is, annihilated and/or (imaginarily) transformed (Potter, “Reimagining Place” 250).

The colonial metapoetics of essence-water thus results in the imaginary erasure of other poetics. In the case of settler countries such as Australia, this erasure of poetics corresponds to the erasure of (Indigenous) knowledges. Selective inclusions and exclusions occur as waters are contained through a discourse of iconicity which is only seemingly arbitrary. Everything is measured, calibrated (see for instance Brown et al.; Revell). Specific sites/species are favoured by government rankings which reflect how the colonial mind judges value. Sites and species deemed iconic<sup>143</sup> are prioritised in managerial care and used as a diversion to hide the extent of the damage befalling other (non-iconic) sites and species. These rankings bear witness to an aesthetic and philosophical containment of the river. According to the colonial imaginary, there is—and can only be—one river. As such, the universal pictorial developed around Murrundi/Murray River’s waters reflects and builds a very specific form of universality. This universality is more accurately described as a form of western-centricity, in that this universal is always congruent with a western, and more particularly colonial, imaginary.<sup>144</sup> The western-centricity of the imagery means that the river’s waters seem to be only there to favour, support, softly garner and carry settlers’ wandering reveries. They do not exist outside of these, beside these. As journalist and author Max Fatchen writes: “[i]t was a man’s river, a boy’s river, a settler’s river, a river that could break your heart, a river that could soothe, a sly river and a wilful river” (29-30). Referring to the aforementioned singularising watery imagery, Bachelard elaborates:

Pour une telle métapoétique, l’eau n’est plus seulement un *groupe* d’images connues dans une contemplation vagabonde, dans une suite de rêveries brisées, instantanées ; elle est un *support* d’images et bientôt un *apport* d’images, un principe qui fonde les images. L’eau devient ainsi peu à peu, dans une contemplation qui

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<sup>143</sup> Yet, it has been argued that “all sites in Australia are ‘sites of significance’ because they are, or were, Aboriginal sites” (Berndt 17).

<sup>144</sup> Glissant has discussed the universalising tendency of the West at length (*La Poétique de la Relation; Le Discours Antillais*).

s'approfondit, un élément de l'imagination matérialisante.<sup>145</sup> (*L'Eau et les Rêves* 15-16, original emphasis)

Besides conglomerating into a precise set of globally congruent images, this essence-water starts to both frame and generate other, and new, imageries; and, as a result, these subsequent imageries are strongly marked by this water's "indelible sign" (16). The watery metaphors, comparisons and metonymies contained in the pieces under scrutiny carry a great power in terms of (re)reading Country, of (re)shaping Country at large. Applied to Lower Murray Country's waters, these semantic constructions "are powerful theoretical tools: they have the power to change our perception and thus to create a new reality" (Kershaw and Saldanha 135; see also Lakoff and Johnson 145). Through the power of essence-water metaphors, adjacent environments are also imbued with western values and codes, that is, given a new orientation and purpose. Essence-water turns into a channelling creative force. However, this force does not freely impact its surroundings. As the music under scrutiny (trans)forms these waters into essence-water, they also imbue it with mirror-like qualities. As any mirror, essence-water remains deprived of any agency and the images that it returns, bathed in faltering sources of light, are predetermined and conditioned by the colonial imaginary. This essence-water thus becomes a malleable tool in the mind of the settler. It offers him a flat and passive surface; a surface which is oriented to reflect the desires and impulses of the white male only; a surface shaped in such ways that only the white male can relate to it, and his gaze decipher it. The settler uses such a mirror to project himself and his expectations not simply onto watery sceneries, but onto the landscapes of Country at large. Besides being an easy support for poetics and poetic reverie (a reflecting mirror whose surface fuels the dreams of the settler-singer), essence-water is thus a crucial instrument for comprehensive imaginary colonisation. It gives the colonial power an imaginary spring from which it can legitimately scheme further manipulations—that is, ongoing colonisation—to construct a more comprehensive alternative reality of Country.

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<sup>145</sup> "For such a metapoetics, water is not only a *group* of images known through a wandering contemplation, in a parade of broken, instantaneous reveries; it is a *frame* for images and soon a *source* of images, a principle which generates images. Water thus gradually becomes, in a contemplation which deepens, an element of the materialising imagination."

This is possible because of the physicality of essence-water in the colonial imaginary. Despite its confinement within superficial imaginary realms, it never loses some kind of real physical presence in the material world. Its dislocated particles contain an elemental consistency; and, above being seen, they can be *touched*. This physicality is essential: it is what gives essence-water its materialising properties; its ability to imaginarily shape things. Water is the primary element which had to be (re)imagined by the colonial power precisely because of this ability to act as a binder, a mould. Bachelard adamantly asserts this:

On n'insistera donc jamais trop, pour comprendre la psychologie de l'inconscient créateur, sur les expériences de la fluidité, de la malléabilité. Dans l'expérience des pâtes, l'eau apparaîtra nettement comme la matière dominatrice. C'est à elle qu'on rêvera quand on bénéficiera par elle de la docilité de l'argile.<sup>146</sup> (*L'Eau et les Rêves* 19)

Water composes with other elements to decompose them. And when mixing with the earth, it creates (play)dough: a malleable substance which is at the root of materiality, which embodies the first human experience with matter (142). This initial encounter is crucial to be able to grasp and understand matter, and thus be later able to imprint it with an imaginary shape. As Bachelard summarises: “[l]’eau, en groupant les images, en dissolvant les substances, aide l’imagination dans sa tâche de désobjectivation, dans sa tâche d’assimilation”<sup>147</sup> (17). In the colonial imaginary, the environment at large is subsequently open for imaginary (trans)formation through the use of essence-water. As essence-water interacts with its surroundings, it moulds them, and in the process it projects these surroundings into the imaginary realm (of colonial desires) which already gave birth to essence-water itself. These materialising properties are thus used to spread the colonial ascendancy over Country. As echoes of foxtrots and waltzes reverberate upon the waters, the entire landscapes of Murrundi/Murray River are appropriated. In their lyrics, the songs under scrutiny contribute to propagating the exploratory-surveying

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<sup>146</sup> “Therefore, one can never insist enough, to understand the psychology of the creative subconscious, on the experiences of fluidity, of malleability. In the experience of doughs, water will clearly reveal itself as the dominating matter. We will be dreaming about water when we benefit, through it, from the docility of clay.”

<sup>147</sup> “As it groups images and dissolves substances, water helps the imagination in its task of de-objectification, in its task of assimilation.”

mindset of the colonists: they claim grounds. And to claim this ground, they erase and clear the stage of Aboriginal presence. The possibility of an Aboriginal river becomes a bygone. Stoneham and de Garis' piece unfolds:

And through the moonlight they [the roving black men] fade away,  
But leave a mem'ry of yesterday;  
I see my homestead by the big lagoon,  
'Twas but the magic of the Murray Moon.

Passive Aboriginal protagonists “fade away” as the dream of the past dies. Excluded from present and future landscapes, they represent the generic and disappearing remnant of a primitive past; and have no place outside of this past. And even then, the past in which they are confined solely bursts out through the settler's dream; it remains controlled by the settlers: a distant and non-threatening era of “noble savages”. As such, “The Murray Moon” develops a chronology of erasure around Aboriginal presence. Far from being real, this presence is a “mem'ry of yesterday”, fixed before modernity, and which now belongs to the realm of dreams and visions. Meanwhile, this piece secures the settlers' presence within an a-temporal frame: while the ephemeral “roving black men” irrationally come and go depending on darkness/moonlight and magic, the settler homestead is steadily established on the banks of a big lagoon. It is concrete, anchored, its presence unconditional and eternal because of this granted concreteness. Timber or stones cannot turn into malleable dough, and water—although it might be able to destroy them in extreme circumstances—remains unable to mix with such materials. They endure. Such putative characteristics means that they appear immutable, removed from the realm of temporality and change. As the settler acquires these materials to build his home, he inscribes himself in the landscape, *permanently* and *decisively*. Not only is he not about to disappear from this landscape, but he also becomes its most visible occupant: the one who leaves his mark, the *deepest* mark, the only *real* mark, upon it. He replaces the “native” as the person who fills and controls the space: he becomes the sole occupant of the present, physical landscape. The musical styles reinforce this conferral of power: waltzes and foxtrots are dances that are performed in a closed position. As the two dancers move across the dance floor, they delineate the contours of an enclosed space, a space which materialises the self-sufficient and

complete nature of their relationship. There is no room for anybody (or anything) else in these dances but the leading settler and his (distant) lover, in turn a woman (flowing, 1 2 3, on the Cartesian plane), in turn Murrundi/Murray River (flowing, 1 2 3, on the Cartesian plane), with each bar of pirouettes, as both are equally serenaded. The “native” is altogether removed from this equation of place performed on the dance floor. Thus deterritorialised, they are deprived of “their spatial command” of Country (Carter, *The Road* 335-6). As they blend with water, they dissolve; and as they dissolve, they are replaced: the settler naturally comes to occupy the centre-stage which is left vacant. This disjunctive anchorage in pre-modernity/modernity is achieved through the deployment of the great western historical narrative, that is, a cultural construction which allows dichotomies between past and present, between oral and written, and which supposedly draws order from chaos.<sup>148</sup>

As the lyrics locate the “native” within visions and articulate their disappearance through the progressive and soft semantic lexicon of dreams and sleep (that is, they fade away, are dimmed, through magical and astral actions), they also obliterate the actual violence of this replacement. Very conveniently, picturesqueness serves to negate destruction: it acts “to obscure” the damage happening because of colonisation (Findlay 30).<sup>149</sup> A myth of peaceful ceding and settlement is created (Yunupingu). The “dusky tribe” seems to leave on its own, almost on its individual impulse, as such is its symbiotic relationship with its dark watery surroundings. Stoneham and de Garis’ piece continues:

And thro’ the shadows—  
There’s a dusky tribe advancing,  
Wild crys and dancing how fierce they seem,  
By the fire a wild corroboree,

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<sup>148</sup> This schema of erasure indeed belongs to a widespread narrative pattern/method according to which the erasure of Aboriginal people from Australian landscapes is primarily implemented through fixing their subjectivities, bodies and cultural expressions beyond and before modernity (D. B. Rose, *Reports*). Indigenous people are strictly relegated in a pre-modern past. This pre-modern theorisation of subjectivity has been denounced by numerous postcolonial scholars within a wider global context (Bhabha; Said). As Indigenous peoples are anchored in pre-modernity, it allows for the subsequent articulation of settlers as the only legitimate occupants in the present. These are powerful myths of cultural extinction (see for instance Woods; Jenkin; Cleland 24-5; Newland 2).

<sup>149</sup> This contented pastoral innocence is in accordance with a Eurocentric, Judeo-Christian tradition of wilderness, and “the ability of settlers to picture ‘nature’ as an aesthetic object is necessarily premised on the destruction of Indigenous worldhood, people and place” (Kiem 117).



Brings the mystic past, right back to me;  
There comes a cloud o'er the moon,  
It dims the vision too soon—  
My dream is o'er, and I now can see.

In a supposedly inevitable and logical progression, the civilising candlelit ballroom (where the singer-settler returns at the end of this dream) supplants the outdoor fire and its accompanying “wild” corroboree, which are only visions. Such visions are designed to guarantee impermanence; they represent the auditory translation of the political discourse of “doom” which justifies paternalistic governance. The smoothness of the transition confirms and satisfies two criteria: it becomes “natural” for the “doomed native” to be replaced by the settler—it is “cultural evolutionism” (Byrne 73); and this replacement happens through a process of conferral and approval: settlers are not pictured “as invaders but as inheritors of the true spirit of the land” (Byrne 77).<sup>150</sup> As naturalist and painter George French Angas summarised when discussing his rendition of Aboriginal characters: “My aim has been to describe faithfully impressions of savage life and scenes in countries only now emerging from a primitive state of barbarism; but which the energy and enterprise of British colonists, and the benign influence of Christianity combined, will eventually render the peaceful abodes of civilised and prosperous communities” (vii-viii). Home—that is, the custody of the reality of Murrundi/Murray River’s waters—is transmitted through the vision. The settler is naturalised, and a myth of foundation is created. And claiming discovery plays a large part in refuting Indigenous custodianship.

Mitta Mitta River  
Kiewa River Tooma

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<sup>150</sup> This specific dyad has a twofold impact on the conception and expression of cultural legitimacy: it allowed settlers and now allows current white landowners to be perceived as the true “natives” of the Australian landscape, thus legitimately and exclusively placing them (and their science-based cultural system) in charge of its management and custody; and it excludes contemporary expression of evolving Aboriginal cultures, especially in regard to their relationships with the land. Under the banner of this dichotomy, Indigenous cultures are indeed expected to be solely “traditional” and thus frozen in the past and can only be recognised as legitimate if conforming to this idealised pre-modern model. They are otherwise placed under the threat of being perceived as non-Aboriginal and inauthentic. This pernicious double impact, which not only erases Aboriginal traces from the landscape but also prevents Aboriginal people from writing new ones, has been denounced by many scholars, especially anthropologists and ethnologists working with Indigenous people (D. B. Rose; Somerville; Muecke; Bell).

River Ovens River  
Goulburn River  
Campaspe River  
Gwydir River  
Macintyre River  
Moonie River Balonne  
River Loddon River  
Edward River Wakool  
River Warrego River  
Bogan River  
Macquarie River  
Darling River Barwon  
River Murrumbidgee  
River.

These are some of the  
23 major tributaries of  
Murrundi/Murray  
River.

Murrundi/Murray River's waters play a crucial role in the implementation of this foundational myth within Australian settings: they provide settlers with self-reflective temporal connections which enable them to justify and anchor this supposedly smooth and linear transition. Essence-water enables the settler to reach into the "mystic past" in order to be able to find (that is, construct) roots. The admission of age granted to an "old river", instead of triggering an admission of long Aboriginal custodianship, is used to anchor the settler's personal history and "bring back mem'ries": childhood stories alternate with family ties (King; Bellchambers). As such, the structure of this myth of foundation fulfils the settlers' longing for a "désiré historique"<sup>151</sup>: an obsession with "une trace primordiale"<sup>152</sup> towards which everything tends through exploratory "élucidations qui ont la particularité (comme jadis le Mythe) d'obscurcir en révélant"<sup>153</sup> (Glissant, *Le Discours Antillais* 147; see also 133, 256). This desire for historicity blurs—and

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<sup>151</sup> "desire for historicity".

<sup>152</sup> "a primordial trace".

<sup>153</sup> "elucidations which have the particularity (like in olden days, the Myth) to obscure while revealing".

almost conceals—the lines between history and lyrics (or more generally, between literary texts with their fictional elements), as each song constantly proposes—and effectively undertakes—a retelling (rewriting) of history. Murrundi/Murray River acts as a gateway to and away from dreams, a trigger of memories and visions which legitimises the narration of a specific historical tale. As such, essence-water is used as a marker of temporal disjunction, the liquid manifestation of a “Year Zero”<sup>154</sup> before which, free from imperial gaze, Murrundi/Murray River’s waters were unused, that is, useless. The waters (and their imaginary use which progressively includes their surroundings) offer a chronology of colonisation according to which the arrival of the settler marks the beginning of History, an imposed imaginary zone where all and everything remains to be created; a zone which is open for both imaginary and physical grab. As Bachelard writes: “Or l’eau est rêvée tout à tour dans son rôle émouillant et dans son rôle agglomérant. Elle délie et elle lie”<sup>155</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 142). Essence-water is used to remove pre-dating Indigenous custodianship and shape a new, colonial ownership characterised by a different syntax, a different rhythm implemented by essence-water and governed by notions of logical progression. This replacement is rhythmical: kneading and beating the dough into shape is a tactile experience (145). Incorporating essence-water into Country, and making this essence-water take and the dough cohere, is a type of work that requires the involvement of the entire body. The lyrics of Glen Parsons’ “Riverboats and Rivermen” (2002) describe this:

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<sup>154</sup> Developed by D. B. Rose, the notion of “Year Zero” captures the implications behind the narrative construction of Australia as unfulfilled—as lacking a future—before the European colonisation that it was awaiting (*Reports* 59-71; see also Gibson, *South of the West* ix). This palindromic narrative structure is built around a disjunctive and transformative event which allows for the transfiguration of a “proto or pre-configuration” into a “realised or fulfilled configuration” (60). Such a division between an unrealised and realised Australia shapes Country into a “predestined place which could not be complete until the colonists arrived” (Arthur, “The Eighth Day of Creation” 65). Settlers’ vocabulary reveals the absence of future attached to pre-colonial imaginary constructions of Country and “the energetic and future-oriented images of the colonised landscape” (“The Eighth Day of Creation” 66). Such a narrative supports the expression of a predestined historical thread centred on the articulation of an essentialist “myth of origin” (Lim). In the Australian context specifically, this myth of origin has also been defined as an exodus myth (Curthoys). This exodus myth responds to the fulfilment of the destiny of the Australian continent while simultaneously enabling settlers to highlight their own suffering and position themselves as victims, effectively relegating Aboriginal suffering to the background (D. B. Rose, *Reports*; Rutherford, “The Irish Conceit”). The narrative of Year Zero has been associated with warfare because of the totalising and silencing nature of such a project (D. B. Rose, *Reports* 61).

<sup>155</sup> “Yet water is dreamt alternatively in its role of emollient and its role of adhesive. It ties and it unties.”

Cut the trees  
Load the logs  
Load the booze  
Load the grog

Ah riverboats and rivermen  
Heading upstream and around the bend  
It's their way of life

Down on the heat  
Unloading logs  
Stocking the boilers  
It's part of the job

Up and down the river, bodies work towards settlement: manual labour characterises the type of work that is required. Another song by Parsons (“100 Years of Change”) describes how settlers “built their farms from the ground, built their shops too” and “built their house from logs of pine”; it insists that they “cleared the land to make way for the crops” with only “the old horse and plough”. Settling involves the body: it requires the settling body to shape the body of Country. The working of the dough “est rythmé, durement rythmé, dans un rythme qui prend le corps entier. Il est donc vital. Il a le caractère dominant de la durée : le rythme”<sup>156</sup> (Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* 146). This rhythmic engagement of the settler with the essence-water, and the creation of dough, disturbs previous rhythms. Further than this, this use of essence-water represents the manifestation of a break, a rupture: a dynamic replacement which explains and justifies temporal disjunction. Kneading indeed requires a kind of labour (an imaginary strength) which only accommodates and results in “un devenir par le dedans”<sup>157</sup>; and only through rhythm (duration) can this “becoming-from-inside” then lead to “un devenir substantiel”<sup>158</sup> (146-7).

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<sup>156</sup> “is rhythmic, strongly rhythmic, in a rhythm that consumes the entire body. It is thus vital. It has the dominant character of duration: rhythm”.

<sup>157</sup> “a becoming-from-inside”.

<sup>158</sup> “a becoming-substantial”.



Photograph 5. Tyre Tracks in the Sand

Settlers' engagement with essence-water leaves a mark: it imposes a signature on the dough. Each "kneader" has a specific pattern of holes and fillings. Auditory signatures crafted by the settler are particularly interesting. These acoustic markings fill the space three-dimensionally; they are not simply kneaded with the ground, but also with the air. They propagate and impose the new rhythmic affiliation with efficiency, infiltrating everywhere to transform the metrical texture of Country in (sonic) depth. One of these acoustic signatures is the "coo-ee". Some of the lyrics of Hay's piece are:

Where the waving ferns are growing  
Where there's fragrant breezes blowing  
There the wispring stream says "Coo-ee" dear  
Yes says "Coo-ee" dear for you  
And in the morning  
When the waking day is dawning  
I can hear the songbirds calling  
It's calling  
**"Coo-ee" "Coo-ee" "Coo-ee" "Coo-ee" Sunshine**  
brings me sweet dreams in the daytime  
When the eventide is drawing nigh my dreams are golden hued

Down where the **Murray** River flows  
There's a welcome sound I know  
It's the "Coo-ee" call  
It's the "Coo-ee" call for me

"Coo-ee" is an in-between "sound-word": "a sound that signifies, a word whose meaning cannot be defined" (Carter, *The Sound in Between* 27). This sound-word was originally used by Aboriginal peoples and implied a difference, a distance, a gap to be closed. It was used dialogically and denoted a form of sociability as it "criss-crossed[ed] a space where people felt at home" (27). However, it became "a cry peculiarly prophetic of [Aboriginal] dispossession" as it was rapidly appropriated by settlers (29). Carter explains that "[t]he white history of 'coo-ee' forecloses on the voice and fetishizes the sound. It silences one and freezes the other" (38). The settler's use of "coo-ee" in music goes beyond mimicry, the staging of cultural difference or the attempt to communicate. It represents a wide-ranging sonic appropriation which renders the Indigenous voice both inaudible and irrelevant in the present. Further than sonic appropriation though, the colonial use of "coo-ee" translates as spatial appropriation. Voicing a sound indeed requires physical presence and movement. Sound is spatial by nature; it happens in space. More precisely, "coo-ee" happens across waters, and these waters then become instrumental in carrying this sound-word across the landscapes, from one settler to another. This colonial "coo-ee" attaches itself to anything that comes in contact with the waters (such as the birds). These water-adjacent entities, in turn, become carriers of this sound-word, still for the benefits of the settler. The entire Country ends up carrying the colonial "coo-ee". As such, the colonial use of this sound-word supplants its emplaced Indigenous use: "coo-ee" no longer signifies Aboriginal presence and custodianship but becomes a signifier of colonial presence and ownership. As it echoes across the waters, such a "coo-ee" proceeds to imaginarily metamorphose whatever it touches, giving it new meaning and significance as it marks it with a new ownership, that of the settler. Carter writes that "[w]ord-sounds ... are both over-determined and under-determined, allowing them to spread like wildfire through the colonial auditory imagination" (*Ground Truthing* 67-8). The use of "coo-ee" in songs both symbolises and secures the colonial overwriting

of Country; it is part of a narrative of replacement. Author Tony Birch details this process of recuperation in the similar context of naming:

Attaching names to landscapes legitimises the ownership of the culturally dominant group that “owns” the names. Indigenous names themselves do not constitute a threat to white Australia. Houses, streets, suburbs and whole cities have Indigenous names. This is an exercise in cultural appropriation, which represents imperial possession and the quaintness of the “native”. For colonisers to attach a “native” name to a place does not represent or recognise an Indigenous history, and therefore possible Indigenous ownership. (“‘Nothing Has Changed’: The Making and Unmaking” 150)

Naming gives meaning to the environment (Cresswell 97): it brings “history into being” (Carter, *The Road* 46) and teaches the landscape to speak (58-9; see also Rutherford, *The Gauche Intruder* 31-2). Preserved out of context under museum-like conditions and usages within “the rhetorical ambit of a white geo-historical discourse”, Aboriginal names/languages are stripped of their linguistic environment (Carter, *The Road* 328-9) and such segregation relegates them (again) to an earlier (that is, pre-modern) stage of development (Carter, *The Sound in Between* 34-5). While annihilating their mythical properties and connotations, the colonial use of Indigenous (sounding) words and names establishes the replacement of the Indigenous population by settlers (Kiem). As the colonial “coo-ee” is rolled over the landscapes and attaches itself to them, colonial dominance is both asserted and naturalised. From an acoustic perspective, the land is heard as a blank score in the colonial ear, similarly to how it is perceived as a blank canvas in the colonial eye. And while the surveyor is tasked with providing a god’s eye view of the new place, the composer is asked to implement a far-reaching score of mythological nature over the perceived *terra nullius*. The carrying acoustic properties of the sound-word “coo-ee” make it an ideal candidate for this. It can easily be deployed over Murrundi/Murray River’s waters from afar and cover large sections of water-adjacent Country. Auditory imagination empowers colonial (dis)possession. The colonial score of the “coo-ee”, like a map with Indigenous place names, conquers ground for the settler.

“The only tribe which stood aloof and took no part in using insulting words, and which strove to bring out a reconciliation, was the Lyre Bird, and no one would listen to his entreaties. This is why Animal, Bird, Reptile, and Insect tribes have adopted a language of their own, and that the Lyre Bird is able to imitate them all.”

(Unaipon 16)

As such, a sound-word which used to belong to a language *in situ* (signifying the position of its caller; and their relationships with their listeners-receptors) has become part of a language *in actu*, that is, a language which actively and aggressively pursues the translation of another acoustic world into its colonial fold.<sup>159</sup> This language *in actu* does not leave room for dialogue but imposes an overpowering monologue: it is a carefully staged warrior language. It is both masculine and narcissistic. The “coo-ee” reverberates and echoes across Murrundi/Murray River’s waters, but it only comes back to the settler; only he can hear it and through it enter into dialogue with the mirror provided by the “whispering stream”. When the settler interacts with the waters, he solely sees and hears himself: he speaks with himself. Benson’s piece goes:

One bright December morn,  
As the sun rose o’er the hills,  
To my home I was returning from the war-scarred battle fields  
Where far across the Ocean I sailed away to fight,  
For the Honour of Old England defender of the right.  
I saw the Murray flowing  
By the homestead on the “run”  
And my dear old Mother waiting there, to welcome home her son.  
I’m back in dear **Aussie**, the land of my birth,  
Back where the wool barges sail  
Where the laughing Jacks break the still morning with mirth  
Back where the Sundowners “wail”  
Where the Kangaroos dance to the waving corn,  
Where the Gum, and the Wattle tree grows  
Where I hear the **Coo-e-ee**’s at ev’ning call,  
I’m back where the dear Murray Flows.

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<sup>159</sup> Modern languages scholars Angela Kershaw and Gabriela Saldanha discuss these two types of languages at length, particularly in relation to translation.



I love to be back home,  
'Midst the Gums and Wattle trees,  
And to hear the gentle rustling of the Autumn's falling leaves.  
To sit beside the Murray, and watch her gently flow  
To her cradle in the Ocean,  
From the springs of Omeo.  
I see my Country homestead,  
In the hills so green and fair,  
Where my Mother waits for my return, so aged, and worn with care.

Essence-water reflects the glory and worthiness of the male character hearing the “coo-ee”. The river’s splendour, and the iconicity of its surrounding watery environments, symbolise the settler’s belonging. Imbuing the river with grandeur (King) also triggers and stimulates the possibility of worthwhile (and heroic) conquest. The Mighty Murray needs to be mastered, and articles are regularly written about this conquest (Cornthwaite). Interacting with the river means being at war with it. Being “the first” to overcome waters triggers a surge of pride; it gives a taste of power, of triumph—and a certain aversion or contempt for what has been overcome (Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* 248). Sheer survival is cause for celebration: it becomes a victory. Agricultural and recreational gear become weapons to face the Mighty Murray and defeat vindictive waters. The settler is transformed into a battler—an Aussie battler. As he contemplates, and progressively starts interacting with, the waters, this male character grows both spiritually and physically. From boy, he develops into a (war) hero who combines all the skill sets necessary to survive and belong along Murrundi/Murray River. This mythical stereotype of the Aussie battler is infinitely (re)stated: the farmer—resilient, enduring, tenacious, tough and resourceful—succeeds as the battler *en titre*; a worthy descendent of the “noble savage”, the bushman and the returning digger. His identity (like the identity of his predecessors) is shaped and defined by waters—or the lack thereof. It is moulded on that lack; while his aesthetic and auditory imaginary is overflowing with waters. This is because, in the colonial imaginary, waters and power go hand in hand: controlling waters is the primordial dream. This particular colonial illusion can be traced back to the dough-y properties of waters. The appeal of touch leads to increased contact: from platonic (imaginary), the relationships of the settler with waters become tonic (physical). He wants to mould waters in his image and, while the strength of this narcissistic impulse

corrupts the purity of the waters, it also satisfies a primal desire—where penetrating and shaping the dough becomes the translation/expression of a masculine impulse and joy (Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* 146, 153). The ability (duty) of the settler to conquer waters is indeed stimulated by the power that this conquest gives over both humans and more-than-humans. Conquering waters becomes a means to improve and help inferior “Others”, and this conquest is thus for the better: the settler rightfully hastens the spreading of his power over Murrundi/Murray River’s waters because he has greater capacities and a greater purpose—a supposedly superior “vision” for these waters. He can bring forward the bright and shiny future heralded in the songs: as waters are supposedly transformed into a site for advancement and a source of development/improvement, they will finally fulfil their destiny instead of remaining “unused” (Arthur, *The Default Country* and “The Eighth Day of Creation”; Eaden and Mares 229). Making the river useful becomes a way to “civilise” both nature and the “native”. D. B. Rose addresses these matters in her seminal book, *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation*, where she discusses the state of the decolonisation process in Australia. She dedicates her entire sixth chapter to exploring the reasons and mechanisms behind the exclusive legitimating of white presence, ownership and management of Australian landscapes, which is articulated around a perception of colonising activities as an expression of belonging to place. “Civilising”—that is, applying the colonial yoke onto the human and more-than-human “Other”—means belonging. There is a “possessive logic” to “patriarchal white sovereignty” (Birch, “‘The Invisible Fire’: Indigenous Sovereignty” 112).

This conquest does not solely rely on physical weaponry and transformation. It also relies on sound, as the colonial use of the “coo-ee” illustrates. Further than sound, it relies on vocabulary: conquest happens through a superiority of eloquence. The river, equated to a feminine body, is serenaded in songs, and the superior settler is bound to be successful in his enterprise to woo it. This gynomorphism has an impact on how the settler interacts with the river. Sonic abuse has physical consequences: the river figures as both the more-than-human maiden and the virginal messenger between the settler and his human maiden; and wooing it implies controlling and shaping both its flows and the message they carry. It implies dotting it with weirs, locks, dams, levee banks and pipelines, for its sounds must be disciplined.

Flows,  
floods,  
swamps,  
bends,  
spate seasons,  
broad ephemeral  
fringes,  
retreating and galloping  
waters,

no longer

exist;  
waters

are

sealed in-between levee  
banks,  
channelled,  
dammed,  
piped,  
drained,  
diverted,  
extracted,  
conquered,  
civilised.

The conquest of waters reflects the necessary submission of both the feminine and Indigenous “objects”. The colonial “coo-ee” does not bind people together, making them closer (part of a shared acoustic space), but asserts the superiority of the settler over any other entities. Its echoing creates an imaginative space that is not an inclusive collective space. This flattens Country, which becomes the signifier of a singular identity. The colonial “coo-ee” thus establishes a different kind of watery performance. Most Indigenous performances are expressions of connections: they are staged for the benefit of the other, whether human or more-than-human; they aim to favour communication and interaction (Stubington). As settlers appropriate the space, these connective dances are replaced by pantomimes: dances of conquest which are staged by the settler for his own benefit; dances which establish his domination and supposed superiority. Such a transition is a transition from poetics to theatrics; a transition from memory (lived manifestations) to History (the freezing of a certain aspect of this memory to implement and commemorate legitimacy; to bind people together—whether they want it or not—under one single unified banner). The use of this language *in actu* positions the settlers as actors in the landscapes, rather than embedded protagonists.<sup>160</sup> They are not so much interested in the communication potential attached to the sound “coo-ee” (the exchanges it could generate), but in its echoing performance along watery courses, which symbolises the spreading of their own voice and ego over Country. Their impeccable technique of projection across the theatre stage is for the benefit of an audience. Its aim is to convince this audience to accept the colonial ownership of the sound that is presented to them, simply because, carried by essence-water, it resonates louder across the stage than when it was part of its original language *in situ* (relegated to an earlier stage of language development), and “simply” played with Murrundi/Murray River’s waters instead of exploiting them. It is as such that the “coo-ee” signals the imaginary appropriation and transformation of Country. As the settler sings his “coo-ee”, he is naturalised. He becomes a true, deserving Aussie

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<sup>160</sup> It is interesting to note that positioning the settlers as actors rather than as embedded protagonists also reflects how “home” is presented in the music under scrutiny. Home is dislocated; it is an eternal stage: never reachable and/or reached, it acts as a projection to fulfil both commemorative (fond memory) and anticipative (dreamt return) impulses. Such detachment—(re)creating home while remaining alienated—also establishes a distance that preserves the purity of the waters (of the unacted). Additionally, commemoration and anticipation concurrently act to bind the nation together under the banner of a supposedly unified and unifying imaginary (Nora, *Les Lieux de Mémoire* and *Présent, Nation, Mémoire*).

and Country is rightfully his. The materialising properties of essence-water turn the “coo-ee” into a distinctive (and mythological) marker of Australianness.<sup>161</sup>

Murray Bridge’s water  
level in m.

0.584	0.668	0.457
0.64	0.614	0.398
0.662	0.65	0.398
0.637	0.583	0.439
0.649	0.55	0.405
0.711	0.545	0.246
0.686	0.612	0.267
0.582	0.619	0.345
0.619	0.619	0.348
0.677	0.617	0.336
0.714	0.637	0.336
0.739	0.624	0.323
0.725	0.622	0.299
0.699	0.583	0.315
	0.567	0.325
	0.587	0.272
0.751	0.588	0.206
0.654	0.553	0.268
0.69	0.47	0.263
0.752	0.557	0.286
0.764	0.56	0.288
0.769	0.53	0.283
0.814	0.505	0.296
0.829	0.52	0.268
0.81	0.578	0.2
0.771	0.539	0.236
0.755	0.528	0.238
0.768	0.564	0.238
0.746	0.404	0.242
0.781	0.485	0.261

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<sup>161</sup> Worthy of notice, the “coo-ee” has also been used as a call to war. Coming from overseas to arouse the settlers’ sense of duty, such a “coo-ee” dramatises the distance rather than marking the closeness (Carter, *The Sound in Between* 30).

0.79	0.026	0.261
0.801	0.011	0.239
0.863		0.175
0.785		0.202
0.82		0.226
0.833	0.064	0.208
0.845	0.05	0.175
0.845	0.019	0.167
0.869	0.009	0.174
0.885	0.04	0.16
0.785	0.066	0.17
	0.186	0.174
	0.272	0.159
0.601	0.131	0.142
0.742	0.042	0.144
0.782	0.152	0.155
0.786	0.218	0.259
0.786	0.148	0.147
0.809	0.068	0.132
0.776	0.211	0.196
0.732	0.262	0.074
0.741	0.19	0.029
0.721	0.17	0.092
0.698	0.157	0.099
0.702	0.212	0.104
0.716	0.285	
0.698	0.327	
0.712	0.357	
0.717	0.262	0.068
0.737	0.246	0.052
0.735	0.248	0.047
0.7	0.247	0.047
0.741	0.266	0.046
0.713	0.302	0.048
0.664	0.29	0.041
0.688	0.282	0.04
0.709		0.055
0.682		0.053
0.706		0.048

0.697            0.034  
0.71             0.019  
0.729

These are randomised:  
time is

irrelevant  
absent.

Where there is appropriation, there is also an emerging need to manage what has been appropriated. Throughout the history of humankind, imaginary entities have been constructed to act as regents of natural bodies and govern their use (Harari). The subsequent logical step for the colonial power becomes the creation of these imaginary entities whose aim is to manage Murrundi/Murray River's waters in an optimum fashion. And indeed, homogenising and optimising the use of the Murrundi/Murray River's waters is described as one of the primary reasons behind the federation of the colonies in 1901 (Sim and Muller). Managing the river, as well as establishing a coherent toll system for the boating trade happening on its waters, stands at the heart of the agreement. The performance of appropriative naturalisation functions because it is also supported by these larger and governing entities.

Yet, imaginary managing entities implemented as a result of this colonial imaginary are deficient, and their failure threatens the iconography which has come to symbolise national belonging.<sup>162</sup> The lush and nourishing food basket is struggling. In a bid to improve the situation, a new managing entity was created in 2012: the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA), now placed in charge of the management of the entire region's waters. The MDBA further removes water iconography/imaginary and management from locality, and thus reality, disconnecting environments, and peoples from within these environments. Entities

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<sup>162</sup> In addition to encouraging conquest and domination, the river's splendour has been a source of personal and national pride. Music composed to celebrate the centenary and bicentenary of Federation reveals how the building songs of the nation function, as well as music composed in response to World Wars I and II. The materialising properties of essence-water are formatted to construct (and deconstruct) pride-arousing iconicity; an iconicity that the settler can cherish, and to which he can relate; and feelings of national belonging and identity develop as the settler becomes attached to—shaped by—this iconic imagery (Dunlap 95-6). Sentimentality is used to express and build patriotism and nationalism.

such as the MDBA function as part of a world of puppets; their aim is to pull the strings to control waters and peoples. As such, they represent the pantomime of the colonial “coo-ee”, once again imaginarily transposed over the entire Country. They position settlers, no longer solely as lead actors, but also as stage directors.



Deep Map 2. The Colonial “Coo-ee” on Waters

Music thus shapes a coherent and cohesive imaginary space out of Lower Murray Country, a colonially bound space unified by and around essence-water. This essence-water is considered and imagined as a vectorial prop on the Cartesian plane. It becomes (used as) a prop of colonialism, that is, a tamed object which opens water-adjacent spaces to colonial appropriation and (de/re)construction. This use of essence-water thus results in the imaginary (trans)formation of Lower Murray Country into a *lieu* (site-stage), rather than favouring the creation—let alone the maintenance—of a *milieu* (terrain). I borrow this terminology of *lieu* and *milieu* from historian Pierre Nora who uses it to differentiate the way in which memory is called upon to shape and impact the formation and design of place (“Between Memory and History”). I have chosen to provide my own translation of these words as I believe that their commonly accepted translation as respectively “site” and “(real) environment” does not appropriately materialise and reflect the Australian



reality to which I give and apply this terminology. I use the compound noun “site-stage” to characterise the theatrical propensities embodied in the denomination of *lieu* (as the location of actors—with both scenic and managerial connotations); and I translated *milieu* as “terrain” to acknowledge its lived and nourishing properties, after D. B. Rose (*Nourishing Terrains*). According to Nora, a site-stage is designed to retain (and construct) authoritative collective memory—as illustrated by the plethora of war songs, musicals and recitals dedicated to the promulgation of the colonial imaginary. Instead, terrains are lived manifestations, embodiments of a grassroots collective memory—as seen in corroborees, for instance.

“some watercourse ... have the water-flow murmuring and gurgling songs of these Water Spirits. They form into tiny bubbles clinging closely together and make a liquid pool white as snow. In these clustering tiny bubbles dwelt a Spirit peeping out of its many watery windows that were clear as glass.”  
(Unaipon 52)

Terrains are built and filled by repetitions. They provide a bodily environment for synchronised performances. The colonial site-stage is built and filled by reminders; pale, distorted echoes of bygone and displaced locations. Scientific predictability supplants located performance. The site-stage is not Country—and when projected onto Country, bodies lack adequate bearings. It leads to a choreography of bodies which fails to become inscribed in the topography; or rather, which fails to resonate with this topography. They go against the grain, against the current. Such a choreography of desynchronisation reveals a stretch of fissures between stories and place-making practices. It reveals disconnections that shape an unknown imaginary—and physical—space which remains open for a constant and ongoing performance of the colonial act of (re)discovery.

## Losing Control: The D(r)ying River

This imposed imaginary transformation of terrains into a site-stage has dire consequences. The ongoing performance of the same colonial act of “(re)discovery” means that the site-stage does not evolve. It is immobile, constant. It is a geographically and temporally fixed and separate space; an idealised space for the expression of national identity, of History. The meaning of this space—of the *décor*—is given by watery props: essence-water is part of larger stage theatrics. As it sets this site-stage into action, it orients and opens it for physical manipulation and exploitation. Physical elements to fill the site-stage are carefully selected and crafted. They are groomed and tailored to suit this site-stage, and when they cannot rise to the occasion and are found lacking and insufficient, they are simply supplanted by imported species or reshaped so that they end up presenting an acceptable form. The modification of riverbeds for boating and then irrigation purposes is the main illustration of this tailoring, and its dramatic impact on the ecological health of Murrundi/Murray River’s waters.

“Long ago in the dreaming an earthquake shook the land forming a long trench. Then came a second tremor, upheaving rocks and soil. From the centre of the earth emerged Pondi the mighty Murray Cod. He was far too large for the trench, so thrashing and weaving his way across the land he formed the River Murray and all of its tributaries. As he moved along it filled with waters, all the way from where he emerged at the foot of the Snowy Mountains in the east, to as far as Lake Alexandrina to the west.”

*(Weaving the Murray 10)*

Boats occupy an iconic place in the colonial imaginary because they played an instrumental role in the success of early colonial efforts. They opened up entire riverine regions for settlement and commerce, long before the construction of roads and railways (Christopher 5). Given their importance, it is unsurprising that they were celebrated in music at the time of their glory:

The story of the Murray Riverboats is one of romance, rivalry, adventure and humour. In their hey-day during the 1870s the waters echoed to their whistles and the hump of their paddles whilst pioneer settlers ran to wave their respect to those majestic queens of the rivers. (Stephens)

Each boat trip was a victory—not only from a commercial perspective, but also from a social perspective: boats were often the only contact remote settlers had with the rest of the world (Christopher 28). Accurate charts of Murrundi/Murray waters' bends were a treasured commodity.<sup>163</sup> The captain was also a battler, and the myth grew in parallel with the fame of some as they “tamed” the waters. Written in 1985 by Mark Stephens, “Captain Cadell” is a song which includes the following lyrics:

The helmsman was a hero;  
Captain Charles Cadell  
The first to tame the Murray  
He'd learnt her ways so well.

Eventually, the railway replaced the boats in the early twentieth century, but not before great modifications had been made to the river courses in order to ease their circulation (Christopher 8). One of the primary modifications was to stabilise water levels so that the boats could circulate all year round, and not be stranded for long periods of time due to widely fluctuating flow patterns (5). *Riverboat Days* is a jazz suite composed by Dave Dallwitz in 1975. Performed by Bob Barnard and Friends, it was released a year later by Swaggie Records Production. “Back of Bourke” is one of its tracks. It recalls and commemorates the story of the *Jane Eliza*, which took three years to travel from Goolwa to Bourke due to these fluctuations and returned to Goolwa in two weeks while towing three barges.

This stabilisation of water levels was achieved through the construction of dams and locks: five artificial storage structures and/or dams; thirty locks and weirs; and five barrages at the Mouth. This regulation of the river for year-round boating activities breaks its rhythms. Suiting boats implies no longer suiting environmental

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<sup>163</sup> These charts were constantly updated, hand-drawn, personal rolls of paper and were often several metres long since, despite the difficulty of navigating the capricious waters of the river, there was no commercial chart available (Christopher 123).

cycles; it implies throwing off the metrical arrangement of these watery environments to the profit of another metric: a metric of performance. Yet, despite their negative impact on the watery environments of Murrundi/Murray River, these boats have not faded from the colonial imaginary. On the contrary, the progressive disappearance of a trade that used to be instrumental to settlement and subsequent survival has led to a particular form of colonial (re)discovery where the negative aspects are obliterated to solely focus on the iconic: majestic vessels cruising on a mighty river. Parsons' entire 2002 album *Riverboats and Rivermen* celebrates this trade. The covers of O'Dea's, Benson's and Dallwitz's pieces display paddleboats. The riverboat days are lauded as days of goodness, days when everything was fine, that is, when the river had not been tainted and degraded by invasive human actions. The lyrics of "Mannum", another of Parsons' songs, unfold:

Take me back, oh, back in time  
When the riverboats ran  
Take me back when the river ran free  
All the way to the sea  
.....  
Locals rally together  
There is still the old *Mary Ann*<sup>164</sup>  
Steamed the Mighty Murray  
Oh, once again.

Boats are associated with the river's free-flowing waters. Sounds fill their decks and bellies. Horns slice through the air, and hulls through the waters, crashing into submerged branches. Crews and passengers break into songs—their way to sweat it all out. There are also tales of Aboriginal children in riverside missions gathered to sing religious hymns to the boats' passengers as their vessels glided past (Gale, "Roles Revisited" 131). Offshore and onshore, sonic stages juxtapose and intertwine in a complex dance of colonial prowess. Philosopher Michel Foucault argues that boats represent the "greatest reserve of the imagination" (27). He

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<sup>164</sup> In June 1850, the South Australian Government offered a reward to the first steam boat to travel upstream to the Darling River junction in order to encourage the development of the river trade (Christopher 5). In 1853, the *Mary Ann*, built by Captain William Randell and his brother Thomas, was launched from near Mannum. Yet, Captain Cadell and the *Lady Augusta* (having secured a deal with the government) reached Swan Hill hours ahead of the *Mary Ann*, on 17 September 1853 (8). Stephens' song (previously mentioned) celebrates this very same Captain Cadell.

explains that “the boat is a floating piece of space, a place without a place, that exists by itself, that is closed in on itself and at the same time is given over to the infinity of the sea” (27). Boats are simultaneously part of the colonial narrative and autonomous entities that can be removed from the failures of said narrative. They provide the settler-singer with a means to (re)imagine the river as an infinite space: a space detached from the consequences of Lower Murray Country’s colonisation. As such, they embody the culmination of the site-stage: the materialisation of a potential infinity of site-stages floating on a larger, drifting site-stage.

Indeed, as it remains symbolic, the boating trade offers the possibility to imagine yet another site-stage—a site-stage from where to displace and hide the failure of the initial site-stage. The initial “play” has sailed—the adverse effects of European settlement on the ecological health of the river have been proven. However, reorienting the colonial narrative around boats enables the settler-singer to construct a successful “spin-off”. While boats (and boating requirements) are at the root of the damming and taming of the river decried in songs, these modifications are now recuperated for irrigation purposes (Christopher 5). The songs focus on this new use of dams and locks, rather than on the reason why the modifications were implemented in the first place. The boat provides an “other” space where colonial mythologies are recycled, and their harmful aspects supposedly removed. The site-stage freezes over again: it officially becomes a place of heritage (Christopher 126-7). Festivals—such as “Sea to Source” and the South Australian Wooden Boat Festival at Goolwa—celebrate it. This imaginary rerouting of the boating trade constructs a site-stage *en puissance*. This site-stage can be—and is—detached from the blame of ecological devastation by river lovers and restoration advocates alike. Standing on this site-stage—embracing the boating version of the colonial narrative—means that the responsibility for reality (that is, ecological devastation) is left unclaimed and unattended. This spares the settler-singer from having to face, let alone admit, his share of responsibility. To borrow the words of poet Juliana Spahr, this framing mindset enables artists “to show the beautiful bird but not so often the bulldozer off to the side” (69); or transposed into the context of Lower Murray Country: to show the beautiful paddle steamer but not so often the dredger off to the side. Once again (still), specific entities—deemed iconic—are portrayed as removed from their network of connectivities. The larger environments, and their

evolution and impacts on said iconic entities, are discarded. Inconvenient (or threatening) facts and presences are occulted. Baudin's exploratory expedition is never far from the mechanisms at play in such music: botanical drawings perform the same separating task. Spahr links these practices and elaborates on the drawings themselves:

They made drawings of isolated plants against white backgrounds. The drawings are undeniably beautiful. But there is little reference to where the plants grow or what grows near them or what birds rested in them or ate their seeds and fruits or what bees or moths came to spread their pollen or how humans used them or avoided them. (69)

The music under scrutiny tends to prolong this tradition of isolation. Symptomatic of the constant (re)establishment of the divide between nature and culture, it fetishises symbols—of both belonging and power—while remaining blind (or deaf) to the place of these symbolic entities within their larger environments, and the repercussions of their presences on said environments. Such music performs a constant (re)imposition of the colonial imaginary on the waters of Lower Murray Country. Boats continue to be sung into flowing; the river continues to be colonised into pipes, channels and dams—it is straightened. Morrison's description of the Mississippi comes back to mind. Composed in 1996 by Dulcie Holland, "Murray River Boat" is one of the pieces from *Sax Happy: 6 Pieces for Saxophone and Piano*. The accompaniment follows a repetitive pattern: until the tied, long-held notes of the concluding phrases, the piano plays regular arpeggios to transcribe the "flowing along lazily" given as a tempo indication. This repetitiveness provides a constantly renewed projection of the site-stage onto the river. Each arpeggio, stretching over a bar, is a smooth movement—or progression—over a calm, identic, stretch of waters. (Occasional) syncopation in the saxophone's melodic line (which is otherwise fairly repetitive as well) is reminiscent of the waters' gentle lapping on the boat's hull. This boat keeps floating, endlessly, in the sonic universe created by Holland. It materialises over and over again, on each wave of arpeggios performed on the piano; on each current of the site-stage.

Smothered  
Smothered  
Smothered  
the voice of the waters  
becomes a succession  
of fence posts jolting by  
my sight as the boat  
speeds away from its  
jetty, and its engine  
overpowers the rest—  
the voice of the waters  
disappears under the  
surface; buried here, it  
will remain  
Smothered.

Closely linked to boats are willows trees. Willow trees are an introduced species that made its way to Australia as a result of the deforestation triggered by the intense boating activities along Murrundi/Murray River (Christopher 125). From picturesque icons to pests, these trees are a symbol of the ambiguous and ambivalent—the always conflicted—relationships of the settler’s imaginary with the river’s waters.

Past the visual appeal which first justified their importation, willow trees were introduced all the way from Queensland to South Australia to stabilise the banks of creeks and watercourses, and they were used particularly “in scenarios where rivers have changed bed (course)” (*Australian Association of Bush Regenerators*, henceforth AABR). Removal of native vegetation to burn in paddle steamers’ boilers or to use as timber to build the settlements along the river only hastened the introduction process. Willow trees, imported from Europe, were chosen to be planted along these depleted banks, as much for their capacity to bury deeply (and thus provide extensive root systems) as for their aesthetic appeal. Waves of importations washed over from Europe. Boat transport of cuttings or plant pots was necessary because of the short lifespan of willow seeds (two to four days). Those imported in the early 1800s and in 1902 were planted in Lower Murray Country, between Mannum and Murray Bridge (Stevens 201). They then came more

regularly and contributed to re-shaping the watery environments from Queensland to South Australia. Several problems have arisen as a result of this introduction. Willow trees are thirsty and were chosen even though they were “the most weedy and less effective species that have been used” (AABR). There is still little experimentation undertaken to analyse if/what native species could be used to replace willow trees, especially since some native willow-looking species exist, such as the wilga (*Geijera parviflora*) and the willow myrtle (*Agonis flexuosa*). Additionally, willow trees do not “fit” with other species: they do not provide suitable habitat for other plants, animals and insects. They are now considered a serious pest, with worrying invasive properties, especially when considering the pussy or black willows, two species which are spreading along some of the tributaries of the Murray in what is considered to be a “mass-colonisation” by their seedlings (AABR).

Trees are cut; dams and weirs are built: severed branches and waters speak of (dis-membering) rhythms of control.

Trees are planted; dams and weirs remain active: new branches and rerouted trickles speak of the same (dis-membering) rhythms of control.

Willow trees’ invasive propensities and their sprawling into native vegetation have led to the declaration of a war on willows, a position only reinforced by their high consumption of water which places them in competition with farmers.<sup>165</sup> As a result of this war, all species of willows are listed as Weeds of National Significance and

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<sup>165</sup> This reads as a nearly parodic replay of the opposition between ecology and economy discussed in the introduction; all the more so because irrigation waters are often directed at other imported tree species (fruit and nut trees in particular) in the river lands.



as restricted invasive plants under the *Biosecurity Act 2014*. Under the General Biosecurity Obligation, everyone must take appropriate and practical steps to minimise invasive risks. Processes of monitoring and control have been suggested. Grazing—an activity that has been demonstrated as particularly harmful to Australian soils—is presented as a way of controlling the pest. So is the use of RoundUp Bioactive, one of the few herbicides registered for application on willows. Yet, RoundUp is well-known for being a controversial product, mostly because of its toxic impact on waters, and especially groundwaters. Despite the clear ecological threat posed by willow trees, they are still fondly described as “almost part of our heritage” (*ABBR*): a testament to the Victorian-style tradition, they endlessly “[re]frame the picture” (Stoneham and de Garis).

In my mind, willow trees along the river also echo another tale of colonisation. The species is composed of sterile trees, as well as male and female trees. Sterile and male trees are unable to reproduce and spread. The “danger” comes from fertile female or hybrid trees; trees which refuse to conform to the gardener’s rules. These give birth to bi-sexual offspring and catkins—a mixing of the sexes which renders them uncontrollable. Their seedling swarms roll over large stretches of Country and implant new patterns of leafy populations over its texture. Through RoundUp and/or grazing, the colonial power attempts to control this spread. It still knows what is best—in a more-than-human reminiscence of what happened when its administration placed itself in charge of the migratory and reproductive patterns of the Indigenous populations who had fallen under its yoke, as they were a nuisance to its geographical expansionism. From the human to the more-than-human realms, the colonial power continues to play with eugenics. In a conventional mythological association, the provident land—the food basket—is still seen as Eden (with the implication that Adam is in charge<sup>166</sup>). The construction and maintenance of this Eden continues to rest on, and to suit, a capitalist narrative of exponential growth and development.

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<sup>166</sup> The stereotype of the (noble) farmer battler still applies to the rural masculine population (and traumatises, as demonstrated by the recent number of suicides).

“The pelicans fished in the lake and caught some tukkeri fish. They carried the fish to Point Sturt [Tipping]. Then the magpies made a fire to cook the fish with. The greedy magpies then stole the fish. The pelicans were angry with the magpies, and they fought. The magpies were rolled in the ashes, which made them black. Then the pelicans became white like the tukkeri fish, which they had eaten.”

(Transcribed in Taplin 251; also recorded in its original language)

Yet, the colonial power is also voicing sentiments that express a clear disillusion with this man-as-god narrative. The understanding of waters is governed by sentimentality: an elegiac vocabulary is employed to describe how beautiful waters are (or can be) when detached from human stain and blemish. This sentimentality is primarily centred upon nostalgic reminiscences for an untarnished lost Eden, as it is audible in the pieces connected to the riverboat trade. These pieces develop a national ethos of return: most of the nation is sung as wishing to be taken “back in time” (Parsons, “Mannum”). Literary scholar and author Svetlana Boym argues:

Nostalgia ... is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed. Nostalgia is a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one’s own fantasy. Nostalgic love can only survive in a long-distance relationship. (xiii-iv)

This ethos of return is characterised by the idealisation and simplification of the historical context—both social and economic—that it is describing. It implies the constant (re)discovery of the waters; and thus the endless performance of this foundational colonial act. This performance is articulated as a form of pastoral escapism, where the “countryside” is yet to turn into the “environment”. Such an impulse appears as a sort of a romanticised counter-vision to modernity; and even as a (postmodern) extension of romanticism. It advocates a (non-scientific) return to and of nature. It articulates a tear from science and denounces the destructive chiasm between economy and ecology. Yet, this narrative is destructive: while it could implicate a healthy level of disillusion with what western science (and particularly its industrial and military applications) offers, it primarily leads to a

(selective) (re)discovery of nature and its wonders. It consists in a form of neo-colonisation of the environment.



Photograph 6. Conducting the Waters

This also impacts Indigenous populations: First Nations continue to be dictated a role; their identities are to remain “frozen” on the colonial site-stage—and they are expected to contribute solely within a frame that has been pre-defined for them. Two currents of colonisation are active here. First Nations are perceived as the only ones capable of developing and engaging in sustainable relationships with nature. The stereotype of symbiotic harmony keeps on living: the “native” and his bride. Alternatively, and as harmfully, the “native” is altogether banned from the landscape, because nature is no longer perceived as natural, that is, it can no longer act as a suitable habitat for this “native”; or because wilderness is construed as detached from all, even from the “native”. Such neo-colonialism removes “the native” from their Country as surely as colonialism did when it fixed their presence before modernity. Lawyer Noel Pearson argues that the term “wilderness” is simply another version of the *terra nullius* myth, for it preserves the “invisibility of Aboriginal people”. Commissioned by the River Murray Urban Users Local Action

Planning Committee, *The Mighty Murray Musical* (composed by Nick Vall in 2000) illustrates this ongoing subordination and/or removal. Aimed at school children, this musical proposes to follow a past-to-present-to-future narrative that implements a (familiar) chronology of erasure around Aboriginal custodianship of Lower Murray Country's waters. It opens with a section highlighting the significance of the river to First Nations people; but is quick to move away from such attachments, and clearly position the action on the site-stage. While the settler-singer acted poorly in the past, he is presently aware of his shortcomings (mistakes) and will craft a better future for all. *The Mighty Murray Musical* sings the constant unsustainable (re)discovery of Murrundi/Murray River's waters.

Overall, the music under scrutiny denounces the tragic ramifications which concretely arise from the imposition of the settler imaginary over Country, while at the same time emulating this imposition. The lyrics of another 2002 song by Parsons ("Ain't no Fish in the River Today") are:

Well ain't no fish in the river today (x2)  
Ducks and pelicans have all flown away  
'Cause ain't no fish in the river today.  
Well ain't no fish in the river today (x2)  
Esky and [?'<sup>167</sup>], I'll have another can  
There ain't no fish in the river today  
Well ain't no fish in the river today (x2)  
Pack up our tents, be on our way  
There ain't no fish in the river today  
Well ain't no fish in the river today (x2)  
It won't be long you'll be singing this song  
'Cause ain't no fish in the river today (x2)

Lamentations are composed. Mostly written in minor keys (as a transition from earlier pieces which were mostly in major keys), this music of lamentation deplores the current state of things (the ecocide); and yet continues to promote and spread the same (nostalgic) colonial imaginary over Lower Murray Country. Lamenting does not lead to a change of behaviour, rather the opposite. Despite lamenting, the boating industry is still celebrated; willow trees remain iconic. This places the

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<sup>167</sup> The recording from which I transcribed the lyrics was not of very good quality, and I unfortunately could not understand this word. "Ham" sounded like a close phonetic match.

current settler-singer in an ambiguous position: he still promotes the same (supremacist) imaginary while simultaneously denouncing its impact. Country remains a passive stage for human action and music speaks in terms of human success or failure. The human subject is imagined as the sole entity able to bring agency and placed at the centre of any ecological project. Waters, abstracted, are understood in terms of human needs alone. Distributed according to “entitlements”, they are not constructed as a privilege but as an unquestionable right. Waters are, without a doubt, possessed. Notions of responsibility, connectivity, ethics or reciprocity are removed from water use and control. The use of waters thus becomes “free” of impact. This anthropocentric terminology and perspective favours a metonymical paradigm of loss and redemption through objective reflection on human-made destruction (Potter, “Ecological Crisis” 3; Massey, “Landscape as a Provocation” 39-40). This does not challenge the way the environment is understood, approached and managed. Complexity and connectivity are reduced to what is and can supposedly be defined and understood in a complete way. Generating a dynamic of sin and redemption—similarly to displacing the site-stage to the boat—serves to hide and negate the ongoing impact of colonial (re)discovery. *Fortissimo* remorse and a newfound appreciation for “free” waters protect the settler from having to address the impact of over two centuries of colonial behaviours when it comes to water management. This is unsurprising: literature and sociology scholar Jennifer Rutherford explains that “[i]n Australia speech perpetually pays homage to the Australian Good” (*The Gauche Intruder* 208). Such discourses protect the settler from having to implement radical change in the way the waters are managed: making adjustments—“improvements”—appears to be a viable, sustainable solution. After channelling, piping becomes an option: evaporation is further reduced. Waters are continuously colonised. Piping waters also means that they are to be used by humans only, and in the manner dictated by the colonial power. Such practices remove access for others, denying them their (basic) right of access to water. The colonial imaginary allows for, and results in, the privatisation of waters. Yet, responsibility remains diverted. Another of Parsons’ 2002 songs, entitled “The River of Life”, goes:

Let the river run free  
Let the river run high

Let the red gum rejuvenate the sky  
 River of life  
 River of dream  
 Mighty Murray is the lifeblood of our country  
 There's a reason for the sun  
 There's a reason for our trees  
 There's a reason for our rivers to flow wild and free  
 River of life  
 River of dream  
 Mighty Murray is the lifeblood of our country  
 Now the river is crying  
 Now the river is dying  
 Are they ever gonna listen  
 Before it's a trickle to the sea  
 River of life  
 River of dream  
 Mighty Murray is the lifeblood of our country

The taming of the river is a Tragedy.<sup>168</sup> It brings the nation together as all (re)unite to resuscitate the flows of Murrundi/Murray River—the watery heroine whose impending death has turned into a national priority, and must be counteracted for the salvation of the entire nation. And yet, the taming of the river remains an unfulfilled Tragedy. It is enacted by a generic and conveniently detached third body—a deaf body, a deafened body, which is forever refusing to listen: a body of “they”. The colonising body is the “other” body; it is the governing body: located in air-conditioned offices, far removed from the daily reality of Murrundi/Murray River. Legitimacy continues to be threatened and belonging is never (re)conquered. Both are instead “folklorised”<sup>169</sup>. Obsolete and non-reflective, such expressions of tragedy are open for recuperation by the politic. Historian and cultural theorist Chris Healy discusses “possession as a *commedia dell'arte* performance that only later comes to be recognised as conferring legal authority or founding a nation” (72). Such a performance leads to the disappearance of the heroine—to the useless mediation of her sacrifice. Waters keep vanishing from Murrundi/Murray River’s

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<sup>168</sup> My choice to use the word “Tragedy” is marked by a Glissantian understanding of this term’s collective stake: it is the (involuntary) sacrifice of a propitiatory hero whose defeat and death are necessary to finally gather and bind a community (*Le Discours Antillais* 148, 413; *Poetics of Relation* 52-3).

<sup>169</sup> Here, I draw on the rerouting of folklore denounced by Glissant: I refer to a detached, frozen and politically instrumentalised imitation of a tradition which should be communal, emplaced and evolving (*Le Discours Antillais* 213-25 in particular).

beds. Waters, acting as catalysers, are consumed during the transformation from terrains into a site-stage—a place tailored for monetary profits. This disappearance is obscured: hidden within the fold of numerical metonymy; obscured by a language that makes it impossible for most people to participate<sup>170</sup>—a language that disconnects and excludes<sup>171</sup>; where staged dialogues are actual monologues.<sup>172</sup> “Other” voices are disappearing along the waters.

less and less waters

(- H<sub>2</sub>O)

=

less and less entities

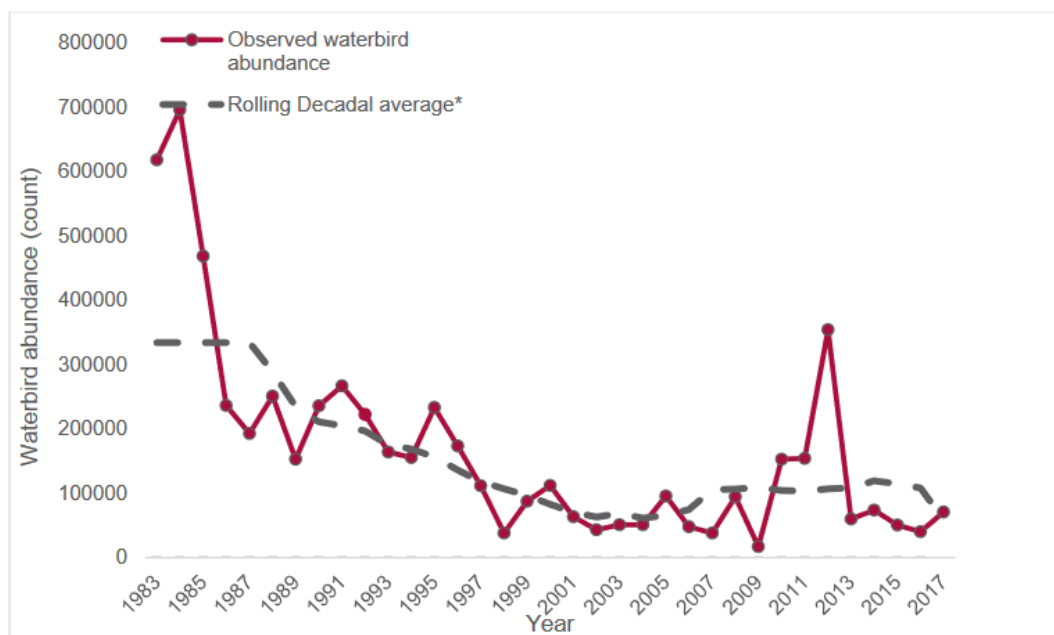
(- life)

Or so states the *Basin*

*Environmental*

*Watering Outlook for*

*2018–19 (9):*

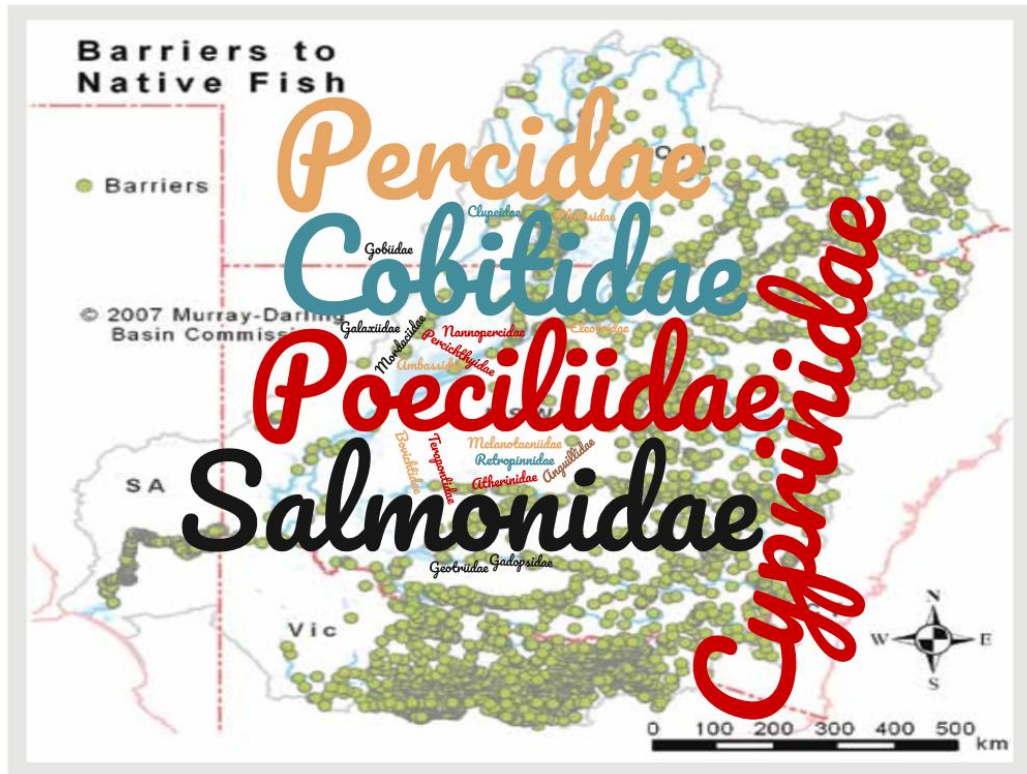


<sup>170</sup> Glissant denounces the power of the “formula”, that is, the conquering and excluding aspect of (scientific) jargon presented as universal (*Le Discours Antillais* 382-9). Such discourses exclude people from participation. They also always trigger the same—empty—sequence of words: Indigenous knowledges are “valuable” and “respected”; the state of waters in Murray River Country is “critical”, etc. Maps also function similarly in terms of disconnection and removal: they “desocialise” the represented Country, fostering the notion of a socially empty space and thus implying that decision making can—and should—be removed from the realms of located, interpersonal contacts and exchanges (Harley 303).

<sup>171</sup> Science, positioned as the supreme mode of knowledge, removes the possibility of multiple readings (Tuan 141).

<sup>172</sup> I have discussed this in depth elsewhere (Roulière); see also Hattam et al. (113) and Hemming and Rigney (“Unsettling Sustainability” 768) on the absence of/need for “real” dialogues.

Graphs, pie charts—data—do not paint a *tableau vivant*. Rather, they stretch a *nature morte*<sup>173</sup>: a river progressively depleted of its names and voices: “cause ain’t no fish in the river today”.



Deep Map 3. Crying a River<sup>174</sup>

Yet, the river is rich in names and voices: Murrundi is one of them. Other Aboriginal Nations who have custodianship of its waters call it differently. It is Millewa; it is Millie; it is Tongala; it is Indi; it is Panamilli; it is Tiregola; it is Tangula. It depends on where bodies stand. Every marked feature has been given a name. When Hamilton Hume and William Hovell encountered the river in 1824—

<sup>173</sup> Here, I play on visual representation and a style of painting known as *nature morte* in French. While generally translated as “still life” in English, this style literally means “dead nature” in the original French. It is the dual—and almost oxymoronic—meaning encapsulated in the French (the style of painting and the more literal meaning it can take) that interests me, and the French thus stands untranslated in the body of the text. Nature—or natural life—is not simply “still”; it is dead, or at the very least dying at an increased and unprecedented pace.

<sup>174</sup> This word cloud shows the species, both endemic and introduced, of fish present in Murray River Country, dotted with approximately 4,000 barriers to fish passages (Lintermans 8). The species were attributed a value depending on the number of individuals that are recorded. The five larger names are alien species, which make about 80 to 90 per cent of the biomass of fish and 70 per cent of the numbers (1). This word cloud reflects the fact that “[n]ative fish populations in the Murray–Darling Basin are estimated to be 10% of their pre-European-settlement levels, and alien species, such as carp, dominate the fish population in many places” (iii).



the first Europeans to do so—they overwrote this plurality of names with a singular patronym: the river became the Hume River. This name was itself overwritten as quickly as it had overwritten others. In 1830, when Captain Charles Sturt stumbled onto the river, he did not realise that it was the river that Hume and Hovell had already named. So he called it the Murray River, after Sir George Murray, the then British Secretary of State for War and the Colonies—a man who never set foot near these waters. Plural representations and understandings were officially replaced by a single, monological “Murray”: a foreign body on these shores. This body is thirsty: only 4 per cent of the rainfall over the basin actually reaches the Mouth (“Fast Facts”; see also Webster 3). This a sobering fact. As watercourses are drying up, pipes are purring. Carter’s notions of humidity and dry thinking come to mind. Bachelard writes:

L’eau est le symbole profond, organique de la femme qui ne sait que pleurer ses peines ... L’homme, devant un suicide féminin, comprend cette peine funèbre par tout ce qui est femme en lui ... Il redevient homme—en redevenant “sec”—quand les larmes ont tari.<sup>175</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 113)

As waters are associated with the feminine, dry thinking also represents the abuse of this feminine—the destruction of what cannot be emulated or understood, in order to control it. Dry thinking has physical repercussions: it effectively dries riverbeds and watercourses. It dries the ground. The waters of Lower Murray Country are d(r)ying, endlessly, infinitely. Their pain, too, is infinite. Bachelard writes:

L’être voué à l’eau est un être en vertige. Il meurt à chaque minute, sans cesse quelque chose de sa substance s’écroule. La mort quotidienne n’est pas la mort exubérante du feu qui perce le ciel de ses flèches ; la mort quotidienne est la mort de l’eau. L’eau coule toujours, l’eau tombe toujours, elle finit toujours en sa mort horizontale. ... pour l’imagination matérialisante la mort de l’eau est

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<sup>175</sup> “Water is the deep, organic symbol of the woman who only knows to cry her pain ... Man, confronted by this feminine suicide, understands this funeral pain with all that is woman in him ... He becomes man again—by becoming ‘dry’ again—when the tears have dried up.”

plus songeuse que la mort de la terre : la peine de l'eau est infinie.<sup>176</sup>  
(*L'Eau et les Rêves* 9)

Dry thinking is vertiginous. It inscribes itself in an endless cycle of sin and redemption. Its death is not exuberant; it is daily—its death is rebirth: it is always partial, temporary. Dry thinking keeps flowing, running underground in the sonic discourses that wallpaper Lower Murray Country's watery environments. Bottles, pipes and taps become caskets in a funeral march. In “good” years, 40 per cent of Adelaide's waters come from Murrundi/Murray River; in dry years, this number rises to 90 per cent (Rankin and Mantelli 3). As stated by the Murray Darling Basin Authority in their “Fact Sheet”:

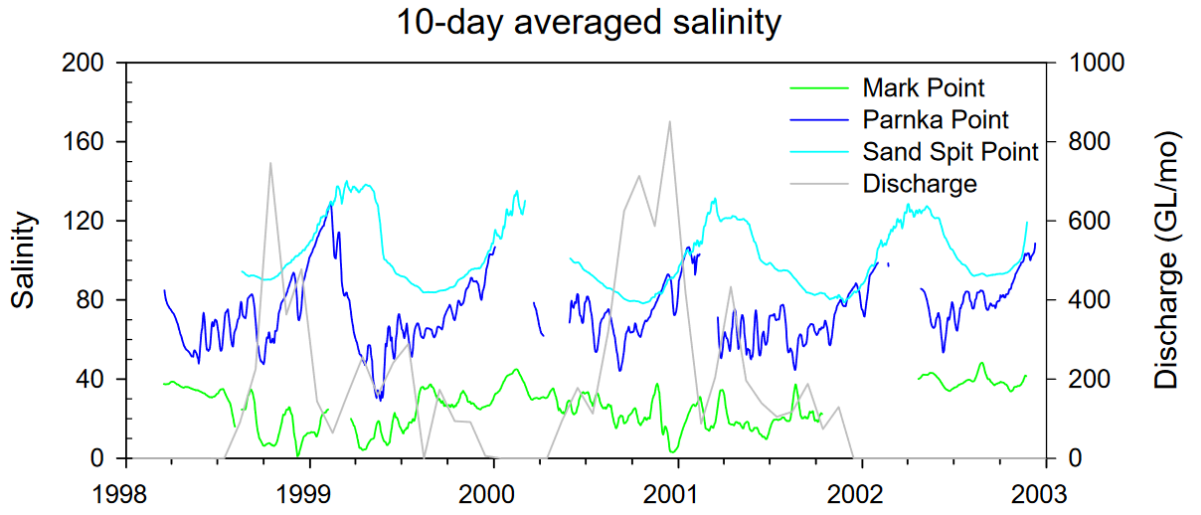
The barrages maintain the river level between the Lower Lakes and Lock 1 at Blanchetown, a distance of about 250 km. Adelaide, parts of the mid-north, Yorke Peninsula and south-east South Australia depend on water pumped from this weir pool. The water in this reach is also directly drawn for towns and agriculture around the Lower Lakes and River Murray up to Lock 1. (1)

Such diversions leave Lower Murray Country's waters impure in the colonial imaginary: salt water carries connotations of contamination (Bachelard, *L'Eau et les Rêves* 20). A deeply anchored hatred of salinity tinges the relationship of the settler-singer with the new reality of these waters.

“A river is like a mirror:  
it reflects the care given  
by people whose lives  
depend upon it.”  
(Muir et al. 259)

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<sup>176</sup> “The being destined for water is a being in a state of vertigo. He dies each minute, something of his substance endlessly flows. Daily death is not the exuberant death of the fire that pierces the sky with its arrows; daily death is the death of water. Water always flows, water always falls, it always ends in its horizontal death. ... for the materialising imagination, the death of water is more pensive than the death of the earth: the pain of water is infinite.”



The mirror seems to be shrouded in salt (Webster 14).

\*

Epilogue: beginning  
(curtain call)

*The settler-singer is a visionary: he strolls next to the waters along a chronological timeline, with its implications of logical progression. His story is one of surveyed wandering. He analyses, he annotates, he classifies—he boils sceneries down to measures and dry recordings, he writes narratives of undisputable facts: he sets the stage for each scene of colonial conquest and development to be played. He is not so much an individual as a discipline (a project). Yet, this settler-singer takes on different roles depending on his chronological location. His voice is in turn the voice of the scientist, of the botanist, of the historian, of the judge, of the boat captain, of the politician,<sup>177</sup> of the scholar (myself). It is the overlapping of many colonial voices and, as one succeeds to the other, nuances appear and disappear: each has a different approach to (and relationship with) waters. And yet, despite these differences, they share a common mythology which binds them together. From the 1820s to 2018, the colonial mythological framework has continued to play a major role in shaping place-making practices, and this unsustainable monolingual supremacy has led to destruction.*

I am back on the colonial theatrical stage. Murrundi/Murray River runs through it. It should be centre-stage, but colonialism relegating it backstage. Along with the rest of Australia, it is to play a minor role as a silent protagonist in its imaginary. However, that is not satisfying enough. As its waters still refuse to sing in the appropriate tonality, the watery vocal chords of the river are altered so that a familiar and agreeable melody is carried to the ears of the newcomers. This musical construction and constriction is both imaginary and physical (real).

*The voice of the settler-singer travels through time, place and persona but always forms part of the same imaginary materialisation. If I blend many individual voices together, it is because they form an unending monologue which, despite the different positions, carries the same imaginary: a structured graph on the Cartesian*

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<sup>177</sup> Especially of the politician who binds science to make it legible.

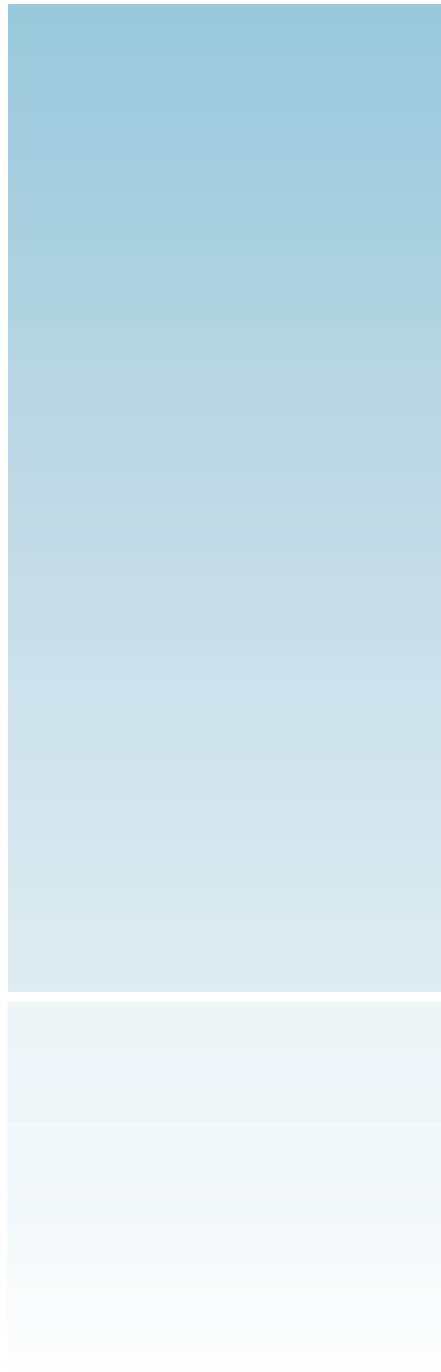
*plane. This Cartesian plane is not grounded in Country, and yet, it is used to localise and fix everything of Country with which it comes in contact. It is used to safely put and tuck Country away in its place, both in time and place, and to eliminate unpredictable change and occurrence.*

This passage of an Austral river from watery terrains to d(r)ying site-stage is a Tragedy in three acts, as dictated by the operatic-theatrical canon. It is the story of a watery heroine, and her name is Murrundi/Murray River. It is the story of her slow death through the blind eyes of her captors.

Act I: Brave but clueless explorers “discover” the heroine. Her plural waters do not match their mythological expectations. They must (re)interpret them in the singular. Her waters are imagined as essence-water.

Act II: This imaginary construction of essence-water acts as a catalysing concept: lived watery environments become malleable in the settlers’ imaginaries and can be turned into a site-stage befitting the ongoing performance of the colonial act of “discovery”.

Act III: This continuing/unending performance is not without physical consequences. The maintenance of the site-stage requires the nearly total consumption of the waters. Lived terrains are d(r)ying. The colonial powers are constantly working to reverse the self-destructive dynamics they are inflicting upon themselves, but Murrundi/Murray River remains impassive in the face of such superficial attempts.



I have only my eyes left to cry—my ears are deafened. I raise my glass of water to the ceiling (to the skies) and bring it to my mouth. I drink. It quenches my thirst; it empties the river: drinking water in Adelaide is a sweet and sour experience. Swallowing is raspy.

Epilogue: end

(curtain!)

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# Vision 2—

**Bodies and Spirits and Waters: *Ruwe/Ruwar***

But this sorrow and rage will not inflame us to seek retribution; rather they will inflame our art. Our music will never again be quite the same. This will be our reply to violence: to make music more intensely, more beautifully, more devotedly than ever before.

Leonard Bernstein  
(147)

The assassination of a single—admittedly charismatic—individual prompted this reaction from composer and conductor Leonard Bernstein. On 22 November 1963, then American President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot. He died.

This isolated act of violence triggered gasps and cries across continents. It remains a controversial blister bubbling under the surface of the American collective psyche. Such intensity leaves little room to imagine or speculate on the intensity of the Ngarrindjeri experience of colonisation. How is one to speak, let alone react, when confronted by programmed extinction, assimilation and “improvement”—or, to be more precise, the attempted (and ongoing) genocide and ecocide of one’s people, culture and Country? Can music truly be an answer? Connections between people and their environment are mediated through culture, and performance—the combination of dance, music and storytelling—is a pertinent and powerful medium to record their dissolution and/or maintenance. In this vision, I argue that performance does indeed provide an outlet to survive and transcend the violence imposed on one’s persona, community and environment. It crafts a much-needed space of empowerment from which to reaffirm and (re)invent practices; and, as such, it challenges and potentially subverts colonial destruction.

Vision 2 is concerned with Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin (River Country Spirit Ceremony, henceforth *Ringbalin*)—an Aboriginal travelling ceremony whose aim is to regenerate the spirits of the river and its peoples through songs and dances. It



was revived in 2010 on the initiative of Ngarrindjeri Elder Major “Uncle Moogy” Sumner. This vision draws on the ceremony as portrayed and transcribed within different media by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous protagonists; as well as on a number of adjacent cultural productions.<sup>178</sup> It aims to explore the reverberation of impacts flowing on from this recent revival, after a nearly two-hundred-year-long interruption of its practice. In particular, this vision focuses on what lies at the outskirts of *Ringbalin*, that is, on the semiotics surrounding the event and the range of interconnected cultural productions which simmer in its periphery. It travels between languages and movements to unveil how instances of rhythmic ruptures and continuities are expressed. It then reveals how these rhythmic perceptions are performed and used as a source of healing as human and more-than-human bodies (re)connect with one another.

As I am writing, I realise that some of this vision sits uneasily with the opacifying (po)ethics that I defend. My textual explorations of loss and forms of loss imply that I attempt to represent the unrepresentable: to signify the (ongoing) attempted genocide and ecocide promoted and carried out by a large portion of the settler imaginary to which I belong. As philosopher James Hatley writes:

the very attempt to memorialise the annihilated by giving them a body beyond their own within this poem or this essay would be a betrayal. Such a gesture would repress the very significance of the other’s vulnerability by acting as if the other’s nudity were somehow capable of even the most cursory translation, the most tentative appropriation, as if one could feel the pain of the other for her or him.  
(246)

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<sup>178</sup> In 2013, a documentary about the ceremony (entitled *Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought*) was released and started its own voyage from one film festival to the other. The year of its release alone, it was part of the official selection for the Adelaide Film Festival, the 23<sup>rd</sup> International Short Film Festival in Sydney and the 18<sup>th</sup> Canberra International Film Festival. Almost simultaneously, a mobile software application (an app) entitled *Ringbalin: River Stories* was developed. This app offers viewers a chance to embark on their own journey along the river guided by geo-located videos of Aboriginal Elders discussing their relationships with their Country. Throughout the years, *Ringbalin* has also developed a consistent web presence. It has a Facebook page, and is included in several other significant websites such as those of the Cultural Flows Research Project, Ananguku Arts and Creative Spirits. Because of these different manifestations, *Ringbalin* has additionally received significant coverage in mainstream media and government platforms. It has regularly featured in newspapers and on the websites of the Australian River Restoration Centre, the MDBA and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation. Additionally, it won the Riverprize in 2015.

I agree that vulnerability is precisely what must be protected. It is significant because it composes Relation: being vulnerable also means being open—open to Relation. Relation does not support destructive, repressive, one-way exchanges. I do not give a (vocal) body to other people’s pain and loss; I do not translate these—I base my approach on my own body. I speak of my own experience of (re)connecting bodies as part of the 2017 iteration of *Ringbalin*. I centre my words on my participation in the ceremony as an active audience member. To paraphrase a quotation by Glissant from the thesis’ introduction: I engage in exchanges that reflect my acceptance of change while exchanging. If this vision translates vulnerability, it is my own: treading on Country is never an easy nor anodyne act for a non-Indigenous person. More than any others, I perform this vision: being performative represents a way to leave room for the unsaid and the unsayable (Denning, “Writing”)—for the “Other”. My in-text performance highlights my vulnerability: I speak from where I stand—a researcher typing these words on Kaurana Country, Country that was never ceded. It highlights the ambiguity of my position as a non-Indigenous researcher concerned with voices and (re)presentations. My voice, while bearing—and even exceeding—meaning, remains “recalcitrant” to its production (Dolar 14-5). Dolar writes:

it [the voice] is what does not contribute to making sense. It is the material element recalcitrant to meaning, and if we speak in order to say something, then the voice is precisely that which cannot be said. It is there, in the very act of saying, but it eludes any pinning down.  
(15)

On its own, my voice is assuredly deprived of meaning: only through the reader engaging with *Ringbalin* on their own terms—by themselves—is sense to be made. To this effect, deep maps are absent from this section. These maps around *Ringbalin* already exist and they belong to the app. Creating other deep maps would obscure these and be counterproductive in terms of representational practices—I refuse to appropriate them. Yet, this vision cannot function map-less: it would be unbalanced compared to the others. And so, I invite the reader to refer to the interactive maps from the app rather than extract them. In this way I aim to encourage the reader to engage with the app for wider contextualisation—for visualisation. As such, my voice does not dissect *Ringbalin* (*per se*). Rather, it asks for a constant, radiating

reconstruction of settler engagement with Indigenous productions and practices. This reconstruction is to unfold endlessly, until equality is reached—until sonic equivalency appears. This vision, in its design and content, is intended to contribute to these necessary readjustments of volume.

Vision 2 rises from the following premises:

South Australia’s founding document, the *Letters Patent* of 1836, contained provisions for the Traditional Custodians’ land rights (see also Capper; Cleland 18). These were ignored: Lower Murray Country rapidly became “a ‘white space’ framed by Aboriginalist myths of cultural extinction recycled through burgeoning heritage, Native Title, natural resource management ‘industries’” (Hemming et al. 92, 101). The Ngarrindjeri never abdicated their land rights or remained passive in the face of dispossession and subsequent environmental transformation and degradation. Throughout the centuries, they have resisted such a project of “systematic colonisation” (Hemming and Rigney, “Unsettling Sustainability” 760).

“The Ngarrindjeri have always occupied the traditional lands of the Ngarrindjeri Nation and Ngarrindjeri have never ceded nor sold our lands and waters ... we humbly require that your Crown forthwith recognise the Ngarrindjeri Dominion in our soil and beneath our waters.”  
(“Proclamation of Ngarrindjeri Dominion”)

Since the beginning of European colonisation, the Ngarrindjeri have been “forced to negotiate a space within the Australian nation from a place of constructed cultural extinction” (Hemming et al. 94). They have been submitted to a process of “conscientisation” (Freire), that is, a forced analysis to define who one is in regard to others. As part of this process, “becoming Indigenous” (Clifford, *Returns*) is often juxtaposed with becoming modern (Gelder) because of “strategic essentialism” (Spivak, “Subaltern Studies” 202) or the “cunning of recognition” (Povinelli), that is, the production of western-accepted performative versions of traditional cultures (see also Muecke et al.; Dodson, “The End in the Beginning”). As activist Lowitja O’Donoghue summarises: “Strange as it may seem, to be ‘Aboriginal’ is a

comparatively recent experience for us, the Indigenous Peoples of Australia” (qtd. in *Chance* viii).

Vision 2 is shorter than the others:

Voices are missing: I secured ethics clearance to engage with the Ngarrindjeri community, but failed to develop the necessary contacts. Time is of the essence, and a PhD candidacy hardly supports such an approach.

Voices are missing: maps are to be found elsewhere. They do not appear within the body of the text—a reference has been made to the places where they live. The reader chooses whether to (re)insert these voices within my academic text.

Voices are missing: the loss that is discussed infiltrates the vision’s design. There are no watery voices to be found there. These are left to rest within the voices of the people involved, however closely or remotely, with(in) *Ringbalin*.<sup>179</sup>

Vision 2 is about loss—but it speaks primarily of what is not lost.

La souffrance des peuples n’est pas dicible ; seulement leur espoir, leur  
présence.<sup>180</sup>  
Édouard Glissant  
(*L’Intention Poétique* 13)

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<sup>179</sup> I must stress that I am not associating Aboriginal production with sustainability or environmental entities. Rather, I am interested in listening to the watery voices contained and/or produced within Aboriginal voices—in a similar fashion to how other visions express watery voices contained and/or produced within my own voice.

<sup>180</sup> “The suffering of people cannot be spoken (described); only their hope, their presence.”

## Rhythmic Ruptures

Psychiatrist Frantz Fanon writes the following about the devastating impact of colonisation on his Caribbean homeland:

Hostile nature, obstinate and fundamentally rebellious, is in fact represented in the colonies by the bush, by mosquitoes, natives and fever, and colonisation is a success when all this undocile nature has finally been tamed. Railways across the bush, the draining of swamps and a native population which is nonexistent politically and economically are in fact one and the same thing. (201)

The impact of this particular colonial encounter is easily transposable to most—if not all—settler countries. While varying immensely in the details, each act of colonisation tailors the same overall outcome on whom or what it colonises. The common denominator is loss. This loss stems from the fact that colonisation imposes the mythologies of the coloniser upon the colonised, and that these impositions rarely generate enriching transformations for their supposedly passive human and more-than-human objects. As Fanon hints, the colonial encounter aims to force what it touches, what is different and does not bend to its rules, into non-existence: loss is created. Loss in Murray River Country is profound and severe. It is everywhere: there is a loss of biodiversity, of emplaced knowledges and relationships, of language, of connectivity, of plurality. It is both physical and metaphorical.

The revival of *Ringbalin* is a response to this loss: it represents an Aboriginal answer to the decay (and the feared death) of the river's and people's spirits. As such, expressions of loss fill this ceremony. The ruptures that colonisation has engendered are mainly conveyed through narratives of disjunction: there is a past order—how it used to be—and a present order—how it is now. Memories from youth or older community members are contrasted with present experiences of and with Country.

Tom Trevororrow explains:

We put our little net out, get a feed of Coorong mulloway. We go out fishing pulling big mulloway, mulloway bigger than me. That's our, you can say, our supermarket. ("Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin" 1:45)

Perceptions and expressions of loss are strongly tied to a capacity to remember—not only in terms of language, but also through body memories.

Major Sumner states:

A lot of our people, older people ... they see the change coming, but this is more than they expected. To see how the rivers are dry, what colour they are. The water you can't drink. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 3:22)

These different forms of remembrance tend to be extremely concrete and specific: they are shaped around precise located anecdotes. These disjunctive narratives demonstrate that loss is intimately known. It has been experienced within a lifetime. Loss has names; it has a concrete physical presence—the absence of the rest. It is not an abstract concept, a list of decreasing numbers. It is embedded, grounded, rooted. These expressions of ruptures are “thick”, that is, sound because they are anchored in space and time (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* 9).

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As I attend the ceremony, I hear some of this “thickness”. Major Sumner introduces each performance with a story. These explain how the fauna and flora around the Coorong came to be and how they have changed over the course of his life. They also detail the ongoing relationships of the Ngarrindjeri and other river Nations with these entities.

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These expressions of rhythmic ruptures translate a passage from free bodily movements to regulated ones. These regulated movements are as much those of Indigenous people within the region as those of the waters. The increased regulation of one generally runs parallel with the intensification of the other's regulation. In *Rivers of Empire*, historian Donald Worster demonstrates the tight and intimate relationship between water and socio-political power in a North American context. In Australia, the domination of the Great Murray—however illusory—goes hand in hand with increased control exerted over Aboriginal peoples in Murray River Country (Abdulla et al. 24).

Major Sumner recalls:

I talked to some of my old aunties. And they went down along the Coorong and camped. One of my aunties said: it was a place where we could go and be free. And I asked her, what do you mean by free? And she said: free of the eyes that were on us here. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 16:38)

Relative freedom—or, probably more accurately, some indifference—was obtained through being out of sight, out of the (colonial) way. Yet, as the taming of the river intensified, Aboriginal movements along the river also became increasingly monitored and reduced. Access to the river was, and still is, subjected to limitations which have ranged from straightforward prohibitions (such as displacement and confinement in missions, the Seven- and One-Mile Laws) to more insidious restrictions linked to agricultural and pastoral development and/or environmental and heritage protection (Russell; Byrne 83; Wiltshire 4, 7; see also Harvey on the construction of heritage).<sup>181</sup> There is a lack of access—or restricted access—to significant sites, based on governmental policies and legislation supposedly implemented for monitoring and conservation purposes, or because these are located within private properties (Willis et al. 192-3). New languages of colonialism

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<sup>181</sup> It is interesting to note that nowadays most restrictions on Aboriginal access to the river are implemented under the guise of environmental care, that is, to supposedly protect the health of the river. These are the result of “wilderness” preservation policies and the creation of conservation parks. Small—or maybe rather token—provisions for Indigenous use of the waterways are insufficient to balance the negative impact of fishing restrictions and licensing, or agricultural water allocations. There is a blatant lack of recognition and provision for Aboriginal fishing and hunting rights in legislation (Clarke, “Twentieth-Century Aboriginal Harvesting Practices” 102).

take shape and fill the space (Hemming and Rigney, “Unsettling Sustainability” 767).

Beryl Carmichael (Ngiyaempaa Elder) explains:

I was reading in the paper only last week, where our cotton industry down below Menindee are bragging about the amount of surface water they got, where they sell it and rip the harvest, millions of dollars for self-gain for the members. You’ve got to see the big pipes they’ve got. The water runs backwards, comes back here when they turn their pipe pumps on down there. That’s fair dinkum, we’ve seen it, two great big pipes pumping from other creeks and everywhere they can to store the water for them to sell. It’s cruel you know, that’s the thing. How can they get away with all of this? (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 4:15)

Christine Egan laments:

The Murray Mouth is now a sand bank. They have boats sitting in sand. There isn’t a river there anymore, in my Country. The pelican is my spiritual guide ... when your totem is not flourishing, you know the land is sick, and you’re not doing what you should be doing. It makes you feel sick because, you know, it’s not a natural thing for the pelican to do: their nests are usually in the water reeds, not in trees. (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 6:40)

These regulations, which affect both environmental and cultural connectivities, represent one of the most basic colonial intrusions into the lifestyle of the “Other”: circumscribed by colonial whim and allowance, movements become fixed and predictable. The environment is “civilised”, along with how people move and interact with and within this environment. Colonial monitoring also applies to individual behavioural and cultural movements. Assimilation policies have arguably proven even more damaging than the preceding isolation policies (Hemming and Rigney, “Unsettling Sustainability” and *Indigenous Engagement*; Hemming et al.). Indigenous languages all across Australia, including Ngarrindjeri languages, were tentatively suppressed by successive colonial governments who judged them counterproductive in light of their assimilationist agendas.<sup>182</sup> There is a close connection between language, place and human relationships with place. It has been argued that “[l]anguages encode collective knowledge bases in a way that

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<sup>182</sup> It is only fairly recently in the history of European colonisation of Australia that Indigenous nations whose language has been nearly destroyed by colonial powers started (re)learning it.



is often non-translatable, but links its speakers to their landscape inextricably. In this way, language can be described as a resource for nature” (Pretty et al. 104). Ngarrindjeri languages encapsulate these connections which have emerged from “corporeal experience” (Chen et al. 10): “language and Country share the same ecology” (Tjukonia 69; see also Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception* 177, 193). The Ngarrindjeri terminology of Ruwe/Ruwar illustrates these connections between bodies, spirits and waters. Translated as “country/body/spirit” (Hemming et al. 92), it is “a concept that encapsulates the interconnection of Ngarrindjeri people, their lands, waters and all living things” (93). Assimilation policies leading to language loss damage these connections.<sup>183</sup>

Cheryl Buchanan (Guwamu Elder) explains:

When I was a child, when people were afraid to speak language, that people were ostracised, people were punished. You know, if you went to school and you said any Aboriginal word, you’d get the cane. And that’s what it was like in the ’50s. And certainly it was even worse before that. You know, when [in] my Mum’s time, when she was growing up. That fear, they put such a fear into people. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 16:04)

Fear acted as a powerful deterrent to language transmission (Pring 158: Ellis, *Songs, Stories and Discussions* C03 125 a/b 31: 20, 36:20 and a125b, 24:30). Along with languages stand cultural practices: *Ringbalin* was halted for almost two centuries because of colonisation. Sumner himself recalls how he had to be initiated outside of his language group because the rupture in transmission was such that there were no Ngarrindjeri Elders to teach him (*Ringbalin: River Stories*). As Glissant argues, “[i]t is the language of a community that controls the main vector of its cultural identity, which in turn determines the conditions of the community’s development” (*Poetics of Relation* 103-4). On top of environmental degradation, there is thus an ongoing impediment to self-determination (Abdulla et al.).

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<sup>183</sup> The (partial) loss of these languages indeed inflicts another rupture to sustainability as the dialogical nature of the landscape–language relationship is severed (Bakhtin 271). The loss of an ecologically rooted language creates an ontological space where answerability across locations, which is born through discourse, no longer applies. These ecologically rooted languages are replaced by what Glissant describes as blocked languages (*Le Discours Antillais*): languages which, because they do not share a relationship with their surroundings, are both disconnected and disconnecting. Unable to create, unable to generate any form of (sustainable—meaning implanted within ecological rhythms and patterns) productivity, these uprooted languages disconnect discourse from ecology, people from their environment.

Irene Watson explains:

Our people have been stripped of all that is required to maintain an ecologically sustainable lifestyle. In addition our spiritual relationship and obligation as caretakers is made difficult to sustain because of the failure of the Australian Government to acknowledge our inherent right to self-determination. ... the majority of indigenous nations residing in the State of South Australia remain dispossessed. (67-8)

Calls for Aboriginal rights in the river lands are nonetheless slowly being heard.

Peter Williams (Ngiyampaa Elder) ponders:

To imagine that seventy years ago, for someone, or for a group of people, to do this festival [*Ringbalin*], of this stature and significance, yeah, it wouldn't have been allowed I'd reckon. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 15:45)

Cheryl Buchanan explains:

We've only had the Country back ten years now. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 6:40)

Yet, despite some recent—and often highly localised and/or symbolic<sup>184</sup>—improvements (“Water Flows”), regulations of movements within and of environments continue to have a dramatic impact on Aboriginal connections to place in the river lands. The story of Ngarrindjeri cultural weaving offers a particularly forceful account of the far-reaching and dramatic impact of these intertwined attacks on self-determination. These impacts bear upon the shape of the

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<sup>184</sup> Indigenous knowledges remain neglected or submitted to reductionist treatment (that is, discarded/silenced) when they do not fit within pre-existing structures/regulations, and are used to fill gaps in western scientific knowledge rather than as a framework/knowledge source in their own right (Johnson and Hunn 287; Hawke). The inducements linked to this “data mining” and the partial insertion of Indigenous knowledges in discourses that cannot support their ontologies has been argued to cause much harm (Johnson and Hunn 286; Whyte). Denial of native title claims in the river lands, along with the MDBA’s lack of “real” consultation (that is, open and potentially destabilising), also excludes Aboriginal Nations from management (for instance, see *SA Murray-Darling Basin* 6; as denounced by Weir; Hemming et al.; Hemming and Rigney, “Is ‘Closing the Gap’ Enough?”; Hemming and Trevorrow). This represents another way to disconnect people from their environment. The Ngarrindjeri have nonetheless managed to develop agreements with the Alexandrina Council and other managing and/or researching bodies over the years (Hemming and Trevorrow; Hemming and Rigney, “Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar” 351-3; Hemming and Rigney, “Unsettling Sustainability” 765-7). These agreements hint at necessary “shifts in power” (Hemming et al. 92), and the resulting Indigenous-led initiatives offer unique solutions to national challenges (Hemming and Rigney, *Indigenous Engagement* 4).

practice (what its role and place are within Ngarrindjeri society since colonisation), the practice in itself (as a concept and cultural expression of the Ngarrindjeri people), and the material of the practice (the impact of colonisation and ecological devastation on gathering practices and sites). These diverse violations of self-determination (such as fixing identities or displacement) have not only discouraged Indigenous peoples from maintaining their cultural practices, but have additionally left them with fewer opportunities for transmitting these practices to the next generations (Rowse; Willis et al. 194).<sup>185</sup>

“The land and waters is a living body. We the Ngarrindjeri people are part of its existence.”

*(Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan 13)*

Loss is also physical; dislocation is sensorial. Colonial regulations create a (dis)order<sup>186</sup> which results in unhealthy bodies. Country is eco-sentient, that is, capable of feeling and sensing.<sup>187</sup> It is described as “sick” (Clarke, “Twentieth-Century Aboriginal Harvesting Practices” 103). The disfigurement and illness of the river’s body leads to disfigurement and illness of the human body: there is a parallel deformation and dysfunction of Indigenous bodies (as in, of place) under the pressure of European colonisation (Hemming and Rigney, “Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar” 351). There are “no conceptual separations” between entities, whether human or more-than-human (Muir et al. 263). Desecration of place goes hand in hand with reports of declining environmental and human<sup>188</sup> health (Simons;

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<sup>185</sup> In severing ecological connectivity, loss indeed has a dramatic impact on intergenerational connectivity. It dictates what can be transmitted, and how this transmission can occur. As places succumb to environmental degradation and disappear, knowledge can indeed often no longer be passed down in an embodied form, if at all (Weir 136-48; “Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 8:30).

<sup>186</sup> Settler management generated a human-made disorder of nature’s order (Byrne and Nugent; Gibson, *Seven Versions* and *South of the West*; Weir 45). Ironically, the settler environmental ideology which disrupted and flattened a textured space was supposed to bring order. This confirms what D. B. Rose argues: “[t]o create order is to promote loss” (“Tropical Hundreds” 60).

<sup>187</sup> A similar eco-sentient understanding of the environment is witnessed in the ontologies of most First Nations throughout the world (Whyte).

<sup>188</sup> It has been noted that Aboriginal people of the river lands bring together “the metaphysical/spiritual paradigm of their own culture and the western bio-medical and social determinant paradigms to create a cohesive explanation for their illness and disease states” (Willis et al. 191).

Willis et al.; Hattam et al. 111). In the early days of colonisation, smallpox travelled down the river ahead of settlers (Taplin 260).

Tom Trevor states:

The land and waters must be healthy for the Ngarrindjeri people to be healthy. We are hurting for our Country. The Land is dying, the River is dying, the Kurangk (Coorong) is dying and the Murray Mouth is closing. What does the future hold for us? (*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 5)

Cherie Watkins explains:

The spirit of the land is weakening. We are weakening. (qtd. in Tjukonia 70)

Doreen Kartinyeri says:

I cried enough tears to flush the River Murray. (Kartinyeri and Anderson 186)

People and waters merge in suffering. Connections are fusional, visceral. Country sprouts into human configuration. Places are built on anthropomorphic attributes and metaphors: the place names Goolwa and Coorong respectively mean “elbow”<sup>189</sup> and “neck” (Simons 27). Hindmarsh Island’s pre-colonial name (Kumarangk) hints at pregnancy and womb: it is where blood pools, in the lakes (144). It is where the waters meet. The land is a body. Waters are part of the blood system—rivers become arteries (Bell). Locks and dams are clots deterring blood from flowing. Geographies are tortured.<sup>190</sup>

Cheryl Buchanan laments:

And it’s the same, just like your heart, when the blood isn’t flowing through, it’s very very similar to what’s happening to the rivers. And if you can imagine how poor diet makes you, you know, get clots and things like that, well it’s the same

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<sup>189</sup> Although Goolwa has also been recorded elsewhere as derived from *Gutungald*, meaning “the place of cockles” (Mattingley and Hampton 183), but this seems unlikely as cockles is translated as *kuti* (Birckhead et al. vi).

<sup>190</sup> I paraphrase Glissant who discusses the “géographie torturée” (“tortured geography”) of his home island subjected to colonial yoke (*Le Sang Rivé* 21). He goes into detail: “[l]a rivière était naguère comme un delta d’infimes irrigations, pulpeuses de sangsues, où les tournolements de moustiques prenaient l’ampleur de cataclysmes très naturels. ... Mais c’est aujourd’hui un caniveau, son delta comblé, trace d’industries besogneuses” (“the river used to be like a delta of minuscule irrigations, full of leeches, where the mosquito whirls took the breadth of very natural cataclysms. ... But it is now a gutter, its delta filled, sign of lumbering industries”) (*L’Intention Poétique* 220).

thing, exactly the same thing, that's happening to our river system. ("Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin" 3:50)

If waters do not flow, there is no life. Hydrological connectivity is essential (Hattam et al.; Birckhead et al.; Hemming et al.).

Major Sumner says:

It's changed in a way where our fish is not there. The fish that we relied on, and that was given to us by our creator, there's not there anymore. ("Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin" 5:59)

One of the most obvious aspects of Ngarrindjeri life that has been affected by the lack of waters is their diet. Fish and other water creatures once constituted their primary food source (Clover 12). *Ringbalin's* participants often comment on the drastic dietary change due to the rarefaction of sustenance from a river which once provided a rich and varied source of livelihood. Many recall times when, thanks to the cultural knowledge held by their language group, Country provided them with ample sustenance (Willis et al. 191; Rankine; Pring 173; Clarke, "Twentieth-Century Aboriginal Harvesting Practices" 103; Birckhead et al. 29-34). This granted them self-sufficiency and self-reliance despite their lack of material wealth (Abdulla et al. 6-12; Pring 157-72). Throughout this riverine region, there is strong archaeological evidence which supports accounts of frequent gatherings around abundant food (Weir). It explains its comparatively dense and semi-nomadic settlement prior to European colonisation (Berndt and Berndt, *A World That Was*; Weir; Clover 4-5). Besides stories of abundance, dietary memories are also imprinted with memories of communal activities. Food connects: around food, people join, rejoice and communicate. As colonisation leads to the rarefaction of sustenance, it attacks and threatens these binding properties of food.

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I witness some of the bonds that can be made around food. Food trucks occupy the left side of the field for *Ringbalin*'s last stop at Bristow Smith Reserve, Goolwa. Chef Andrew Fielke specialises in native cuisine. Kangaroo tail and damper bread are on the menu. Everybody is excited about trying the native berry sauce that goes with it. I talk to the people standing in front of me. The people standing behind me join the conversation: we exchange ideas about what we expect to become a part of as the ceremony is about to begin.

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It is not simply food which has been dramatically impacted by colonisation, but also waters. Memories of clear drinking waters occupy a pivotal place in Ngarrindjeri expression and perception of environmental degradation.

Ellen Trevorror remembers:

But then there's the environment. That isn't so good; like the changes to the land, the fish, the birdlife, the water. Like I mentioned, I'm from where the river and the lake meet and we were able to drink the water. You can't now. We didn't have a water pipeline or anything like that. We just had the river as our water source. ("One River: Weaving")

Changes in water quality and quantity are a threat to Ngarrindjeri survival. Above food, these waters are essential to Ngarrindjeri identity: they represent an integral and central part of it.

Major Sumner decries:

Something like that [absent and/or dirty waters] will destroy us if we let it. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 3:27)

He develops this theme:

If you ask how important the river and the lakes is to us, it's like taking our spirit away from us. You're dead, you're nothing, you got no feeling. ("Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought" 4:14)

Beryl Carmichael explains:

Well it's like the blood in my veins. Without it, no water, we'll die. It will kill us. It will kill our spirits, it'll kill our spiritual connections. It will also kill our spiritual selves. ("Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin" 2:23)

The importance of healthy waters to the Ngarrindjeri community goes beyond a mere desire for ecological health, and the subsequent benefits to individual human health.

“We say that if *Yarluwar-Ruwe* dies, the waters die, our *Ngartjis*<sup>191</sup> die, then the Ngarrindjeri will surely die.”  
(*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 13)

Compromising and contaminating waters represents the ultimate assault: it is physical as much as spiritual—it is a violation of human rights, especially for Indigenous populations (*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*). The relative independence of colonised Indigenous peoples depends on unrestricted access to healthy waters.<sup>192</sup> There is a well-documented link between self-determination (especially cultural) and ecological health/sustainability at the global level; and colonisation has resulted in dramatic changes in the accessibility of basic dietary requirements for Indigenous populations throughout the world (Whyte).

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<sup>191</sup> *Ngartji* loosely translates as totem. The *ngartjis* are part of the Ngarrindjeri interspecies kinship system: people, places and ecological entities are connected to one another through totemic relationships from the moment of conception.

<sup>192</sup> Waters are fought over by Indigenous peoples throughout the world. The most recent and most extensively covered example of this is probably Standing Rock.

Illness is far-reaching—it is not only physical. While framing his mission as a “resistance to their downward progress towards extinction” (258), Reverend George Taplin nonetheless wrote:

We have deprived the natives of their country, sadly diminished their means of subsistence, and introduced a state of things more fatal to them than the barbarism in which they before lived. (257)

In his journals, he reported the decline in health as soon as he succeeded in implanting his religion:

It is a singular but undoubted fact to me that as soon as the natives become pious and cast off their old superstitions they begin to suffer in health and sometimes die. It is very strange and inexplicable, but it has been true in every instance I have seen. The bad health always succeeded the desire for religious knowledge and the manifesting of pious feelings. The only reason for this which is at all probable is the dread of witchcraft which preys on the mind. (qtd. in Jenkin 102)

Alongside his attempts to implant agriculture within the Point McLeay mission (and the relative lack of success of such an endeavour<sup>193</sup>), Taplin worked to convert Ngarrindjeri residents to Christianity. He pushed for both physical and spiritual transformation—and his effort was even commended by Prince Alfred on his visit in 1867 (Barry and Grimshaw 242). These disruptions of both mind and body inflected Ngarrindjeri rhythms to impose European religious and agricultural rhythms; both of which are particularly tyrannical and intransigent (Harari). Lefebvre argues: “[w]hen relations of power overcome relations of alliance, when rhythms ‘of the other’ make rhythms ‘of the self’ impossible, then total crisis breaks out, with the deregulation of all compromises, arrhythmia” (*Rhythmanalysis* 99-100). The landscape in particular is described as completely altered (Tindale and Pretty 43; Berndt 13): it has been transformed for control, for shaping the “other” into (religious) submission (Hayles; Clover 91; Gale, *A Study of Assimilation* 154).

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<sup>193</sup> Taplin was not particularly successful in implanting agriculture and several factors have been proposed as reasons for his failure, including the fact that the plot allocated to the mission was relatively small and, despite his efforts, Taplin could not secure a larger plot because of hostile neighbours (Mattingley and Hampton 183-6).



An iconography of Country that bound people together is erased: a gap between symbol and substance continuously widens (Meinig 164). Country becomes an “impressionable surface” whose ichnography of criss-crossing tracks (Carter, *Ground Truthing* 37-8) is overwritten: its body is scarified. People disconnect. Carter writes: “[a]griculture is a culture entire, a mode of dreaming places into being. The clearing integral to its practices is also the ‘clearing’ of Western knowledge in which the light of reason is cultivated” (*Ground Truthing* 34). Such a coerced rhythmic transition has repercussions for what sociologist Pierre Bourdieu defines as habitus, that is, “embodied history, internalised as second nature and so forgotten as history” (56). Ngarrindjeri people were removed from their habitus *per se*<sup>194</sup> as a large portion of said habitus was deformed beyond instantaneous bodily recognition and ontological comfort: features were transformed—Country was disfigured, flattened, chopped and desecrated; and the interpretive frame for reading Country was subjected to great tensions and altered. This corresponds to a semicide, that is, the attempted destruction and the resulting disturbance of both the physical and symbolic meanings of Country.<sup>195</sup>

Displaced or removed physical markers disconnect place from stories, Country from memory.<sup>196</sup> This change in habitus disturbs both encultured senses and bodily hexis, and thus threatens “miraculous encounters” where other bodies respond in certain ways to interactions with one’s body based on both memory and expectation (Bourdieu 60). There is no longer a “memorable pattern” (Carter, *Dark Writing* 272). As such, anticipating the (near) future through bodily responses to habitus becomes harder, even near impossible: the “numb imperatives” of the body are no longer met (Bourdieu 69) and fusional connections between place and people disappear. Such dis-synchronisation between embodied memory and habitus means that the ability, possibility and opportunity to read Country wane. Semicide thus

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<sup>194</sup> As Point McLeay Mission was located on a significant site within Ngarrindjeri Country (Gale, “Patterns” 22), Ngarrindjeri people mostly avoided being removed from their Country, unlike some other Indigenous Nations. This was precisely why Taplin selected the site to erect the mission in the first place (Hayles 90). Yet, it should not be overlooked that kinship lines were still broken as many Ngarrindjeri people were displaced because of employment needs and stolen generation policies (*Ngarrindjeri Lakun* 9-10). It is interesting to note that the mission was named after George McLeay, Sturt’s second-in-command during his voyage down the river (Clover viii, 51-2).

<sup>195</sup> Semicide is a corollary to ecocide and genocide. Semiotician Timo Maran has discussed this concept at length.

<sup>196</sup> Here memory is used in the sense of “the bodily sedimentation of accomplished acts, which gives us a past and a future” (Archer qtd. in Wise 923). It could also be termed “place-memory”.

disturbs the “counter-muscles” of Country which can no longer respond in the same manner or be understood as “counter-muscles” because of a different interpretive frame. These ruptures are felt in and through the body, which becomes alienated from both land and culture. Disoriented by unknown sensorial and rhythmic maps, this body becomes ill; it is perturbed in its movement routine, in its “muscular consciousness”.<sup>197</sup>

By rupturing co-evolving symbiotic agencies and severing bodily connectivities, colonisation in Lower Murray Country creates rhythmic fragmentation between peoples and places which used to share osmotic relationships. Colonisation indeed impedes the fluid dynamics of “meshwork”, that is, the concatenation of rhythms which interpenetrate and configure each other (Ingold, *Being Alive* 71). Colonisation means that Country is occupied, rather than inhabited, to draw on anthropologist Tim Ingold’s differentiation (*The Perception of the Environment*). Under such a colonial order, embedded being in Country is challenged by a theatrical occupation of space.

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I stand on the shore, I feel the rhythmically unsound contours of landscape. Concrete paths and signage delineate where I am to walk. The firetruck in the background is ready to extinguish the fires surrounding the ceremony, should they get out of control. We are to remain within the lines.

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<sup>197</sup> I borrow these notions of “counter-muscles” and “muscular consciousness” from Bachelard (*The Poetics of Space*). The phrase “muscular consciousness” refers to the body knowledge of the evolving textures and contours of place that people acquire as they interact with said place in their daily life. This muscular consciousness conditions their capacities for responses (that is, their understanding of the “counter-muscles” of Country).

*Ringbalin* provides a discursive structure which supports the expression of ruptures: *through Ringbalin*, riverine Aboriginal communities in general (and the Ngarrindjeri Nation in particular) document and illustrate the decline and appalling state of the river environments. They create a space from which to vocalise their understandings and perceptions of loss and carry these across so that they can be comprehended by a non-Indigenous audience. As such, *Ringbalin* is a potent and polymorphous platform to carry Aboriginal voices across mainstream political, environmental and cultural scenes. The ceremony in itself and its multiple platforms have given me the opportunity to grasp the extent—both social and environmental—of loss in Murray River Country from Aboriginal perspectives.

*Ringbalin*'s participants account for loss through broken bodies—their own as much as those of their community and Country. Their perception and knowledge of loss is experiential, embodied: the world is known “through the body and the body through the world” (Solnit, *Wanderlust* 29).<sup>198</sup> Doing conditions the formation of a “muscular consciousness”. By doing, the “counter-muscles” of Country are learnt; instances where these “counter-muscles” have been altered and damaged can subsequently be identified. Participants detail at length how walking, treading Country, spending time with and in Country is at the heart of the ceremony. Without this active bodily engagement with place, there would be no performance. Such a practice is telluric, that is, arising from, sustained by and rooted in Country. It is by performing—by doing—that people know and connect to their surroundings. Doing creates an embodied repository of knowledge. And, as Ingold points out, to carry such an act of remembrance “is not so much a matter of calling up an internal image, stored in the mind, as of engaging perpetually with an environment that is itself pregnant with the past” (“The Temporality of the Landscape” 152-3). *Ringbalin* provides a space for bodies to learn and express this embodiment: performance is indubitably “one of the most powerful media through which this complex of related social, spiritual, musical, ecological and environment concepts is enacted and embodied” (Mackinlay 84). Through this embodiment, *Ringbalin* induces emotions,

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<sup>198</sup> This is in accordance with philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view that perception is mediated through the body (*Phenomenology of Perception*). The body is inseparable from one's (subjective) experience of the world *and* from the world in itself, as a space that the body inescapably occupies (70).

that is, “socially mediated reflective interpretive filters through which we experience our embodied affect” (Wise 934). Geography itself becomes “emotional” (Koch and Hercus 5). It is as such that the Ngarrindjeri Nation articulates “feeling-as-knowing” (Bell 219-25). Acquired through emotional and sensorial interactions with Country, knowledge is not always expressible. It is inked and inscribed in matter: it is of flesh and blood. Perceiving environmental loss goes beyond words; it is tacit (see also Polanyi). Feminist theorist and philosopher Karen Barad writes:

There is an important sense in which practices of knowing cannot be fully claimed as human practices, not simply because we use nonhuman elements in our practices but because knowing is a matter of part of the world making itself intelligible to another one. Practices of knowing and being are not isolated; they are mutually implicated. We don’t obtain knowledge by standing outside the world; we know because we are *of* the world. (185, original emphasis)

Shaped by corporeal sensibility, such an embodied form of knowledge contrasts sharply with colonial practices of surveying. It places the bodies of Country and people in communion.

## Rhythmic Continuities

These expressions of rupture also highlight continuities: the maintenance of a strong link between people and their environment is evident in accounts of parallel illness; and transmission still happens in the cracks of environmental devastation and denied self-determination. Through cultural productions that rise out of Country, Aboriginal Nations attest to ruptures (that is, acknowledge and account for the impact of colonisation), while demonstrating the superficiality of these ruptures. Country remains saturated with meanings, memories and emotions. To some extent, *Ringbalin* acts as a disturbance of the colonial narrative of progress in the river lands and provides the Ngarrindjeri Nation with a re-empowering outlet to renew and/or reaffirm their relationships with place and culture: to surpass or debunk the loss inflicted by colonial hands. *Ringbalin* reveals and/or (re)develops continuities that reach into the past and stretch into the future.

## Healing Bodies

The revival of *Ringbalin* is synonymous with a reconquest of movements in defiance of the colonial law and narrative. As it travels from Queensland to South Australia, the ceremony rewrites/counterpoints the Aboriginal experience of controlled movements. It *is* Indigenous movement through space (through Country) against the backdrop of ongoing colonial regulation. It rises against the monitoring and dictating of what can be done and how it can be done.

This journeying also demonstrates a way of perceiving the world, a way of thinking. It is “intuition in action” (Deleuze and Guattari 409): emplaced meaning grows from the movements—and particularly the walking movement—that characterises it (Satchell; Muecke et al.). As they allow for feeling the contours, substances and textures of Country, walking movements represent a privileged mode of encounter with the environment (Baugh). Journeying has also become a powerful means of Indigenous subversion and protest against colonial powers. From the North American Anishinawbe grandmothers who have travelled their Mother Earth Water Walk every year since 2003<sup>199</sup> to Aboriginal<sup>200</sup> Clinton Pryor who walked across Australia in 2017 to ask for justice at the Parliament in Canberra, members of Indigenous Nations worldwide journey to (re)claim their voice and right. The energy of the journey—the energy collected through journeying—infuses and translates into the words that are uttered along the way. As anthropologist and ethnologist André Leroi-Gourhan states: “l’homme commence par les pieds”<sup>201</sup> (71). The act of walking, of journeying, represents the first step along the way to freedom. And indeed, movement is reclaimed, not only geographically through travel, but also within bodies. Traditional performance—dance, sound, story and music—makes *Ringbalin*. And through these physical movements, spiritual freedom is also reclaimed: the body, no longer trapped within colonial confinement, frees a space for the mind.

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<sup>199</sup> With the exception of the year 2010, they have carried water and offered prayers to the waters they encounter every year.

<sup>200</sup> Of Wajuk, Balardung, Kija and Yulparitja descent.

<sup>201</sup> “man starts with the feet”.

The use of body paint throughout *Ringbalin* illustrates the power of this reclaimed freedom. Body paint and colours are a potent symbol of Indigeneity, particularly in the colonial mind. It is a powerful practice because it makes the connections between people and Country visible. As body paint is applied onto performers, both people and Country appear as active and interconnected subjects in the ceremony. Country is both a palette and a participant (Van Toorn; Muecke et al.). In this way, paint frees the body by (re)connecting it to Country. Its use becomes the symbol and expression of this (re)connection. It is the physical manifestation of embodiment. As paint is being applied, the link between Ruwe/Ruwar is affirmed and reignited. The act of painting itself is also significant because it reunites form and process: they (re)appear as unseparated and of equal importance, despite the “systemic bias in Western thought” that tends to dissociate them and privilege one over the other (Ingold, “The Temporality of the Landscape” 161). Painting becomes performance: an “act of contemplation in itself” rather than the preparation of something for hypothetical future contemplation (161). Painting already means deeply engaging with Country.

*Ringbalin* journeys in harmony with the environmental rhythms and the flowing of the waters. It is resistance to rhythmic ruptures. Its cyclicity—its repetitive nature over the years—means that its performance represents an ongoing engagement through which relationships to Country are embodied and (re)enacted (Mackinlay 83-4; Dunbar-Hall). Reclaiming movements and freeing bodies is thus a way of asserting, consolidating and (re)activating connection with places, cultures and peoples: it is a way of healing the many dysfunctioning bodies. Movement is medicine: performing dances the spirit back into entities. It means being involved in non-binary movements (unlike walking). The multiple beats of the ceremony call for listening to plural agencies—the healing process is reciprocal.

Major Sumner says:

when you dance on the land, you’re letting Mother Earth know you still care about her. This is about restoring the energy, dancing the spirit back into this country, dancing the spirit back into ourselves, into Aboriginal people. ... We looked after each other, and we looked after our country. We need to do that again. It’s time we reconnected with each other, with ourselves, with our ancestors, with the spirit of our motherland. (qtd. in Riley 37)

He adds:

There is a need to do ceremony, to dance the spirit back into the lands and the people, from one end of the river to the other. (“Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought” 2:03)

He adds:

We’re dancing for ... the spirit of the water to come down and heal our land. Heal everyone’s cultural land right through. (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 0:27)

*Ringbalin*’s participants cover great distances to show (Country) that people care. The performance could be described as environmental art: it is art for and with nature—and not about or in it. There is a collaborative and reciprocal aspect to it. Connecting with the environment through performance is a means of regenerating all entities. Journeying as part of *Ringbalin* is the opposite of surveying. The focus is on present sensations rather than on potential future applications of these sensations. The space is approached as shared, lived and imagined in common: it is not “the indifferent space subject to the measures and the estimates of the surveyor” (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* xxxiii). The present of *Ringbalin* is not simply the present, it is the “continuous present” (Stein 220). This non-linear division of time represents an important ethical positioning (D. B. Rose, *Reports*). It makes “situated engagement” possible, as an antidote to the power of universals (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 332). Situated engagement respects ecological rhythms. It opens up possibilities for regeneration and resilience by drawing on the natural power of places, waters, and ancestors (Pring 175). Movements reconfigure relationships with Country as they demonstrate that continuity also comes (with)in and as change, through ongoing engagement.

Conducting *Ringbalin*, besides healing, also acts as a proof of survival—as a platform of resistance and denunciation. *Ringbalin* proves the biases of the colonial historical narrative and its attempt to break rhythms in order to cross memories out.<sup>202</sup> It provides a living record of the ongoing environmental demise of the river

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<sup>202</sup> I borrow this vocabulary from Glissant in *Le Discours Antillais* where he discusses a “mémoire historique raturée” and “rythmes brisés” in response to linear and hierarchised historical narratives (133).



lands, along with the tentative erasure of Aboriginal traces and presences from these Countries.

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I listen to Major Sumner discuss what people have always done to Country and the misuse of waters since the beginning of European colonisation. His message is simple, and yet powerful. He is charismatic.

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*Ringbalin* highlights the continuous activities—the imagined absence—of Aboriginal peoples in Murray River Country. It renders obvious the ongoing historical and geographical presence of co-existing water literacies, each with its own evolving specificities. Such an intercultural vision destabilises hegemonic Eurocentric practices, and refutes the settler myth of exclusivity and uniformity achieved through annihilating conquest (Carter, *The Lie of the Land* 366-8). It counterpoints the construed silence of the colonised land, and the “blank” slate—the *terra nullius*—is doubly filled, as both the supposedly erased and the imposed are *re-membered* (brought together, again). This reveals the presence of meshed and shared landscapes, of multiple and mingling continuities; of intermeshed narratives inserting themselves within the colonial narrative of discovery and progress.

Rhythmed by car tracks and footsteps criss-crossing the river lands, *Ringbalin* is often described as a 2300-kilometre pilgrimage (McLeonard; *Riverstories*). This English term “pilgrimage” brings an Aboriginal *démarche* within a framework of European spirituality. The connotations and history attached to the word give the act a mythic and mystic quality. *Ringbalin* is a journey, but this journey is of a spiritual and moral bent. Being a pilgrim implies walking where others have walked

before, following their journey. It implies mimicking and reliving their experiences. And indeed, the performance of *Ringbalin* reveals—reminds of—cross-temporal connections and continuities. Feeling the presence of ancestors merges past, present and future in place.

Cheryl Buchanan explains:

The spirits are there, they're just there with us, you know. ... It was like a bit *déjà-vu*-ish. It was as if you're going on a journey that other people had done many, many years before you. And I really had that sense, and I could, I could actually feel, that other people had done this before. I had this image in my head of, you know, dancing, happening and fires, and all of that stuff. Yeah, it was just, oh wow, that was just exhilarating. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 7:12; 9:53)

Major Sumner says:

It is like sending a message, to our ancestors. We're coming together, to dance the spirit back to the land. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 4:52)

The tension between temporalities is achieved through the reiteration of movements: continuity comes in the form of walking in the paths of ancestors. The past is contained within the present, within Country (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin”; *Ngarrindjeri Lakun* 40). In reliving the journey of the ancestors, each generation also relives the dreaming (Pring 174-5). As such, *Ringbalin* highlights cultural continuities. It presents a transhistorical narrative which refutes peaceful settlement and the supposed contemporary absence of Aboriginal custodianship within river landscapes. It reveals undeniable predating and ongoing Aboriginal traces. It reveals “two intertwining histories: one Indigenous, the other Western; one of abundance, the other of depletion; one of occupation, the other of abandonment” (Lane).

*Ringbalin* makes history, as understood after this quotation from a Yirrkala Elder: “Art is messenger for the land: the land cannot speak” (qtd. in Neale 92). The ceremony is constitutive of the region’s metrical arrangement, and vice versa. *Ringbalin* makes history, in the sense that history is “the process wherein both people and their environments are continually bringing each other into being”

(Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment* 87). Country provides a crucial intergenerational reservoir of memories (Cigoli and Scabini 56; Irwin et al.). Gibson writes that “[t]he landscape itself has a memory, and the story-teller [the performer] activates it so that the community can know its place in the world of time and space” (*Seven Versions* 68). As they take part in the ceremony, participants (re)inscribe themselves within the landscapes of Country and culture—they (re)connect with them. They re-insert themselves (and others) within their changing Country, connecting it to what it used to be, and with what it is. The performance of *Ringbalin* reclaims movements and rhythms. It contributes to healing as it frees bodies and (re)activates/renews connections—as much with Country as with the past, oneself and one another, and disproves colonial myths of erasure and/or disconnections. Such movements open up a space for the transmission of knowledge.

## Teaching Bodies

*Ringbalin* has a marked didactic vocation. It is designed to teach the next generation as they embark on the journey. *Ringbalin* (re)constructs or builds collective memories: it encourages intergenerational engagement and learning.

Major Sumner states:

They want to go and learn culture. They want to learn about the dancing, they enjoy it. They want to get away from what they are doing. They want to learn about who they are. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 5:46)

Symbiotic relationships arise from the range of encounters fostered by *Ringbalin*. The dynamism of the performance emerges from the people being brought together: there is a catalytic emulsion of energies. Performing—moving in a synchronised, socially codified way—means listening and synchronising rhythms, that is, “intimately making contact with the rich fabric of social formations which are sedimented” in place (Chen 534). It is “movement [that] activates these relations so that they become alive and revealing” (534): ancestors and Elders guide the latest generation. Cultural reproduction is a dynamic process (Jenks 3; Burke 98); the transmission of embodied memories happens from bodies to bodies (Radstone and Hodgkin 23). As a remembrance of the past is inserted into present (inter)actions, collective memory is anchored: (re)formulations appear as connectors mirroring past formulations (Gongaware). Such continuity implies that it is not only the practices that are transmitted, but also a sense of identity and pride.

Cheryl Buchanan details:

You know what it did for me, was just saying to my children and to my grandchildren, and the grandchildren who aren't even born yet, that you know, don't be afraid, don't be afraid, be proud of who you are. Be proud of your identity, and be proud of this place that, you know, you have been born into, because every footstep that you have, some of your ancestors have stepped there before you, and that all the air that you are breathing, they have breathed that before you. It will stay with me forever. And I think all of the people who were a part of that journey, no doubt in my mind, would feel the same way. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 29:50)

Major Sumner explains:

The rain is following us. You can see it coming across the land. When you look behind us as we're travelling, you can see the rain coming behind us. And when we got to the place where we had ceremony, it's like it stopped there. When we finished, it had come in. Even though we can never really fully understand our ancestors and how they worked, every place we went, it was like visiting the ceremonial places. Our ancestors were taking the rain there. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 24:47)

What seems to matter is not so much the finished product—the DVD, the app, the articles—but the creation process during the actual event. Performing (re)creates Country, it awakens ancestors: it revives the environment and peoples' connections to it. This creation process creates “a sense of community” (Lawrence 25). Being involved means learning and feeling these connections. Bodily gestures are culturally inhabited. Movements are “a process of human action in time” that builds communities (Farrar 90). Providing a space in which to perform these movements and share them is as much about self-determination as it is about transmission. Being included and taking part in something that appears as a long-lived tradition is essential to developing feelings of community belonging (Hobsbawm and Ranger). The ceremony is structured as an opportunity to pass knowledge down as performers of all ages share the stage. It is a giant, public community gathering. It provides Aboriginal Nations with meetings points, or “geographies of communality and continuity within which social activities are co-ordinated and synchronised” (Edensor 8). Engaging in the journey reveals the social shape of Country.

Agnes Rigney states:

it doesn't matter what language group or what group you belong to, there is a common cause, there is a common thread along the river people. (qtd. in Weir 97).

The journey to surpass loss is (re)uniting: Aboriginal Nations across the river lands connect to defend waters. This reflects the fact that “Indigenous Australians have been forcibly united: united in dispossession, in oppression, poverty, sadness and, never let it be forgotten, in struggle and resistance” (Chance viii). As Glissant states: “[t]his is the only sort of universality there is: when, from a specific enclosure, the

deepest voice cries out” (*Poetics of Relation* 73-4). I also think of author Albert Wendt who writes: “[l]ike a tree a culture is forever growing new branches, foliage, and roots” (“Towards a New Oceania” 52; also stated in “Reborn to Belong” 25). This journey opens other paths and reveals other cultural avenues to travel. The Ngarrindjeri Nation leaps outside of Australia and looks for connections with other First Nations worldwide. They have more of an impact—they are louder—that way. The body of Country symbolically stretches beyond geographical borders: survival happens through the growth of these “new body parts” (el-Zein 239). Biopolitics go from local to planetary (Wilson, “Postcolonial Pacific Poetries” 63). A global community emerges: a “Fourth World” (Manuel and Posluns 5-6) woven around the “hyphenated histories of Indigenous modernity” (Johnson 324; see also I. Anderson 18).

“We therefore see the benefit of building links with other Indigenous peoples who share our challenges and who share responsibility for our culturally significant species. ... We will maintain and strengthen these alliances and plan to engage with Indigenous groups elsewhere in the world.”  
(*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 30, see also 31-51)

*Ringbalin* is about encounters and meetings. As such, it is also designed to teach non-Indigenous people. People of all backgrounds from across the river lands connect around the ceremony. It is a space of convergence where border epistemologies can be sketched as waters become text (Hawke 239). It also provides people with an outlet to their feeling of powerlessness in the face of environmental degradation. Together, they can imagine and discuss potential solutions. The global scene plays a role in local ecologies: performances such as *Ringbalin* connect participants to other, global movements, while paradoxically focusing on and retaining localism.

The app functions in a similar fashion. It records Elders telling stories about their Country. Viewers are invited to step into these Countries. They are shown the environment through personal narratives. This environment acquires meaning as the video progresses. Viewers start to feel connected to it: unfamiliar, foreign

landscapes become familiar and welcoming. An emotional connection is shared. It builds on symbolic images and narratives of colonial destruction. Continuity rises from bearing witness and inviting others to bear witness as well. This continuity is rooted in Country but travels many routes. It has a global reach as it infiltrates real and imagined spaces such as museums, galleries and online sites.

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Towards the end of the ceremony, I come onto the sand with the others. Men are taught to perform the kangaroo dance, women the emu. Major Sumner reiterates that we are all living together on Country and that, as such, we must care for it together as well. He invites us to join him and the travelling crew next year. We dance together on the sand in between the fires. We stay close to each other to repel the wind. There are people of all ages: each moves how they can. Toddlers and elderly people are slower; teenagers do not seem to be able to stop jumping. We all show (Country) we care in our own way. There is an intrinsic inclusiveness in a rhythmic (body-based) approach to environmental care.

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Everybody is welcome to engage with *Ringbalin* and participate in the ceremony. It is an exercise in inclusiveness. The proposed “cure” to colonial degradation lies in “glocal” imaginary Countries—in emplaced Countries of imagination (see also B. Anderson).

Major Sumner explains:

Bring the people together. That’s the most powerful energy you can get, it’s to bring the people together so that we look after this country together. (“Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought” 5:23).

“Our Lands, Our Waters, Our People, All Living Things are connected. We implore people to respect our *Ruwe* (Country) as it was created in the *Kaldowinyeri* (the Creation). We long for sparkling, clean waters, healthy land and people and all living things. We long for the *Yarluwar-Ruwe* (Sea Country) of our ancestors. Our vision is all people Caring, Sharing, Knowing and Respecting the lands, the waters and all living things.”

(*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 5; also stated in Hemming and Rigney, “Unsettling Sustainability” 757 and “Ngarrindjeri Ruwe/Ruwar 352).



## Embodied (Re)Empowerment

Major Sumner states:

It's us mob that have to teach people how to live in this country, and this is about doing it our way. (*Riverstories*)

This teaching—similarly to the expressions of ruptures—is not abstract(ed). It happens by doing: it requires an active engagement with Country. As feminist and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson summarises: “Our [Indigenous] sovereignty is embodied, it is ontological (our being) and epistemological (our way of knowing), and it is grounded within complex relations derived from the intersubstantiation of ancestral beings, humans, and land” (2). Journeying not only symbolises a reconquest of movements, it is also a spatial reconquest of this sovereignty. This reconquest does not correspond to claiming ownership but is a means to reaffirm custodianship and custodian duties. These notions build on moral responsibilities and obligations on a human scale (Robin 217). As such, it has been argued that Aboriginal knowledge “is not a toolkit for management, but an ethics for living” (Muir et al. 260).

Tom Trevorror summarises:

we had a perfect management plan in place, and that management plan was: don't be greedy, don't take any more than what you need, and respect everything all around you. That's the management plan. It's such a simple management plan, but so hard for people to carry on and to do. (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 10:32)

Matthew Rigney explains:

The emphasis of our roles, responsibilities and spiritual/cultural connections to our Mother, Mother Earth, is as profound yesterday as it is today and will be tomorrow. We must not neglect these mandatory responsibilities. (qtd. in Birckhead et al. i)

Major Sumner explains:

We had to do something, we had to be involved in a way that we only know how to. And that's through ceremony. That's through dancing, asking our ancestors

to help us, to bring that water. Ask our ancestors to bring it down. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 3:56)

Journeying, and performing *Ringbalin*, means (re)implementing the Ngarrindjeri management plan. It grants visibility to this plan: it becomes a means to show, promote, and enact it. It becomes a means to take action.

“Maintaining (looking after) the environment is something that Ngarrindjeri must do. It is the same as, or an extension of, looking after oneself. ... Ngarrindjeri have responsibilities to their Elders and ancestors to look after the country and the burial sites and other culturally significant places that still exist.”

(Birckhead et al. 7)

Caring for Country is approached locally, but through a holistic lens (*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 12; Birckhead et al. 38; Farley Consulting Group 5-6). The journeying reveals songlines which illustrate this “glocal” approach: while each song is rooted in its Country, it also connects with other songs and cannot stand without them. The fact that *Ringbalin* happens in Aboriginal languages is not anodyne. Words and footsteps reunite with Country’s features and textures. Through these connections, songlines generate a map which covers all of Australia. *Ringbalin* is concerned with caring for the environment in its entirety.

Cheryl Buchanan explains:

Those songlines connected you right throughout other parts of Australia. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 7:47)

The practices dictated by such songlines are based on dynamics of respect, mutuality, connection, and reciprocity of nurturing, care and health (Brearley et al. 8). Beyond and besides survival, *Ringbalin* is about moving towards rebirth. It is not about persisting but about living and thriving. Journeying means (re)discovering Country and people. It means remembering continuities and surpassing the colonial rule(r). It is an act of internal resilience, rather than imposed resilience. As such,

*Ringbalin* is re-empowerment: Aboriginal Nations of the river lands take matters in their own hands and act as game changers in the colonial play.

Peter Williams states:

I want to be a part of this [*Ringbalin*] because for a long time now, I have seen the misuse and mishandling of our fish traps and our river ... So yeah, I am happy to be here. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 11:33)

Major Sumner explains:

People say: oh yeah, it had to rain some time. Of course it did. But it just rained when we were dancing. ... When we danced that night there, after we finished dancing, the rain came, and it came and it came. It just kept coming. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 1:34 (repeated at 31:15); 28:10)

Cheryl Buchanan says:

Being on that journey, suddenly, I realised that we had become rainmakers, we had actually become rainmakers. And you know, I have talked to people since then, and every time they talked about all the rain that came, I say: yeah, I was one of the people, I danced that up, I was there, you know, we made all that happen. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 26:50)

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The revival of *Ringbalin* reminds me of the unavoidable and necessary dialectics between destruction and creation (Fry, *A New Design Philosophy*). Environmental loss in settler societies almost seems necessary: it fissures colonial discourses and practices, offering points from which they can be challenged. It provides First Nations with a prominent and powerful site from which to engage with colonial unsustainability.

*Ringbalin* fits within these fissures: it is an attempt to reinstate Aboriginal management practices of waters. It gives such practices visibility and encourages the wider community to engage with them. Unlike their colonial counterparts, these practices are inclusive. *Ringbalin* is also a potent reaffirmation of waters' capacity

to restore and reconnect entities. It reiterates the ways in which waters ramify in networks of health, which are to be activated through active engagement—through performance. It is as such that *Ringbalin* is an outlet for (re)creation, reconnection, and above all, re-empowerment. The choice of Archie Roach’s “Jamu Dreaming” for the soundtrack of the documentary and the app reinforces my impressions.

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An unnamed participant concludes:

Wow. This is all I am going to say. That’s what we set out to achieve, a difference for our river by singing Country. And now I know more about singing Country. And there’s more to come. There will be more than the flood. It will be a flood of culture. (*Ringbalin: Breaking the Drought* 29:24)

# Vision 3—

**Translated Waters: Key Changes and  
(Re)compositions**

The landscape gives you the sounds,  
the sounds give you the words,  
and the words give you the songs.  
Steven Wanta Jampijinpa Patrick (Warlpiri Elder)  
(qtd. in Martin)

The soundscape of the Murray Mouth entered the colonial auditory imaginary by omission. This soundscape did not exist (it was silence): the first European boat crews in the vicinity repeatedly missed it. Captain Matthew Flinders sailed past on his 1801–2 expedition from England to Sydney aboard the *Investigator*. He did not chart it as he did not see it, let alone hear it. Neither did fellow explorer Nicolas Baudin when he also sailed past aboard the *Géographe* during his 1800–3 expedition. These two legendary figures, tasked with (and now best known for) charting Australian coasts, both failed to identify an estuary. It was not by lack of proximity to it. In April 1802, both men met and shared the data that they had gathered from their respective scientific surveying. Their meeting was peaceful, despite the war raging between their two nations. Flinders named the place where they crossed paths Encounter Bay. It is less than thirty kilometres away from the Murray Mouth.

During his trip, Flinders also “discovered” Kangaroo Island, an unpopulated island located just off the coast from Encounter Bay. Whalers and sealers were already using this place, which provided an ideal location to launch their expeditions. Small temporary settlements operated from the island from 1801, until the establishment of the South Australian Whaling Company in Encounter Bay in 1836 (Staniforth). These early whalers and sealers did not know about the Murrundi/Murray River either. Its mouth still refused to open and speak to the newcomers. They knew about the lakes though, and encounters continued to occur there, particularly in the Coorong. These encounters were far from being as pleasant as the polite exchange of information between Flinders and Baudin. The silence of the “undiscovered”

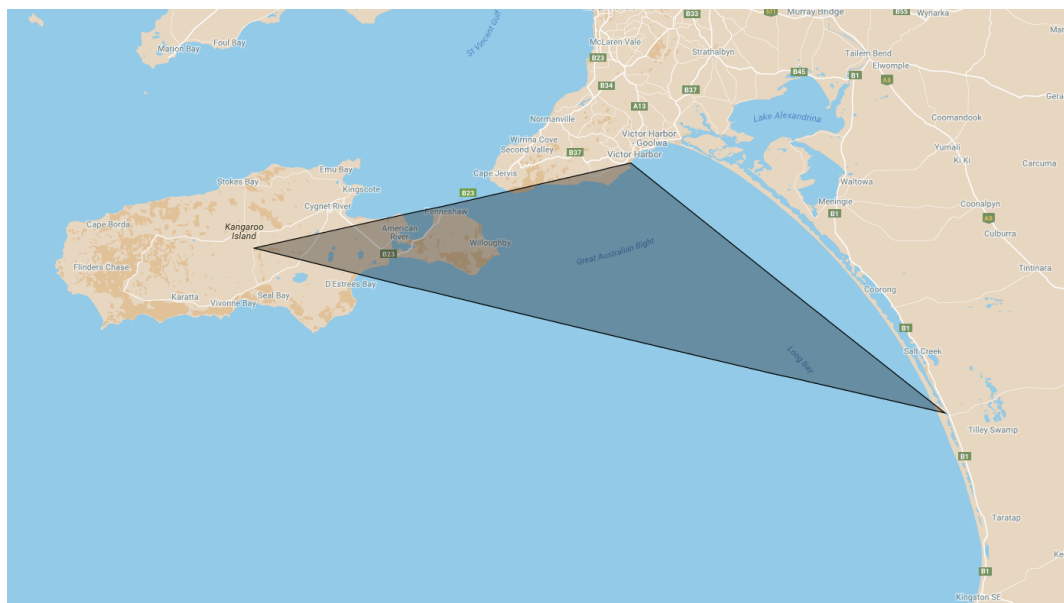
Murray Mouth rapidly filled with gunshots and blood-curdling screams. Whalers and sealers came ashore to kidnap women from the local Ngarrindjeri Nation and took them to their base on Kangaroo Island, where they were already holding kidnapped Tasmanian women. One of them drowned while attempting to swim back home, as if forced into a macabre colonial parody of the Ngarrindjeri story of Ngurunderi and his two wives.

“Meanwhile, Ngurunderi’s two wives (the sisters of Nepele) had made camp. On their campfire they were cooking bony bream, a fish forbidden to Ngarrindjeri women. Ngurunderi smelt the fish cooking and knew his wives were close. He abandoned his camp, and came after them. His huts became two hills and his bark canoe became the Milky Way. Hearing Ngurunderi coming, his wives just had time to build a raft of reeds and grass-trees and to escape across Lake Albert. On the other side their raft turned back into the reeds and grass-trees. The women hurried south. Ngurunderi followed his wives as far south as Kingston. Here he met a great sorcerer, Parampari. The two men fought, using weapons and magic powers, until eventually Ngurunderi won. He burnt Parampari’s body in a huge fire, symbolised by granite boulders today, and turned north along the Coorong beach. Here he camped several times, digging soaks in the sand for fresh water, and fishing in the Coorong lagoon. Ngurunderi made his way across the Murray Mouth and along the Encounter Bay coast towards Victor Harbor. He made a fishing ground at Middleton by throwing a huge tree into the sea to make a seaweed bed. Here he hunted and killed a seal: its dying gasps can still be heard among the rocks. At Port Elliot he camped and fished again, without seeing a sign of his wives. He became angry and threw his spears into the sea at Victor Harbor, creating the islands there. Finally, after resting in a giant granite shade-shelter on Granite Island (Kaika), Ngurunderi heard his wives laughing and playing in the water near King’s Beach. He hurled his club to the ground, creating the Bluff (Longkuwar), and strode after them. His wives fled along the beach in terror until they reached Cape Jervis. At this time Kangaroo Island (Karta—the land of the dead) was still connected to the mainland (18,000 years ago), and the two women began to hurry across to it. Ngurunderi had arrived at Cape Jervis though, and seeing his wives still fleeing from him, he called out in a voice of thunder for the waters to rise. The women were swept from their path by huge waves and were soon drowned. They became the rocky Pages Islands. Ngurunderi knew it was time for him to enter the spirit world. He

crossed to Kangaroo Island and travelled to its western end. After first throwing his spears into the sea, he dived in, before rising to become a star in the Milky Way.”

(*Ngurunderi—An Aboriginal Dreaming* 4)

Relations did not improve. In July 1840, the twenty-five survivors of the wrecked brigantine *Maria* were reported to have been slaughtered by the local Aboriginal inhabitants. Retaliation was swift. A punitive expedition departed from Adelaide in August and two men were hanged—despite the speculations surrounding the actual circumstances of the *Maria* deaths.<sup>203</sup> The watery areas around the Murray Mouth became the stage for traumatic and violent encounters between the Ngarrindjeri and the European whalers and settlers. Already connected through Ngurunderi’s story, Encounter Bay, Kangaroo Island and the Coorong saw these connections redefined and reshaped as they came to form the points of a triangle characterised by these painful initial contacts.



Map 3. Triangle of (Dis)Connection

(Source: Google My Maps)

By then, the Murray Mouth had finally registered in the colonial auditory imaginary. From non-existent to violent, its soundscape turned into a disappointment because

<sup>203</sup> Depending on sources, the tale of the event differs (see for instance Hackett 24; Cameron-Bonney; Rigney xii).



it was unsuitable for safe navigation. There were no precipitating, fast-flowing, deep waters to be heard. The Murray Mouth symbolised a perceived lack of rhythm: the sound of “progress” being slowed down. In February 1830, Captain Charles Sturt almost forfeited his life to this mouth that still refused to open to the newcomers. Travelling from New South Wales down the Murray River aboard an unnamed whaleboat, he had planned to undertake his return journey by sea. He entered the Lower Lakes and saw the Mouth but failed to cross it and reach the sea. Running low on supplies, he was forced to cave in: he retreated and carved his way back against the currents. This contretemps nearly cost him and his crew their lives. From the other side of the Mouth, Colonel William Light was just as quick as Sturt to dismiss it in August 1836 when, aboard the *Rapid* and scouting for suitable ground to implant the utopian city of Adelaide, he saw “at a glance that there was no satisfactory harbour at or near the Murray Mouth” (Light 28).<sup>204</sup> He was congratulated on his instantaneous dismissal of this incomplete estuary, which was attributed to his great experience as a surveyor. The Mouth frustrated the colonial imaginary.

The Mouth is an incomplete estuary; an estuary that cannot be expected to speak with its single line of shore deposit. Its morphology altered by barrages, it is instead to remain forever incomplete: its Mouth separated from its lakes. No flow no speech no voice.

This mouth that failed to connect river to sea for the Europeans symbolised a broken promise: it was not obvious how riches could come from its waters. It thus went from missed to dismissed. As the Murray River became dotted with locks, colonial

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<sup>204</sup> Although the Mouth did not provide a suitable site to implant a deep-sea port, a river harbour (suitable for inland travels) was later developed in Goolwa and connected to the sea (in Port Elliott) by railway, somewhat compensating for the shortcomings of the Mouth in European minds.

disappointment grew: waters around the Mouth became increasingly saline<sup>205</sup> and turned muddy from the lack of upstream flow. As early as 1887, concerns about the rising salt levels in the Lower Lakes (and up to Wellington) due to upstream extraction were raised in debates in the South Australian Parliament:

Many people imagined that there would be nothing to fear from only flood waters being taken, but this was a great mistake. All the floodwaters were required to drive out the salt water. (Sim and Muller 11)

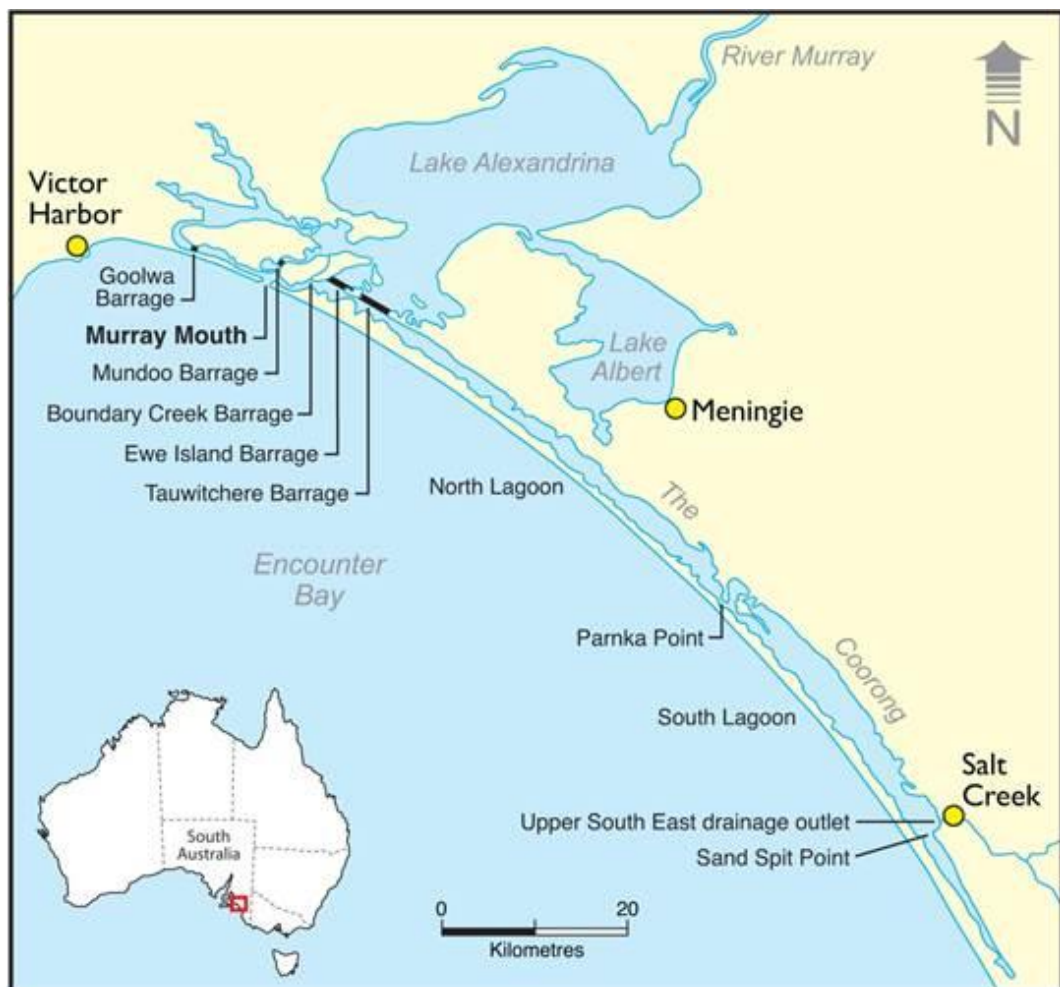
Not enough water was flowing down the river, and sea water had been pushing its way inland. South Australia regularly complained about the liberal water extraction policies of other states. Local members kept pressing the issue until 1889, but to no avail. In 1890, another solution was considered: the construction of barrages blocking the Goolwa, Mundoo and Coorong channels. Two years later, in July, the South Australian Parliament was presented with a report on controlling the waters of the Murray Mouth. Local councils and residents kept pushing the issue with the state government. Things were slow to move. It took ten years—until 1902—for a Murray Water Commission and an interstate Royal Commission to conclude that salinity was indeed increasing: “[i]nstead of the water being fresh, as it should be naturally, it has either been brackish or as salty as the sea” (Sim and Muller 12). These new conditions were described as so “phenomenal” that fish were “driven out of the lakes” (2). Reports on the poor health of the Lower Lakes continued to flood in. The main concern raised was the dying of the reeds on which the cattle fed. These reports travelled upstream. In 1903, the *Sydney Daily Telegraph* described Hindmarsh Island as “a saline waste”, when once it was used to “support large herds of cattle on its succulent reedbeds” (Sim and Muller 12). Yet, nothing changed and the controversy surrounding upstream water extractions continued. Over the following years, several solutions were considered; the draining of Lake Albert was one of them. Anger kept growing among residents. In 1912, the local *Southern Argus* published a blistering column:

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<sup>205</sup> Waters everywhere in Murray River Country have been affected by rising salinity, along with the soil around them. However, this rising salinity has been exacerbated near the Murray Mouth, a logical consequence of its geographical location.

But meanwhile the river is being so drained by irrigation works that its level is so steadily sinking that the lower stretches are becoming almost tidal, and the sea water is finding its way far up stream .... Lakes Alexandrina and Albert have ... become a menace instead of a rich asset to the people resident on their shores, and unless barrages are put down there is prospect of each year finding conditions worse and worse. (Sim and Muller 13)

From 1914 to 1935, events unfolded fast: several test barrages were built; propositions to drain both lakes resurfaced; residents and commissions continued to report on the poor environmental health of these lakes and their surrounding areas; long-term schemes of various costs were designed to remedy the situation; agreements to build barrages were read and ratified in the South Australian Parliament. In 1935, the construction of the barrages commenced. All five barrages were erected by 1940 (“Fact Sheet”).



Map 4. The Five Barrages of the Mouth  
(Source: Parliament of Australia)

But none of these interventions truly fixed the problem. The five barrages at the Mouth attempted to stop backward flow from the sea, but did little to control the salinity ratio in the inland waters. Not enough flow, deforestation, irrigation and ploughing inevitably led to a rising salt table—there was no need for the sea to stretch inland for these previously fresh waters to become corrosive salt waters.<sup>206</sup> The draining of the Coorong’s eastern water sources in the 1970s amplified the issue (Hattam et al. 109). Eventually, the Mouth closed in 1981, for the first time in recorded history. Salt could no longer be discharged into the sea. This mouth that initially refused to open to the newcomers could no longer open—it was shut. If it could not be heard for what it was, with its own irregular, cyclical rhythms, the Mouth did not seem to want to speak at all. Actions were taken to force it to open again. For nearly two decades, it has been threatening to close again but for the continuous *staccato* intervention of dredgers.<sup>207</sup> These colonial visions of the Mouth’s waters are visions of failures: first, a failure to encounter, then a failure to sustainably engage with the rhythms of its waters. Such failures, translated by a rapid succession of physical transformations, have led to a brutal erasure (overwriting) of rhythms in the region.

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In January 2015, I saw the Mouth for the first time. I found the sight underwhelming: the mechanical arms of the two dredgers at work to remove sand made as much noise as the backwash of the sea. Everything looked stagnant, in suspension—another *nature morte*. I had read environmental reports, but it still came as a shock to witness the extent of the devastation. There was barely any water, and the few visible watery particles appeared thick and brown from the dredgers’ agitating hustle and bustle. Each dredger was eating away at its own sand dune on each side of the Mouth.

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<sup>206</sup> Some of the waters around the Mouth have always been saline, but with a much lower proportion of salt (one that does not destroy life).

<sup>207</sup> Dredging first started in October 2002 and ran until December 2010. It then started again in January 2015, in response to concerns that the mouth had been “constricted” since 2013 (“Keeping the Murray Mouth Open”).

Oceanographer Jochen Kämpf and anthropologist Diane Bell trace the Mouth's historical desire to move (escape) and open elsewhere: "the position of the Murray Mouth has migrated over 1.6 km since the 1830s, with migrations up to 6 km over the past 3,000 years. Movements of 14 m over 12 h have been observed. Thus, the Murray Estuary is naturally a geomorphologically highly dynamic area" (33).

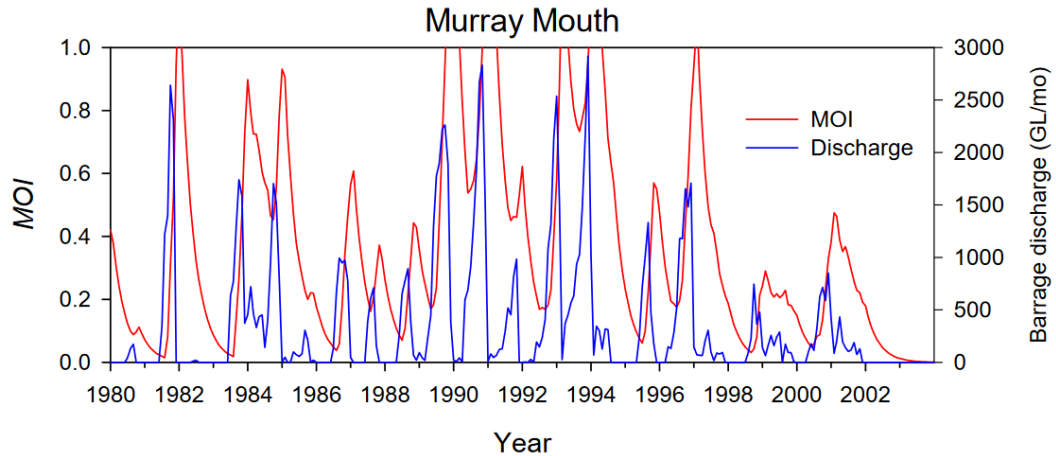
The space in between them is narrow: a mini-channel between two saline bodies; one trapped and trying to break free, the other pushing its way inland. I stand nearby on the hot sand and I feel disappointed. *This* is the end of the Mighty Murray. *This* is what it is all about: this immense, endless *nothingness*. Suddenly, I understand how Sturt felt, and the bitterness he consigned to his journal. I understand why Light might not have given the place a second look. I am as much an explorer in and of this Country as they were. Two British conquistadors looking for the next paradise—be it a commercial route to the sea or a perfect city; a PhD candidate searching for something as elusive as paradise: inspiration. It is assuredly not here.



Photograph 7. Dredgers at Work at the Murray Mouth

I mainly blame it on irrigation. Maybe it is easier to blame what you cannot picture accurately. The food basket mythology is destructive. I am thirsty. It is a hot summer day, in a typical South Australian fashion. If I listen, I can almost hear my skin sizzle. I lick my lips which have been dried by the wind. They taste salty. This nothingness is salty. Salt is everywhere; it coats everything, eroding place and sculpting hearts. I also smell it—this salt—omnipresent, stringent, corrosive. It is prickling wounds but failing to disinfect. I imagine the blood smeared onto it. I remember tales of pristine waters: drinkable liquid that one only had to scoop up in the hand to enjoy (Sim and Muller; “Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin”). Saltwater is now preponderant. I am far from the womb: the waters are no longer meeting. The barrages, just a few hundred metres away, the locks, weirs, pipes and dams upstream, the draining of the wetlands to the east: all these physical transformations produce a different kind of speech exiting the river’s Mouth—an arrhythmic speech.

There is now a Mouth  
Opening Index (MOI).



(Source: Webster 5)

It highlights that water discharges are not great.

Vision 3 seeks to explore how to compose while being thrown out of balance—while standing unbalanced—in such an arrhythmic space. For that purpose, I am interested in exploring music that offers ways to compose with shadow-casting salt waters and to write different scores for them in an attempt to find life-sustaining polyrhythms. More precisely, this vision aims to illuminate how composers, sound artists and performers use sound to reimagine and transform our relationships with these Mouth-adjacent saline watery zones.

In focusing on the briefly surveyed triangle of early colonial connections and encounters running from Encounter Bay through the Coorong to Kangaroo Island, Vision 3 contrasts with previous chapters which centred on musical imaginaries around the river. This vision represents the last stage of Lower Murray Country’s waters before their mixing with sea waters—it represents the last section of my thesis before the concluding vision. It emerges from thirteen pieces of music which are bound together by their collaborative nature.<sup>208</sup> As these pieces are not

<sup>208</sup> These pieces involve exchanges across and beyond ethno- and/or anthropocentric boundaries and divides, as detailed in the body of the analysis. This collaborative nature is also what primarily differentiates them from the music of Vision 1: they engage with crises, be they environmental or interpersonal, rather than solely offering forms of lamentation over the deplorable environmental destruction all too visible in these opaque waters. Additional differentiation comes from the fact that these pieces are not descriptive (about waters: Vision 1) or Indigenous (Vision 2), but inspired and shaped by waters and watery relationships, including Indigenous relationships, with these waters. It is interesting to note that four of the pieces under scrutiny are based on recordings by anthropologist Norman Tindale in December 1932. Performed by Milerum (Clarence Long, reputed to be the last Ngarrindjeri person to escape the missions and be raised by family), these recordings were

descriptive but inclusive of waters, it does not seem pertinent to use geographical and/or topographical mapping. Rather, I play with spectrograms (visual representations of the spectrum of sound frequencies) to create sound maps.<sup>209</sup> These represent attempts to see the rhythms of waters differently—outside of number-based mapping and charting. I also use scores as a form of maps (codified sonic maps which function similarly to spectrograms, albeit less accessible to the non-musician) to offer a visual representation of how salt waters are musically expressed on paper.

Rather than treating the thirteen pieces under scrutiny by genre,<sup>210</sup> I have organised them along three main lines of enquiry to demonstrate how the artists use resonances to engage and compose with the Mouth's arrhythmia.

In the first section, I focus on recuperative resonances created through mimesis involving translations (the Richard Coates Quintet's "Eulogy for the Coorong" and Barry Conyngham's *Kangaroo Island*, with a brief focus on Chester Schultz's *Ngartong* and *Keinindjeri's Song*).

The second section is dedicated to restorative resonances created through mimesis involving dialogues (Bruce Emsley's *Sanctuary* and Becky Llewellyn's *Clarence Long (Milerum) Songs*, with a brief focus on Emsley's *Island Wilderness*, Becky Llewellyn's *Milerum's Basket* and Schultz's *The Land of the Grand-Fathers*);

The third and last section touches on resonances created through mergers, and how these enter into the composition of new, polyrhythmic languages of awareness (Mike Ladd's *Wind and Water (Weatherings)* and Llewellyn's "Whales Weep Not!", with a brief focus on Clayton Elwyn Dennis' "Coorong Breathing" and Llewellyn's "Salt is Rising").

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undertaken on wax cylinders which are now held at the South Australian Museum (Durán). They are accompanied by English translations done in the 1940s by the Royal Geographic Society. A copy of these recordings on a magnetic tape is also kept at AIATSIS. Beside analysing each piece, I also compare the different transcriptions and instrumentations of the original recording, drawing on my own experience of listening to Tindale's recordings at AIATSIS in December 2015.

<sup>209</sup> These spectrograms are generated using the software Audacity.

<sup>210</sup> Some of these pieces are experimental (and particularly acousmatic and/or electroacoustic); while others belong to the tradition of European classical contemporary composition. Two of them are inspired by salt waters; four are shaped by salt waters and contain environmental inclusions; and seven involve interactions and/or collaborations with Ngarrindjeri people and culture, especially in terms of their relationship with waters.



## Recuperative Work: Mimesis and Translation

Towards the end of the Millennium Drought in 2009, the Richard Coates Quintet<sup>211</sup> recorded *Eulogy for the Coorong*. The entire album was created under the impulse of Coates, who had been working on a musical suite which would reflect “his years of travels through the South Australian landscapes” (album note). It contains three pieces: the eponymous “Eulogy for the Coorong” (the album’s first and primary piece lasting 20:16), “The Big Murray Cod” (8:33), and “Maralinga” (19:07).

“Eulogy for the Coorong” is a compilation of a great variety of sound effects inserted in improvised melodic phrases developed by talented performers playing with every potential facet of their instruments.<sup>212</sup> These effects are not anodyne, but tailored to mimic the Coorong’s environmental sounds in order to convey its decay. Mimesis starts with the keyboard and string instruments which craft an eerie sonic background resembling waves crashing and echoing. This reverberation of echoic watery sounds in space stretches throughout the piece, and even continues into the next piece on the album (“The Big Murray Cod”). It forms the essential basis on which everything else is grafted. For these instruments, salt waters are a vivid source of inspiration and mimicking them fuels the musicians’ creative process. This is a common way of expressing and developing musical creativity. Bachelard writes: “L’art a besoin de s’instruire sur des reflets, la musique a besoin de s’instruire sur des échos. C’est en imitant qu’on invente. On croit suivre le réel et on le traduit humainement”<sup>213</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves*, 259). Members of the quintet respond to this mimetic impulse: they engage in a process of translation of environmental sounds into instrumental music. The Coorong transpires through every note that is played, as does its current devastation. The musicians translate well-known factors which came to profoundly disfigure and define the Coorong during the Millennium Drought. The fact that the music is tinged by ecological degradation is further underlined in an album note which states that the piece

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<sup>211</sup> This quintet is a cosmopolitan jazz fusion ensemble made up of South African drummer Brian Abrahams, British flugelhorn player Ian Dixon, and Australians Richard Coates (accordion and keyboard), Chris Soole (saxophone) and Josh Bennett (sitar, guitar, delruba).

<sup>212</sup> The flugelhorn in particular is extremely versatile in this piece thanks to the many different attachments used to modulate the sounds.

<sup>213</sup> “Visual art needs to develop from reflections, music needs to develop from echoes. It is by imitating that we create. We believe that we are following ‘the real’, and we translate it humanly.”

emulates the Coorong which has been “in drought and suffering years of human impacts along Australia’s major waterway”. The album’s title also encapsulates the band’s awareness of the Coorong’s poor environmental state: the recorded music is defined as a eulogy, that is, a musical speech given to celebrate the life of a Coorong perceived as deceased. Mimicking in this context represents a way of musically translating (of remembering) something which is understood as dead/dying. Their translation is to be listened to as a statement of facts designed to honour the memory of the Coorong. It corresponds to a human farewell to an ecological system.

“Ngurunderi’s wives fled back along the Coorong. Ngurunderi followed their footprints north, camping along the way... Ngurunderi crossed the Murray mouth and followed his wives around Encounter Bay, creating fishing grounds and islands. He rested near Pultung (Victor Harbor).”

(“Ngurunderi: An Aboriginal Dreaming”; also stated in *Ngurunderi—An Aboriginal Dreaming* 26, 28)

Such a process of translation is bound to display anthropocentric characteristics despite its inspirational origin in the Coorong’s waters: above all, it is undertaken by humans (the musicians), and directed at other humans (the listeners). Translating environmental sounds in music implies bending them through both auditory selection and musical transcription/(re)interpretation. The primary strength of this musical translation resides precisely in its imperfect, compromised nature: it is not “the real” but its human translation, to paraphrase Bachelard.

Inter-dune  
coastal  
lagoon:

over  
one hundred  
kilometres

of sand.

Humans are in a privileged position to acoustically mimic and create a musical record of human-generated degradation: a human-centred sonic map stretching through time and space. What is mapped is thus not so much the Coorong—as a separate and hypothetical “pure” sonic system—but the Coorong as it is experienced by humans: a Coorong of humans, or a human Coorong. The anthropocentricity of the creative translation process provides a rampart and provision against the common separation of humans and their environments recommended by protectionist ecological discourses. As they mimic human intrusion and suggest the inextricability of humans from—and their impact upon—their (sonic) environments, the sounds of “Eulogy for the Coorong” enable listeners to imagine an ecological discourse which bridges unsustainable divides.<sup>214</sup> This discourse negates the supposed separation of human and more-than-human entities, which, like the divide between nature and culture, appears as a mythological construction. The endlessness of these watery echoes further defies and trespasses boundaries because it conveys a vision of suspended immensity. As echoes indefinitely propagate and reverberate, an acoustic image of infinity emerges. Their emulation of the constant back-and-forth rhythm of tidal movements stretches the concept of waves. Widened across both space and time, these sounds murmur visions of another dimension: the separation between water and sky fades away. They emulate salt waters but resonate in the still air of the Coorong, and both elements partially fuse in this echoic mimicry. These sounds have an audible porosity—an aqueous liquidity: they sonically blur barriers between elements, as well as between entities.

As any act of translation, the musicians’ creative process is a deeply subjective, personal act which requires intense and prolonged engagement with the material undergoing the translation. As such, the degree of improvised mimicry displayed in “Eulogy for the Coorong” calls for a form of deep listening: a careful and considerate awareness of the changing soundscape being reproduced. This awareness does not stem solely from a sonic perspective; it also arises from less easily audible factors which nonetheless contribute to defining the Coorong. Beyond environmental sounds, what is musically translated is also a presence—or

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<sup>214</sup> This (re)insertion of humans within their sonic environments, and its significance, will be discussed in more depth later.

a lack thereof. Echoes teach listeners how to hear “the presence of absence and the absence of presence” (Levin qtd. in Carter, *Places Made After Their Stories* 135-6). The piece’s musical features postulate that the Coorong’s soundscape is defined by clearly audible elements as much as by missing acoustic elements: elements whose voice has been distorted, silenced or erased by environmental devastation. “Eulogy for the Coorong” thus transmits the feelings and sensations of the Coorong’s salt waters—above and beyond their acoustic properties. More than a purely sonic landscape, what is perceived and grasped is an essence, or an atmosphere: the impression of a smell in the air, the weight of this air on the skin. What the musicians grasp is also one another: each player emulates the others. The level of mimicry displayed in “Eulogy for the Coorong” requires attentiveness—and even care—not solely for the waters, but also for the human and more-than-human entities with whom these watery moments are shared. As musicians compose with salt waters, their translation generates a form of understanding. Creative mimicry differs from parroting—the sterile recitation of poorly digested emplacement that reflects both disconnection and alienation. Rather, it represents a way to connect and accept: to understand, in the Glissantian sense of “donner-avec”<sup>215</sup> (*La Poétique de la Relation* 206): a movement that opens rather than closes; that (re)creates rather than freezes (see also Latour, *Facing Gaia* 65). As such, mimicking not only represents a way to express and transcribe these waters; the engagement it requires also responds to the musicians’ desire to think (with) salt waters in order to capture and translate the atmosphere of the Coorong through their instruments. Such mimicry thus implies being (resonant with) water: becoming (one with) waters, that is, entering a fluid and complex network of intertwined connectivities.

While the keyboard and strings initiate these intimate translating processes, the mimesis of environmental sounds soon stretches to other instruments which progressively come to improvise above them. Layers of instrumentation build up from the keyboard and strings’ watery sonic background. The piece contains the sounds of a fluegelhorn, a saxophone, an accordion and some percussion. They combine to mimic larger watery environments and their fauna. The symbolic

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<sup>215</sup> “giving with”.

Murray cod plays a particularly important role: an album note posits that this powerful fish is at the root of the energy infusing the entire album. The percussionist's dynamic lead originates in a cue from Coates to "think like a big, strong fast fish on the drums". The sounds generated by such thinking can be connected to musician and composer Dave Dallwitz's jazz piece "Murray Cod" which is part of the album *Riverboats Days* discussed in Vision 2. Infused with a similar energy, Dallwitz's composition also attributes a crucial role to the drums, which condition the performance of the other instruments. In both cases, the respective drum work of the percussionists transmits to the listeners the image of a large fish swiftly making its way through the waters. Drum sounds become a rhythmic prop that incarnates the cod. And because of the usual role of percussion as active metronomes in charge of most rhythmic impulses in ensembles, the "cod thinking" behind the percussion's rhythmic base leaks through the rest of the music and colours the performance of the other instruments. It is interesting to ponder on the reasons behind the heavy influence of a fish intimately connected to Murrundi/Murray River (and symbolic of its waters) on the soundscape of the Coorong.

"A long, long time ago Ngurunderi our Spiritual Ancestor chased Pondi, the giant Murray Cod, from the junction where the Darling and Murrundi (River Murray) meet. Back then, the River Murray was just a small stream and Pondi has nowhere to go. As Ngurunderi chased him in his bark canoe he went ploughing and crashing into the land and his huge body and tail created the mighty River Murray. When Ngurunderi and his brother-in-law Nepele caught Pondi at the place where the fresh and salt water meet they cut him up into many pieces, which became the fresh and salt water fish for the Ngarrindjeri people. To the last piece Ngurunderi said, 'you keep being a Pondi (Murray cod)'."

*(Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan 8)*

According to Ngarrindjeri mythology, it is from the body of a giant cod called Ponde/i that all other species of fish were created. That the same fish inspired the entire album and gave it its energy seems like a prolongation of this cod's mythical creative properties which reach far beyond its body and actual geographical location.

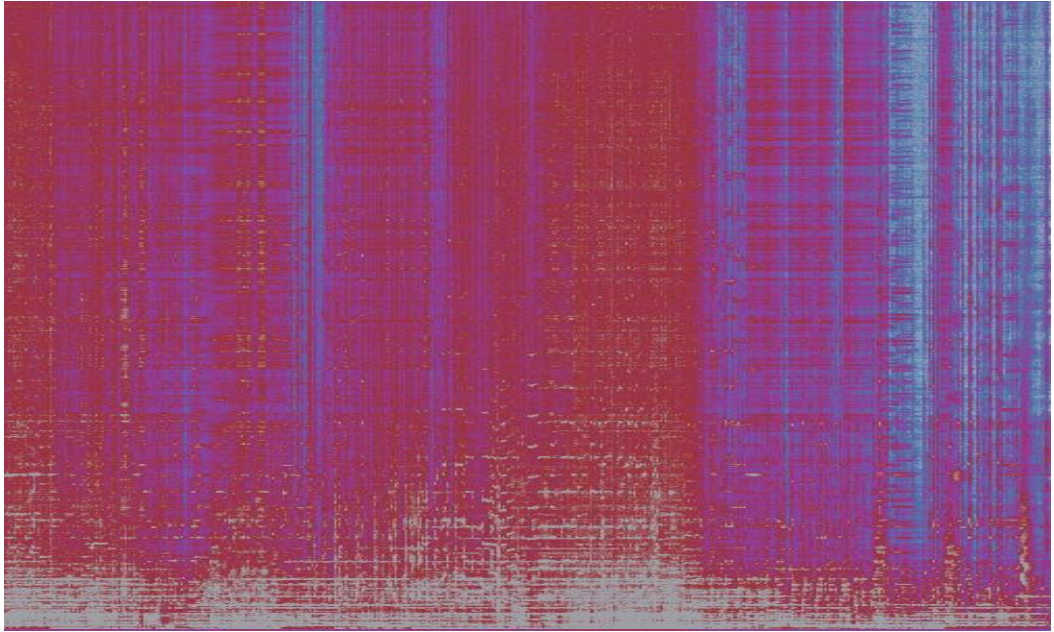
Musically placing the cod in the Coorong is also a strong sonic message of hope in favour of an imagined (re)connection—a reconnection to come?—of the Coorong to the river’s waters, despite the current lack of flow. In this capacity, “Eulogy for the Coorong” can be listened to as a record of changes which have happened in the past, *and* changes that might happen in the future. Musicians translate ongoing environmental decline but also leave their music open to the imagination of more positive outcomes. They propose (and maybe themselves hope for) alternative endings to their eulogy: rather than a lament at a burial, it might transform into a melody for a rebirth. These different hypotheses find some corroboration on the quintet’s website, which presents the album as a “reflection on time, space and transformation”.

These notions (of time, space and transformation) are also audible in the echoic characteristics of the salt waters’ musical translation. Echoes generate a disturbance around any perception of space and time by suggesting the presence of other temporal and geographical locations. As Carter explains, an “echo deconstructs the metaphysical projection of an ‘original sound’” (*Places Made After Their Stories* 135-6). It transports sounds between places and times: a sound uttered at one specific time in one specific place travels and reaches another place and time; it morphs and is modified by the space/surface that it encounters; and then indefinitely travels back to its original place, but at a different time. What comes back reflects the space and time “away” as much as the space and time where it was first uttered, and where it is now heard. In echoic sounds, “here” and “now” merge with “there” and “then”. It becomes possible to sonically map separate (and yet interconnected) places and times through each single echoic sound. Echoes can thus be understood as a device to “resound” space, as explained by Dyson who writes that resounding<sup>216</sup> “multiplies, rather than simply redoubles, sound, in a return that brings to mind a history that precedes the sonic emission and is rewritten, or reshaped, by its return” (157). Listening to echoes as a sequence provides a way to map progressive changes triggered by both the passage of time and the spatial transformations linked to that passage—to sonically perceive and record

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<sup>216</sup> This concept of resounding (extrapolated from philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy) can also be positioned as a form of human translation, hence the re-sounding: sounding the environment again, from a human perspective, as a form of reminiscence about that environment.

environmental changes over time. As such, echoic reverberations provide a way to “sound” the evolution of space in time, that is, to generate an evolving sonic map of this space. What echoes in the “Eulogy for the Coorong” map is therefore a renewed continuity: permanence is change. They illustrate the “endlessly geographically” mobility of the environment—which only becomes fixed through static representational practices (Massey, “Landscape as a Provocation” 35).



Deep Map 4. Renewed Continuity in “Eulogy for the Coorong”  
(from 12:00 to 20:00)

As echoes in “Eulogy for the Coorong” simultaneously contract and expand the sonic space-time continuum of the Coorong by suggesting the piling, overlapping layering and amalgamation of different spaces and times to the listeners, they enable these different times and spaces to be briefly apprehended. Perceptions of time and space indeed reside in hearing or sensing transformations: “[t]here is no absolute time ... Time is that within which events take place. ... Time itself is meaningless; time is temporal” (Heidegger 3E, 21E). Musicologist Justin London explains:

an awareness of duration requires an awareness of change. Without a change in the configuration of our physical environment there can be no sense of time’s passage, and so duration involves the continuation of some features of the environment measured against changes in others.

Auditory sensations of transformation in echoes provide listeners with a way to perceive both duration and emplacement. This perception of time and space is fragile and transient: unlike the printed notes, it rests on ephemeral and modulating acoustic perceptions—on a performance. As poet and sound artist Mike Ladd argues: “non-verbal sounds and the spoken word are always being born and always dying. They exist in space, in the ear, in the perceiving mind, and then, fairly quickly, just in memory” (“Notes” 164). Yet, it is precisely audibility that makes this perception possible in the first place. For instance, the piece opens with the saxophone which, for a few minutes, seems to stretch time with long sustained notes that slowly bounce off the echo-y background. This perceived slowing down of time lasts until the arrival of the flugelhorn, which prompts a more dynamic atmosphere, especially in the response from the drums (played with sticks). This seeming and fleeting capacity of music to provide a sonic way of apprehending time is a topic which has fascinated researchers for centuries. Philosopher Susanne Langer summarises its paradox as follows:

Music makes time audible, and its form and continuity sensible. ...  
It creates an image of time measured by the motion of forms that seem to give it substance, yet a substance that consists entirely of sound, so it is transitoriness itself. (110)

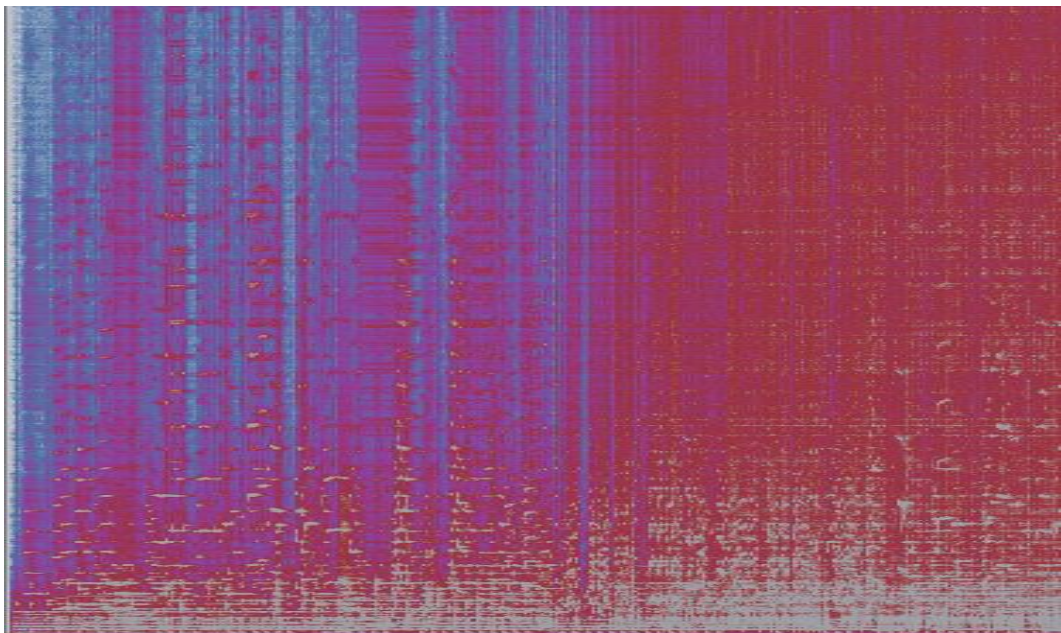
Beside their auditory quality, echoes can also be heard as a conceptual device to capture and illustrate this paradox. They make time audible by “sounding” these transformations and contribute *in themselves* to disturbing this time by creating some of the transformations that become audible. One of the transformations that rapidly becomes prominent in “Eulogy for the Coorong” is linked to the arrival of humans. This imaginary insertion of humans within the waters of the Coorong becomes a “sound” symbolised by the progressive morphing in the sonic consistencies of the echoes from 2:36. The listener starts to picture someone skipping peddles (or water bubbles being exhaled while under water and loudly rising to the air) in the heightened echoic reverberations. These sonic distortions



seem to create a ripple on the surface of the pristine universe previously produced by the performers: in the listeners' imaginaries, humans come in.<sup>217</sup>

The list of colonial modifications in the Coorong is long: from the construction of five barrages to the draining of wetlands; from the acidification of the soil to the rise of salinity due to the lack of flows.

Sonic disruptions in echoic sounds produce a picture of human presence and intervention, both above and under water.<sup>218</sup> As they escalate throughout the piece, they speak of colonial intrusion and of its impact on space over time, effectively mapping the colonial invasion of the Coorong.



Deep Map 5. Colonial Invasion in “Eulogy for the Coorong”  
(from 0:00 to 6:00)

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<sup>217</sup> No human seemed to be part of the sonic atmosphere of the piece prior to this moment, although the creation of a sonic reverberating immensity which seems to stretch millennia can also be heard as a signifier of Indigenous presence.

<sup>218</sup> Around 9:40 for instance, echoes shift and resonate in the background, sounding as if they are suddenly underwater.

There are many other examples of sound distortions that conceptually mimic environmental factors in the Coorong and their transformation due to colonial intrusion. An example of sonic mimicry which acoustically conveys a vision of environmental loss can be heard around 5:40 as the saxophone makes a few quacking sounds reminiscent of a bird. The brevity of these sounds—their fleeting and ephemeral presence—speaks of the plummeting number of entities, which now only fill the landscape periodically and no longer “inhabit” it. Another example is audible at 15:30, when the flugelhorn player progressively drops the pitch of notes to pick it up again on the next ones. As the pitch goes up and down, the coming and going of entities within the landscapes of the Coorong is suggested. Because the pitch mainly goes flat, a picture of environmental decline starts to emerge, especially in a western (classical) tradition where musicians and audience are taught to value pitch perfection and to regard other sounds as imperfect and corrupted. These distortions also trigger visual and odorous flashes in listeners’ minds. For instance, at 13:40, the muted flugelhorn slowly disperses notes, dropping them within the expanded time-space continuum acoustically suggested by the watery echoes. These dropped notes, muted and verging on silence, are reminiscent of water quietly evaporating under a harsh, burning sun. Simultaneously with this muted flugelhorn, one of the string instruments generates a *glissando* metallic sound as the player moves up and down a string without actually playing/pushing a note—without sounding. The performer plays on the resonating properties of such a sound, in contrast to a straightforward sounding note. Listeners’ ears pick up on the sound but relegate it to the background because of its non-vocal characteristics. As it intertwines with other sounds, even in a dissonant manner, this metallic sound nonetheless inextricably mixes itself with the pictures of waters produced as part of the overall performance. The sudden apparition of such an abrasive raspy sound generates a picture of salt: it resonates as a sonic transcription of what salt tastes like on the tongue. As the *glissandi* move up and down, the rub and friction they generate on the eardrums also becomes the sound of the rub and screech of the salt under the sole of the settlers’ shoes, on the wounds of the Coorong. Such a sound appears as an effective acoustic translation of the salty viscosity of the Coorong’s waters: its metallic edges blend within the watery echoes, and salt becomes an inextricable part of these waters—one of their primary constituents. The environment becomes (re)defined as filled by salt waters.



Photograph 8. Waters and Reeds

Another layer of disruption to the space-time continuum is also audible in the performance of the percussionist who sometimes uses brushes (rather than sticks), and the sounds he produces are reminiscent of leaves violently rustling in the wind, being battered by the elements. These sounds are also reminiscent of salt waters swishing and lapping against the earth, eroding it; of salt, water, and earth mixing. Brushes make drum sounds that are suggestive of water because the sounds that they produce are less definite than those produced with sticks. Less entrenched and unequivocal, they allow drum sounds to blend and combine with the sounds of other instruments. This suggests the sonic blurring of boundaries between the entities and spaces that these different instruments mimic and translate. These flowing brush sounds also have a lingering quality that is absent in stick sounds, which only briefly impact the soundscape. As such, they convey the image of a less precisely defined duration in time, reinforcing the space-time disturbance generated by the echoes. The choice to use brushes thus shifts the role generally attributed to percussion: the blurring of their rhythmic qualities means that, rather than “keeping” or imparting time, these sounds dissolve it further. The fact that a primarily rhythmic device such

as the percussion becomes a way of breaking rhythm down means that a form of arrhythmia is turned into an expression of polyrhythmicality.

In summary, watery sounds created as part of “Eulogy for the Coorong” disturb the space-time continuum, contracting and unfolding it because they carry across with them the imaginary and conceptual properties of Coorong’s salt waters, both stagnant and lapping. These waters, like their sonic translation, are always the same and yet constantly different and renewed; they are always at the same place and yet simultaneously elsewhere. They travel through space and time, distorting and binding them together; and these watery properties reverberate and speak through the music. As “Eulogy for the Coorong” recuperates the essence of the Coorong by giving it a musical voice through mimetic translation, it also influences what is and is not remembered. Because of this time-space disturbance, watery sounds can indeed be perceived as (containing) memories to be retrieved. In that perspective, beside translating (lending or applying a human voice to environmental entities), mimicking also becomes a way to interact with historical layers.

Another piece, *Kangaroo Island*, demonstrates this. Also composed in 2009, *Kangaroo Island* is a concerto for double bass and orchestra by composer Barry Conyngham. Commissioned for concert artist and double bass professor Robert Nairn, this contemporary classical piece premiered on 4 April 2009 at the State College Pennsylvania (USA) with a performance by the Penn State Orchestra. The concerto consists of five movements. Because of the focus of this vision on salt waters, only the first movement (“1. Coastline—Seals—Visitors”) is discussed here, although the entire concerto could provide interesting ground for analysis as part of a wider environmental scope.

“He put his canoe up into the sky, where it formed the Milky Way, then he walked down ... But his wives made rafts out of grass trees and reeds and escaped across the lake. ... In the distance, they could see Kangaroo Island. Kangaroo Island is a place where the spirits of the dead go. At that time, it could be reached from the mainland by walking through the shallows. The women headed that way. Ngurunderi stood on the beach and called out to his

wives to turn back, but they wouldn't listen. When they were halfway across, Ngurunderi called out to the sea to rise. A fierce tide came rushing in, flooding the straight. Throwing aside the net bag that she was carrying, the younger sister struggled to swim. The water raised all around and she became weak. She slipped under and drowned. Her older sister swam for a little way, but the waves overcame her and she drowned too. The sisters and their net bag became the three islands known as the Pages. After this time, it was impossible to walk to Kangaroo Island, the Island of the Spirits. Ngurunderi crossed over to Kangaroo Island, the island where we all go. Nearly exhausted, he created a giant swamp oak to rest under. The sound of the wind blowing through the trees caused him to mourn for his wives. He went to the far western end of the island and dived into the sea to prepare his spirit. He cleansed his spirit in the sea and then walked up to the sky where he became a bright star in the Milky Way."

(Sumner in Ladd, *Wind and Water* 41:30)

The score opens with a composer's note stating that "[p]ieces of music cannot be histories or travellers' guides, but they can be reactions to, and musings on, the history and memories of a particular place". For Conyngham, musical composition implies both interactions with the pre-colonial and colonial archives, and personal recollections. The importance of these personal recollections is confirmed as, slightly further into this note, he also writes: "Kangaroo Island is a dream-like musical recollection of a visit to an island off the coast near Adelaide, South Australia. ... The work begins and ends with a theme from which all the music is derived." These two statements are congruent with Conyngham's general approach to musical composition. His personal website and the website of the Australian Music Centre (AMC) present two of his dominant musical themes as "the emotional" and "explorations of what it means to be Australian". In line with these, *Kangaroo Island* interacts with histories and retrieves shards of it to comprehend and emplace Australianness; and gives these interactions emotional (personal) colours. Conyngham brings together histories and his own personal reflections on salt waters as sources of inspiration. This implies that he is aware of the historical and environmental events which have happened on the shores of Kangaroo Island. Specifically about the first movement, the composer writes the following in his introductory note:

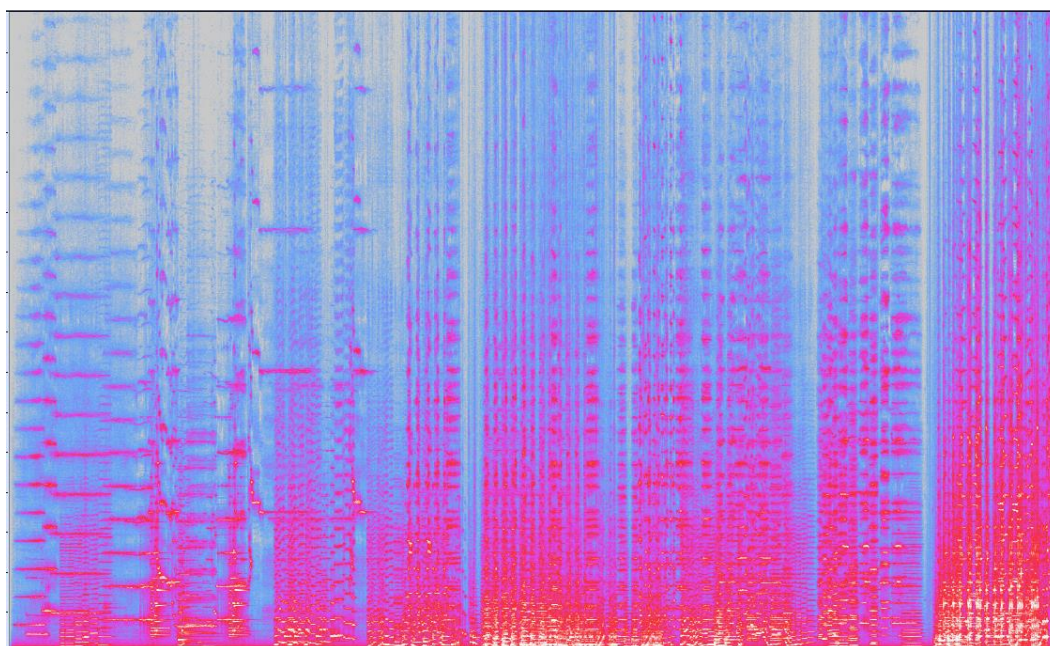
The island has had many visitors, including 18<sup>th</sup> century sailors who are reputed to have kidnapped and brought to the island Tasmanian Aboriginal women; a strange shadow of history over the majesty and beauty of a first sighting. Along the coast, present-day visitors include cantankerous sea lions and playful seals who flock to the rocky shores or sandy beaches, and who in turn attract a steady stream of tourists with their ecology-threatening cars and pollution.

This first movement develops over seventy-nine bars of music (out of 454 for the entire concerto) and lasts for just under five minutes when performed (out of the twenty-two minutes of performance for the entire concerto). Written in 4/8 time, its tempo oscillates between 76 and 104 quavers per minute.<sup>219</sup> The ongoing bursts of double and triple quaver notes charged with accidentals make the movement sound relatively fast-paced and tend toward atonality, despite the fact that the key signature of A minor (the relative minor of C major) sometimes shines through. Both the bursts of notes and the accidentals make for rapid changes which suggest unpredictability. For me, this conveys the composer's difficulty in capturing the complexity of local stories around the waters, and in fixing them within one single key. The movement starts slowly: sound builds progressively, without hurry. Legato and sustained notes in the string section prefigure the introduction of the double bass, playing tied notes with a bow. The coastline is introduced in the distance, with its calm waters—when afar. Other instruments progressively join in—the coastline becomes shore: the waters come to life as the listeners acoustically zoom in. The full orchestra comes and plays within the waters. Besides atonality, dissonances are introduced: the extreme fluttering and bending of sounds, vibrations pushed to deformations—a disregard for accurate (pure or pristine) tone in favour of textures. Voices are plaintively rubbing against each other. These frictions compete for aleatoric soaring or flight: they create an atmosphere, rather than a melody. Seals are elusive: the listeners only get a glimpse of them basking in the sun, or swimming along the coastline with one of their flippers in the air—they are resting. Clarinets and flutes only burst in short sequences. From 2:30, the tension grows along the rhythmic dynamism of the movement. Waves crashing on the shore come to being (imagined). Visitors are coming. This tension culminates

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<sup>219</sup> 76MM at bar 1; 104MM at bar 27; 96MM at bar 35; and back to 76MM at bar 57 to the movement's end.

in the pizzicato passage of the double bass, which happens simultaneously with the change of tempi (from bars 32 to 57). Visitors are here. Most of the instruments are present in this more dramatic part and clashing unisons develop between sections. These instruments fade away as the movement progresses. Towards the end of this faster part, only strings and percussion remain in the background, while the leading double bass devours and drips irregular arpeggios. These aleatoric voices form an acoustic assemblage, or a sonic collage. They suggest the coming together of disparate entities and times; and as several instruments play around similar successions of notes, they also suggest the constant revisiting of these entities and times. They highlight both continuity and change—renewed continuity. Similarly to echoic translation in “Eulogy for the Coorong”, *Kangaroo Island*’s watery rendition thus deeply interconnects salt waters with a wide range of other entities on both temporal and spatial levels. The many interlacing sound waves represent the interlaced memories of these waters.



Deep Map 6. The Interlaced Memories of *Kangaroo Island*  
(from 0:00 to 4:30)

Besides the lack of melodic line, there is also a lack of defined rhythmicity. The piano and harp are the first to introduce some sort of rhythm and give the movement its dynamic edge, followed by the flute a few bars later. Then the double bass joins in and remains fairly rhythmic until a few bars before the end of the movement.

This rhythmicity, though, is disconcerting.<sup>220</sup> The abundance of triplets, septuplets, and tied notes give this movement an arrhythmic feel and balance. The beat grows unclear, blurry, distorted—torn between times, places, entities: what governs overall are the double bass’s musical interjections. It provides the other instruments with a tempo. As it spews its notes, the double bass scatters shards of history over the sonic background provided by the other instruments. As highlighted in Conyngham’s note (quoted earlier), only strands of this past—both personal and historical—can be recovered. What this first movement offers are aleatoric fragments; fragments which appear and disappear within the nearly constant mass of legato string notes—within the salt waters washing the shores of Kangaroo Island. The auditory translation of these waters is to remain a partial rendering of their life. Waves carry sound and memory away, bury them in their depth. Nonetheless, interacting with and mimicking watery sounds remains an evocative and efficient way to bring historical layers back to the surface, to translate them in an acoustic manner so that they can be recuperated and enter the listeners’ minds.

“A long time ago two Ngarrindjeri men went fishing in a bay near Lake Alexandrina to catch the thukeri mani (bream fish). ... They fished and fished until their canoe was full and they said we have plenty of thukeri we will paddle to shore before we sink. As they paddle to shore they saw a stranger coming towards them so they covered up the thukeri with their woven mats ... the stranger said to them hey brothers I’m hungry have you got any fish to share, but the two Ngarrindjeri men said no we haven’t got many fish we only have enough to feed our families. So the stranger began to walk away then he turned and said you have plenty of fish and because you are greedy and don’t want to share you will not enjoy the thukeri fish ever again. ... When the two Ngarrindjeri men unloaded the thukeri on the banks to scale and clean them, they saw that their nice big thukeri were bony ...”

*(Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan 8)*

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<sup>220</sup> Or in French “*déroutante*” which literally translates as “losing the road”. There are no signage or warning signs in the piece: the listener cannot tell where they are travelling to in advance; things come at them unexpectedly.



The same applies to Ngarrindjeri sounds around water<sup>221</sup>: mimicking and transcribing them becomes a way for composers to interact with shards of the past—to revisit both place and history. A good example of this is *Ngartong*. Commissioned by the University of Adelaide Cello Ensemble, *Ngartong: Encounter Bay Jubilee Music* is a forty-seven-page handwritten chamber piece for twelve violoncellos written in 1986 by composer Chester Schultz. It consists of ten short movements. Based on anthropologist Norman Tindale’s recording (1932), it was created for a jubilee ceremony and represents the composer’s effort to (re)inscribe the Ngarrindjeri within “official” history. The second movement of *Ngartong* (“Keinindjeri Sings on the Bluff”) was not performed alongside the others as part of the premiere of the work. Instead, this second movement served as source material for the composition (through transcription and arrangement) of *Keinindjeri’s Song* in 2014.<sup>222</sup> *Keinindjeri’s Song: A Ramindjeri Song* is a fifty-four-bar chamber piece for string quartet.<sup>223</sup> The composer leaves an extensive note on the story behind the original Ngarrindjeri song at the end of the score:

This is a song of historical times sung on Longkuwar (The Bluff at Victor Harbor) by a young man called Keinindjeri. He had the right to marry his brother’s widow, but she delayed; so he looked west towards her spirit-home at King’s Point opposite rocky Ngalaikorombar (West Island), and sang:

*I wonder what holds her, holds that woman of Ngalaikeren.  
 Inside me I feel that someone is persuading her.  
 Those people of Ngarailkeili hold her in their camp with their  
 talk.  
 I wait high up on the Bluff lookout, watching for her.*<sup>224</sup>

In this quartet, Schultz uses the viola to transcribe in detail the melody sung by Milerum in Tindale’s recording.<sup>225</sup> This instrument is traditionally considered a

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<sup>221</sup> This does not mean that I associate environmental sounds with Indigenous sounds, an amalgam which is regularly (and rightfully) criticised by Indigenous Nations worldwide in a range of contexts, especially in regard to self-determination and environmental justice.

<sup>222</sup> It is stated on the AMC’s website that “Permission to use, arrange, perform and publish *Keinindjeri’s Song* was granted by Ramindjeri spokesman Lance Karno Walker in 2006.”

<sup>223</sup> It was first performed on 31 May 2014 by the Australian Chamber Orchestra string quartet at the workshop for teachers “Music + Colour”, as part of their competition project for student composers around the theme of “Indigenous Influence”.

<sup>224</sup> This is a paraphrase of a translation provided by Tindale.

<sup>225</sup> As deduced from my own listening of Tindale’s recording at AIATSIS.

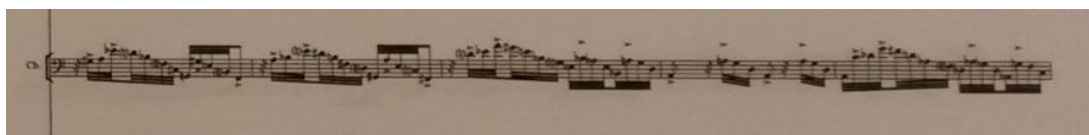
plaintive instrument and, as such, it matches the tone of the story being told. There is also an interesting element to be extracted from the composer's choice to use a viola for this transcription. A parallel can be drawn between the viola-protagonist and the colonised sub/object. On an acoustic level, the viola's place is generally behind the violin—in quartets as much as in larger ensembles. It provides support and accompaniment to the violin, which is in charge of the main melody and in the spotlight. Coerced and subdued to the will of the coloniser, the colonised's position is somehow mirrored in the role of the viola. Expectations of obedience condition their presence in the score (of music and Country): they play second (or even third) role. Even if most likely a subconscious or aesthetic choice on the part of the composer, making the viola the soloist suggests a reversal of colonial tendencies, where the voice of the colonised (the viola) is usually only tolerated as long as it remains subdued to the voice of the coloniser, but sparks outrage if it suggests an equal positioning to the coloniser (the violin): a lead—or at the very least louder—role. As the viola recuperates shards of Ngarrindjeri history and places them under the spotlight, it seems to offer some form of compensation for its previous (and ongoing) silencing. As such, it partakes in transcreation, that is, in a form of artistic (sonic) recuperation which, while different and differing from the original, nonetheless conveys the same message. Such a translation of poetic sounds implies that history is undergoing a constant revisitation. Transcreation pushes the listener to rethink stagnation: rather than the manifestation and expression of a “freeze” in place and time, it generates sedimentation, as layers upon layers of memories feed off each other and keep morphing.

Sediments enrich  
where they deposit  
themselves: it feeds the  
soil nutriments.

Both *Kangaroo Island* and “Eulogy for the Coorong” make it possible to hear (to recover) resonances through the sonic viscosity of salt waters. These pieces impart that the sounds of watery movements (and watery entities) provide rhythms to be listened to and composed within seemingly arrhythmic areas. Salt waters (and Indigenous understanding of and relationship with these salt waters) form a “champ

magnétique”<sup>226</sup> (after Glissant’s terminology) for music: they draw musicians and composers to them and emulate their creations. The composition processes that they generate aim to capture and humanly translate the essence of these waters. In mimicking waters, these composition processes recuperate histories despite disfigurement (arrhythmia). As such, they contribute to (re)layering places with (potentially conflicting) shards of histories and to opening them up to positive future interpretations. Through resonance, mimicry finds biological parallels and (instrumental) metaphors: from the sedimented ground, individual variations are composed *ad libitum*—in each echoic rendition as much as in each listener. This mimetic projection creates a form of resonance, or resonant languages, which open the environment up for sustainable resounding.

The choice of the double bass as the solo instrument in *Kangaroo Island* is also worthy of attention. The body of such a physically imposing instrument provides as big a soundbox<sup>227</sup> as possible for a classical instrument.<sup>228</sup> The properties of the double bass’s cavity can be perceived as a way to further highlight how the many historical layers interact with one another and connect back to the listeners.



Deep Map 7. Extract from the Score of *Kangaroo Island*

The vibrating sounds of the double bass are resonant *in themselves*: such a large soundbox generates a high amount of vibration, especially in its low register. These vibrations superimpose upon one another and resonate (or reverberate) within the chests of the listeners, which act as further soundboxes for the notes, effectively creating new harmonies (oscillating beat frequencies). Here, resonance is also understood in terms of the acoustic properties of the sounds being produced: these sounds are shaped in such ways that they have the capacity to generate sympathetic vibrations or resonant frequencies, that is, they can be reinforced or prolonged by

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<sup>226</sup> “a magnetic field”.

<sup>227</sup> In French: *caisse de résonance*, which translates literally as box or chamber of resonance.

<sup>228</sup> I do not take into account the highly unusual octobass, as only one orchestra in the world currently owns one (while others are in museums), and no more than ten of them have ever been made.

reflection (such as the discussed echoes), or by the sympathetic vibrations of other bodies. Ladd explains that “[s]ounds ... have a greater physicality that literally resonates inside us” (“Notes” 163-4). He continues by quoting producer René Farabet, stating that “[t]o listen is to become porous”, and concludes that “[s]ound is in us, not just perceived ‘outside’. ... [it makes] something happen in the air and the body as well as the mind”. The sounds produced by the soloist double bass transmit vibrations and make nearby soundboxes vibrate: they literally take the listeners by the heart—as they shake this organ lodged within the thoracic cage acting as a soundbox. Such a facet of resonance stresses the sympathetic and emphatic qualities of the sounds which both encourage and draw harmony. As Dyson writes, it highlights “its attributes of sympathy, empathy, and common understanding” (2). The double bass’s resonant language is thus able to evoke emotions and trigger parallel sensations and feelings. Vibrating in harmonic unison through such sounds, chests and instrument enter into a communion. As the sounds of the double bass also carry the many historical layers contained in the salt waters, the listeners’ bodies are metaphorically positioned in these salt waters. The sonic properties of the double bass thus impact the space in which the body of the listener stands.<sup>229</sup> Such a projection is further illustrated in *Sanctuary*.

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<sup>229</sup> On the AMC’s website, it is specified that this work can be performed by a traditional orchestra or by a computer-generated synthetic orchestra. This is an interesting oddity which creates a link between this contemporary classical piece and electroacoustic compositions and displaces the performance out of the traditional concert hall. This also challenges the localisation of the listener’s body, although on a less visceral level.

## Restorative Work: Mimesis and Dialogues

*Sanctuary* is an electroacoustic work produced in 1994<sup>230</sup> by students of composer Bruce Emsley. Held within the State Library of South Australia's collections, it is a cassette recording which lasts for just over sixty minutes. More precisely, it is an orchestral composition<sup>231</sup> with environmental inclusions, and features the "work of nine uncredited composers<sup>232</sup> with the sounds of birdlife in South Australia's Coorong" (as detailed in the State Library of South Australia's online catalogue). The piece stretches throughout the tape without interruption. Because of the presence of environmental inclusions, mimicking is enacted differently in this piece than in "Eulogy for the Coorong" and *Kangaroo Island*. Further than a way to humanly translate environmental sounds to express histories, mimicking becomes a way to build and develop sonic dialogues between humans and their environment.

*Sanctuary* contains fourteen periods with no instrumentation: the listener is only left with environmental sounds. Irregularly spaced throughout the recording,<sup>233</sup> these interludes provide the sonic link from one musical section to another, each musical section standing with different instrumentations and intent marked by dynamic and tempo changes. Additionally, these environmental inclusions open and conclude the recording, as well as providing a link between the two sides of the cassette.<sup>234</sup> Environmental sounds are also present throughout the recording and are used in a similar manner to instrumental parts by the composers. Such a use of environmental inclusions teaches us to be attentive to these sounds: they are no longer considered as background noises to be discarded, but become part of the musical melodies that are generated. In accordance with this awareness, orchestral

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<sup>230</sup> While it was released in 1994 by Sound Environment Productions, the only indication appearing on the tape held at the State Library of South Australia is "5/11/98". This could represent the date the SLSA acquired its copy.

<sup>231</sup> In the case of the specific recording I am working with, this orchestra is a computer-generated synthetic orchestra. I am unsure if it was ever intended to be performed otherwise.

<sup>232</sup> While some guesses might be made regarding the role of each of the nine uncredited composers as slightly different styles and instrumentations succeed one another, it is not the point of this analysis, so I do not focus on attributing credit here.

<sup>233</sup> On Side 1: from 00:00 to 01:02; 06:31 to 07:09; 10:20 to 10:49; 14:15 to 14:58; 17:51 to 18:20; 26:46 to 27:18; 29:47 to the end of the tape, continuing on Side 2: from 00:00 to 01:05; 03:47 to 04:20; 06:38 to 07:10; 13:46 to 14:27; 18:05 to 18:38; 20:53 to 21:44; 26:04 to 26:50; and finally, to end the recording, from 30:30 to 31:25.

<sup>234</sup> Side 2 starts with the same sounds that end Side 1.

instruments are chosen so that they match or complement the sonic qualities and properties of these environmental sounds; and composers also adapt and modulate these instruments to follow the dynamics and rhythmic cues coming from them. For instance, crows, seagulls and other “stronger” (that is, louder) birds and crickets are generally paired with guitars.<sup>235</sup> Instruments and birds are also rather complementary from a rhythmical angle: guitar chords are as precise as seagulls’ cries. Flutes, on the other hand, are generally associated with more “songful” birdcalls, while clarinets sit somewhere in the middle.

The environmental inclusions can be broadly classified along two strands which I investigate in turn: animal and insect activities (in particular, I could discern birds, frogs and crickets), and watery sounds. The piece is punctuated by a miscellany of unidentified birdcalls, which I am unfortunately not qualified to recognise beyond the obvious magpie, seagull and duck.<sup>236</sup> These birdcalls, along with crickets and frogs sounds, mostly function as percussion: they provide rhythmic devices which set the tempo for the other instruments to answer to them. Some birdcalls also play a part in shaping the melody as other instruments answer the themes they develop.

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<sup>235</sup> On Side 1, from 7:09 to 10:11; 11:05 to 12:24; 14:18 to 16:25; 21:15 to 26:56; and on Side 2 from 14:10 to 26:04, then joined and eventually replaced (overpowered) by the full orchestra which builds to a climax at the end.

<sup>236</sup> It would be interesting to work on this recording with an ornithologist and identify the birds. Their presence is a testimony to bird life in the Coorong at the dawn of the Millennium Drought (which has had such a tremendous impact on the Coorong’s life). Electroacoustic music, in this instance, can become a time capsule of extreme relevance for environmental observation and monitoring. Many environmental conservationists team with sound artists.



Photograph 9. Sitting Birds

From 11:07 on Side 2, the flute and birds are positioned as equal soloists. Each takes turn and answers the other. A theme—previously exposed several times by a few woodwinds (from 5:15 to 11:07) and interlaced with other themes—is developed again by the flute. This time, it answers the birdcalls. This theme is then modulated: notes are doubled within the melody to match the birds chirping faster. These birds serve as both rhythmic percussion and lead instruments with the melody. Both the theme and its twice-repeated variation are prefaced by an improvisation on the flute: the notes fly away with the singing birds, answering to them, *mezzo forte*. This theme, which was previously exposed without finding any sort of resonance with the environmental inclusions, suddenly takes a new turn: as it responds to birdcalls, it triggers a specific kind of response from its listeners. The reciprocity between instrumental and environmental sounds develop resonant languages: languages which listen and respond to one another. Such languages, based on animal enunciation and human answering, convey harmony. This harmony stretches to the end of the section, which closes with birdcalls only (13:46), and extends into the next section: crickets appear (14:10) and progressively crescendo. They eventually overpower the birds when they reach *fortissimo*. They are joined by a guitar which answers them rhythmically and equally loudly (from 14:27) as it slowly scatters notes until it finds a melody (from 14:50). This melody (another theme) starts in response to the crickets and merges with the new

environmental inclusions. These sonic dialogues rest on time spent listening, followed by time spent conversing and interacting. Mimicking becomes a way to respond and connect—to draw connections and harmoniously join voices; to exchange. Dialogue between humanly and environmentally produced sounds thus appears as a necessity to reach sonic “beauty” where, in accordance with the western musical tradition of harmonising, this beauty is only accessible through dialogue (Dyson ch. 1). As Bachelard writes: “L’eau a aussi des voix indirectes. La nature retentit d’échos ontologiques. Les êtres se répondent en imitant des voix élémentaires”<sup>237</sup> (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 258). This dialogical tendency provides a barrier against sonic dissonances. Watery sounds function in a similar fashion and play a similar role. Throughout the flute/bird theme, legato strings (pianissimo the first time, mezzo forte the second time, from 12:20) and guitar (mezzo forte throughout the part) provide accompaniment, along with watery sounds. These watery sounds are present during the entire piece. They range from gentle to choleric waves through running waters and someone walking in these waters. These sounds never set rhythms *per se*, but still set the tempo: their tone determines dynamics and moods. This tendency to find inspiration and solace in environmental sounds is thus strongly apparent in enunciating–answering scenarios between environmental inclusions and orchestral instruments; as it has also been visible in the desire of instrumental players to engage in sonic mimicry and imitation outside of and beyond electroacoustic compositions, as prominently audible in the previous pieces “Eulogy for the Coorong” and *Kangaroo Island*.

From 26:50 to the end of Side 2, instrumental crescendos proceed to decrescendos, and sound grows in waves, climaxing and then fading away with regularity, in a time-condensed musical impression of tidal movements. Actual sounds of waves accompany the instruments, guiding their changes in dynamics. Instrumental cycles follow environmental dynamics. As waves sonically lick the shores, so do instruments: from fortissimo, they go pianissimo subito, then they crescendo again until they return to this fortissimo. And this is repeated time and time again, tirelessly until 30:18. There are no jolts, and even the brusque transition from fortissimo to pianissimo seems peaceful, natural: the changes in dynamics remain flowing. From the beginning of this section, a rhythmic alternation between two notes on the piano (and then bass guitar) reinforces the instrumental impression of continuous, wavy back-and-forth movements. These back-and-forth orchestral

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<sup>237</sup> “Water also has indirect voices. Nature resounds with ontological echoes. Entities answer each other by imitating elementary voices.”



movements are also strengthened by the introduction of a harp (from 28:10) playing smooth, fast and clear ascending scales—a musical transposition of the waves’ coming and going. From 27:03, there is a repeat of a melody (yet another theme) first enunciated by woodwinds at 18:58. This theme is modulated twice. It is expositied by a guitar: its sounds enter and graft themselves above the rhythmic base provided by the birds (*forte*) and the waves, which have already been reproduced by the piano, and then the bass guitar. As such, it seems to arise from the waves themselves, like a mermaid chant. It is repeated from 27:30, and variations occur, with progressively more and more instruments joining in, including percussion (from 28:10) and particularly timpani (from 28:35). Throughout this section, sounds constantly grow: as watery sounds progress and become louder, the instrumental fortissimo becomes louder and louder each time it comes around, as each wavy motion adds a layer of instrumentation. As with animal sounds, these orchestral responses to watery sounds mean that these environmental sounds carry and inspire the musical instruments. They encourage them to answer, to respond, and therefore to enter in dialogue: to sing in harmony with the environment.

“A Long, long time ago Ngurunderi our Spiritual Ancestor chased Pondi, the giant Murray Cod, from the junction where the Darling and Murrundi (River Murray) meet. ... As Ngurunderi travelled throughout our Country, he created landforms, waterways and life. ... He gave each *Lakalinyeri* (clan) our identity to our *Ruwe* (country) and our *Ngarjtis* (animals, birds, fish and plants)”.

(*Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan* 8)

By playing with and around environmental inclusions, *Sanctuary* thus links music and the environment. As orchestral instruments mimic, replicate and answer to these inclusions, the composition positions music *within* the environment, and particularly within the *waters*. And along with the composition come the listeners. Music indeed builds and tailors a specific embodied experience for its audience by reproducing elements of haptic interactions and connections (Geringer 24). To paraphrase musicologist Boris de Schlözer: “music, thanks to the overlapping of signifier and signified, has no sense, because it *is* a sense” (qtd. in Negrotti 144).

As music conveys its meaning through sensory inputs rather than symbols (as would verbal language, for instance), it requires the audience to engage with it on a bodily level: the body is the medium of and for the musical experience (Geringer 77). As such, orchestral instruments become tools to duplicate natural experiences by stimulating comparable sensory reactions from the listeners. In that respect, *Sanctuary* shifts the audience's bodily emplacement: it transports and projects this body in the middle of the waters, drawing a visceral link between the two. This repositioning (or re-emplacement) of the body in the waters is key to being able to listen to rhythms and perceive patterns out of supposed arrhythmic chaos (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* 27). The climax of the last section of Side 2 is reached at 29:45. It feels like the end of a fantastic storm, and listeners are left panting—as if they had been swimming in that oceanic tempest. Watery sounds are all that there is from 30:18, calming and soothing. Birds start chirping from 30:21, and then distant crickets join in from 30:30. A new environmental cycle starts, and peace settles again in the listeners' hearts. The piece ends on the sounds of these distant crickets. As such, the orchestral instrumental mimicking of, and dialoguing with, environmental inclusions also fosters the audience's engagement and transformative encounters with the environment, effectively generating both visceral and emphatic communion. This communion rises from the inner qualities of music, and their impact on performers and listeners alike. Waters provide the rhythmic key (that is, structure) through which the rest becomes audible—their rhythmic patterns stand at the basis of resounding, where listening happens both in and through the body.

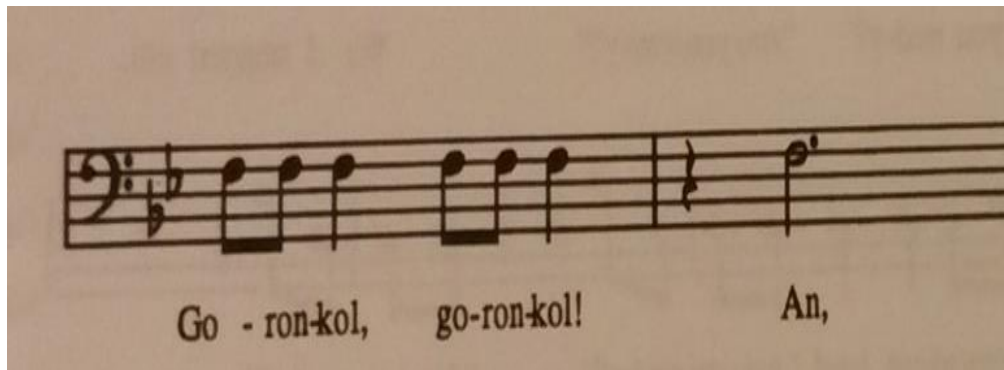
The same is achieved in *Island Wilderness*, another sixty-minute electroacoustic recording produced by Emsley in 1995, which contains the sounds of Kangaroo Island's waters combined with the sounds of panpipe, guitar and orchestra. For instance, waves and piano melody flow together from 22:53 to 27:46. This is congruent with composer and sound artist pioneer Barry Truax's statement that "the real goal of the soundscape composition is the re-integration of the listener with the environment *in a balanced ecological relationship*" ("Soundscape, Acoustic Communication and Environmental Sound Composition" 63, my emphasis). Yet, while music echoes the environment and resonates with this environment to place the audience's body within it, it cannot be said to represent or reproduce this

environment: rather it reconveys and transmits it in a manner which allows the audience to develop an emotional connection with it. It is through music, encouraged by music, pushed by music, that the audience is able to connect with the environment. This emotional reaction is thus a response to the bodily transposition implemented by the music: as the audience becomes aware of—and a part of—the surroundings of the composition (viscerally linked), they become able to engage with them on an emotional level. From such a connection, empathy can be generated.

Besides environmental (re)connections, mimicking is also used to foster another kind of engagement and transformative encounter: that with the culture of the Ngarrindjeri Nation. A good example of this is *Clarence Long (Milerum) Songs* (1998). It is another loose transcription of Tindale's recordings, this time undertaken by composer Becky Llewellyn. The score of this contemporary classical piece consists of six short one-page songs. As Vision 3 focuses on salt waters, only songs 4 and 5 are discussed here; the others present an inland perspective or a purely public opinion (gossiping) inclination. My analysis of these two songs is brief and simply meant to give the reader a rough idea of their textual content and musical shape. Here, and as previously stated in Vision 2, I want to reassert that I am not an ethnomusicologist and that, as such, I am not interested in assessing the musical value and quality of the songs recorded by Tindale, or their role and place within the Ngarrindjeri Nation at the time of their collection.<sup>238</sup> Rather than the actual music, I am interested in discussing Llewellyn's composition process and the significance of her transcriptions in terms of the diffusion and revival of the Ngarrindjeri culture.

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<sup>238</sup> For this, see Tindale, Bell, Ellis and the Berndts, who (more or less successfully) attempted to conduct analyses and postulate rules.



Deep Map 8. Extract from the Score of “First Dream Song”

Song 4, entitled “First Dream Song” (based on Song 11 from Tindale’s recording), opens with a note at the top of the score which details the origin of the tune. It explains:

This dream song or “pekere” song<sup>239</sup> comes from the Tanganekald dialect and tells of ancient times which Milerum earned from his mother’s mother’s husband. The song tells of the fright the people had when they heard the roar of the surf at the Coorong and how they came to terms with this sound. Milerum called the effect of the sound “goronkol” like “the people rushing about without order ... in the city streets”.<sup>240</sup>

Milerum describes “goronkol” as “noise which brings you to a sudden stop” (Tindale, “Native Songs” 109). This sound “goronkol” is repeated four times in the song. Each time, it is written monotonically as two quavers followed by a crotchet. This notation encourages the performer to picture and implement a dramatic crescendo on these three notes so that they emulate the sound of waves, and thus to consider them primarily as watery onomatopoeia, or even homologies. For the non-speaker, Aboriginal words indeed tend to be associated with sounds: the untrained/non-bilingual ear picks up on shared vowel sounds between the Ngarrindjeri word and the crashing waves—a tendency reinforced by the lack of (other) readily apparent meaning. The composer also chose to leave two sentences in Tanganekald dialect in the middle of the song, otherwise written in English. Alternative English lyrics (translations) are provided under the dialect. These

<sup>239</sup> *Pekere* songs (also called “*pekeri*”) are religious songs, as implied by the denomination of “dream song” (Bell). Such songs “record the traditions of the arrival of the first natives in the country and tell of the adventures of ancestral being” (Tindale, “Native Songs” 108).

<sup>240</sup> This is a paraphrase of the explanation given by Tindale (“Native Songs” 109).

untranslated words are significant in terms of language revival and diffusion. Their presence within songs turn the collaborative efforts of the people involved into a restorative practice of empowerment.<sup>241</sup> Sung primarily in a group, the song nonetheless contains two solo sections which dialogue and interact with the chorus sections.<sup>242</sup> The lyrics unfold:

We came south from the inland scrub into this new country.  
We heard a great noise!  
Goronkol! Goronkol! An, Goronkol! Goronkol!  
**Tanowalonan? (What will you do now?)**  
Wannunganji! (Let us go back!)  
**Hear that noise?**  
**We must stay here.**  
**That noise is telling us, “Here’s your country now.”**  
Let’s settle down.  
Make the best of it. Settle down.  
Here can be our settled place. It’s cut off all around.

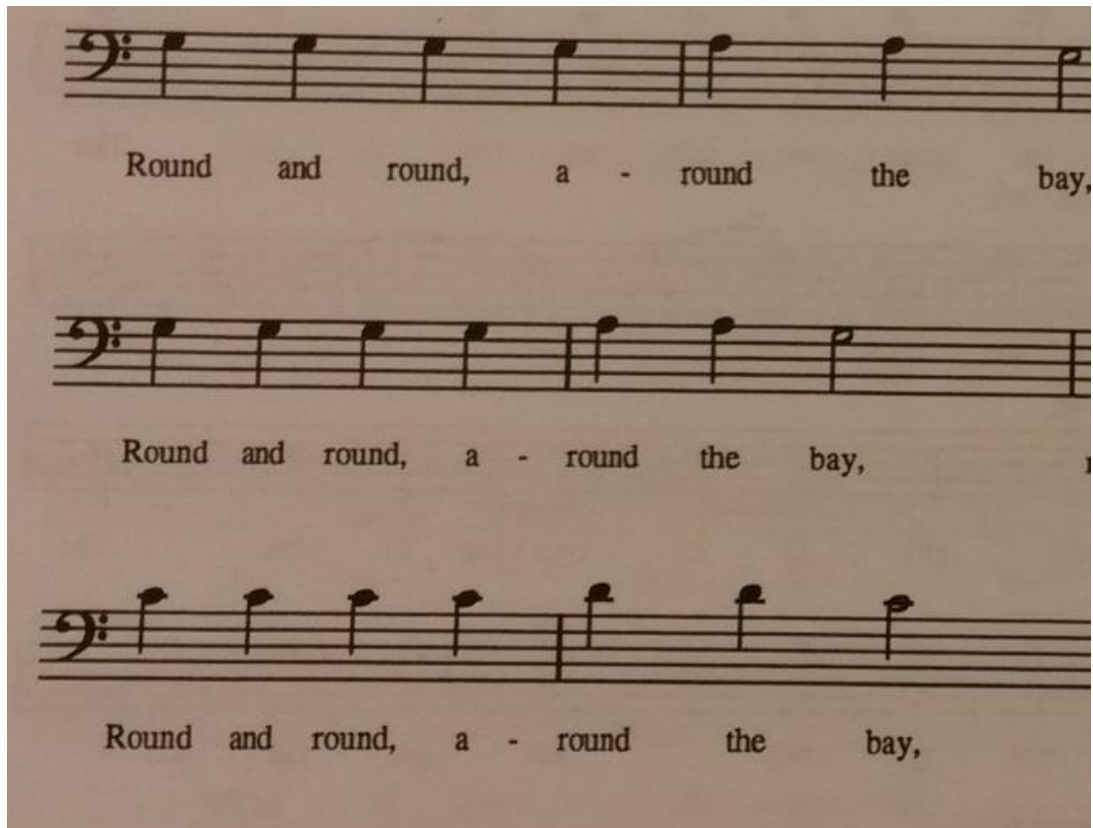
Overall, the song is rhythmically and melodically simple, which is congruent with the Ngarrindjeri musical tradition.<sup>243</sup> This apparent simplicity reinforces the connections that the listeners are able to draw between waves and words.

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<sup>241</sup> Another example of language revival through songs is Schultz’s *Narrunga, Kaurna and Ngarrindjeri Songs*.

<sup>242</sup> The solo sections are presented in bold to differentiate them from the chorus sections.

<sup>243</sup> See Ellis for lengthy discussions on structures and forms in Aboriginal music (*Aboriginal Songs*).



Deep Map 9. Extract from the Score of “Whale Song”

Song 5 is entitled “Whale Song” (based on Song 14 from Tindale’s recording) and also starts with a note written on top of the score. This note states:

This whale song, from the Encounter Bay area of the Raminjeri people, tells the story of a mother and calf having fun on the sandy bottom of the shallow Encounter Bay. Several people are anxious for it to strand itself so that they can collect whale oil which was used for body paint and poison bones. A totem man would sing this song, setting his mind on wishing them around the bay to safety.<sup>244</sup>

Llewellyn chose to transcribe this song in the bass clef and C major. In coherence with this key signature, the listener experiences a strong desire for the song to finish on the C, the tonic note of the scale, to obtain closure and resolve the dramatic tension of the piece. The musical construction of the last phrase satisfies this desire, even though the song does not end with a perfect cadenza as this C is not preceded by the dominant note (the fifth, G). As with the previous song, the rhythm is simple

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<sup>244</sup> Again, this is a paraphrase of the explanation provided by Tindale (“Native Songs” 112).

and the melody is almost monotonic. The same musical (and textual) phrase is repeated three times, with the insertion of a variation between the second and third times. Even the variation is in line with the initial musical phrase: it is a truncated repeat of this musical and textual phrase a perfect fourth and fifth above this initial melody line. This heightened pitch is also congruent with western composition traditions where a heightened pitch is often used to further heighten the dramatic exhortation of the singer (here, for the whales to go away). The lyrics of the song are:

Round and round, around the bay,  
mother and son go and play. Round and round, around the bay,  
mother and son go and play.  
Hei! Ei! Round and round, around the bay,  
Hei! Go and play!  
Round and round, around the bay,  
mother and son go and play away!

This song underlines the role of totems in Ngarrindjeri culture: people associated with a totem are in charge of “protecting” it, that is, ensuring that the species thrives and flourishes. It thus teaches a connective approach to environmental care: entities, both human and more-than-human, are intertwined and share a range of different relationships, depending on whose interests are at stake. As such, the composer creates a space of transmission where it becomes possible for non-Indigenous listeners and performers to engage with a Ngarrindjeri approach to the waters. This song encourages them to consider another way to listen and relate to these waters. As such, it represents another form of transcreation—another resonant language (a language of resonances). A similar aim is to be found behind the composition of *The Land of the Grandfathers (Tjamuku Ngura)*, a contemporary classical piece for choir (SSATB), violin, piano, and three or four percussionists. Composed in 1984 by Schultz, it is a collaboration with Ngarrindjeri musician and poet Leila Rankine (among several other Aboriginal writers from different language groups). It too aims to engage with Aboriginal understandings of Country and to transmit them to non-Indigenous audiences. To that effect, the score is preceded by an extensive six-page note which details the piece’s background and intent, and gives directions regarding performance of the piece’s instrumental and textual components. Schultz

describes the entire piece as his “tribute to the land or earth of Australia, and to its ‘first-born’, and partly an opportunity for them to speak for themselves” (i). Some of Rankine’s text, which shapes the first movement of the piece, proceeds as follows:

The blue of the sky and  
green of the sea, separated  
by the yellow sand—interspersed  
with shades of the bush;  
The cloud scurry across the sky  
with shapes that change in the  
wink of an eye.

The gentle swish of water as it  
washes on the shore  
or the slap, slap, slap of timber  
when it gently rocks the boat.  
The sound of the wind stirring  
through the trees,  
and the sting of rising sand swirling  
around my feet.

Swaying reeds and drooping rushes  
growing by the shore,  
colours of brown, red, gold and green  
with silver grey bleached dead wood  
draped with weeds of differing shades  
.....  
Seaweed of many colours,  
the produce of crashing waves,  
salt spray and hissing surf  
splashing in my face,  
a beautiful but fearful scene.

Shades, shapes, sounds,  
free our inner souls to see  
and give our restless spirits ease.

The text is a celebration of the Coorong (through Ngarrindjeri eyes) and is described as an “introduc[tion] of the land itself” (i). This celebration is powerfully supported by Schultz’s musical settings: the nearly monochromatic melody full of *glissandi* and *portamenti* is reminiscent of—and pays homage to—styles of “traditional” Aboriginal singing. The predominance of rhythmic units over acrobatic melodic



lines implies that the singers' focus should be directed toward accentuations and ornamentations, rather than tone (as understood in a classical sense). These, along with the lyrics, create a powerful evocation of the Coorong's natural rhythms. The textual and musical portrayal of small details project/transport the performers and the audience alike to the Coorong as much as within Ngarrindjeri perspectives of this Coorong. As Rankine states elsewhere: “[t]he Coorong represents a bond with the past, a closeness to the earth” (9).

Llewellyn's piece also aims to celebrate and empower Australia's “first-born”. Her transcriptions were commissioned by Sumner for use with his Ngarrindjeri dance troupe, Tal-Kin-Jeri. The composer states the following about her work:

At the urging of my Ngarrindjeri friends, Major and Betty Sumner, I wrote these six songs out for them as songs which come directly from their heritage. Milerum was the last boy who escaped going to mission school. Clarence Long knew several of the Ngarrindjeri dialects and had hung out with the “old people”, remembering their culture and leaving this for posterity through the Tindale tapes. I feel very humble to have worked on this music which reveals a deep musical culture of the Coorong indigenous. The rich food life meant they had time to sing, dance, gossip, share. I apologise if some Ngarrindjeri people are offended by the publication of these songs but many have welcomed and used them to grow their culture. (AMC)

More than a commission, these transcriptions are a collaboration. Each of them was indeed undertaken with the active participation of both Major and Betty Sumner, who are always credited on the score alongside the composer for “loose transcription and verse”. Composing was done through conversations and collaborations, with the overall purpose to revitalise Ngarrindjeri culture—and thus waters, because the two are understood as closely linked, as developed in Vision 2.

Watery speech can be  
quiet.  
Watery speech can be  
blasting.

Water speech can be  
heard—no matter its  
volume.

In these different pieces—as in *Sanctuary*—composition processes rest on dialogues. The languages that these compositions create are resonant because they answer to and engage with waters and/or Ngarrindjeri culture. In doing so, these compositions foster visceral and emotional communion. It is through this communion that transformation encounters are generated. These encounters favour restorative collaborations. The past (histories) are debated, and (re)created. Indeed, in composing *Clarence Long (Milerum) Songs*, Llewellyn also interacted with shards of the past, similarly to Conyngham. These interactions come through Tindale’s recordings, as well as through a previous composition of hers: *Milerum’s Basket*.<sup>245</sup> Commissioned by the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra and composed by Llewellyn in 1993, *Milerum’s Basket* is a ten-minute (224-bar) chamber work for string orchestra and oboe soloist,<sup>246</sup> and represents her first contact with Tindale’s recording. This piece indeed includes the outline of four songs transcribed from Tindale’s recording. These songs are: “Song of Njengari”, “Storm Song (Belinjum)”, “Song about Death” and “Whale Song” (respectively at bars 39, 85, 121 and 158). It premiered on 15 October 1993 at the Elder Hall (University of Adelaide) as part of the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra’s New Perspectives series, performed by the Adelaide Chamber Orchestra joined by conductor Antony Walker and oboist Alison Stewart-Klein. The name of this work comes from a basket coffin woven by Milerum and held within the collections of the South Australian Museum.<sup>247</sup> A composer’s note at the beginning of the score indicates that this basket was meant to “carry dried bones of loved ones for two or three years until they were eventually placed into raft-shaped platforms facing the sea. Ngarrindjeri people believed spirits used the rafts to cross the sea into the land of the dead, Kangaroo Island, before entering the spirit world.” I am particularly interested in “Whale Song”, in regard to Llewellyn’s subsequent transcription of the same

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<sup>245</sup> It is interesting to note that, similarly to Schultz, Llewellyn’s interest in Tindale’s recording resulted in a couple of compositions.

<sup>246</sup> Again, like Schultz, Llewellyn chose a less common solo instrument, and a parallel can be found between his viola and her oboe.

<sup>247</sup> It is the same basket that captured famous Ngarrindjeri cultural weaver Yvonne Koolmatrie’s attention when she visited the museum, and that inspired her practice.

section of Tindale's recording for *Clarence Long (Milerum) Songs*. Both pieces are relatively fast-paced (with respective tempo indications of presto and "with vigour"). As part of *Milerum's Basket*, "Whale Song" is fairly repetitive: it is made up of small intervals, mostly monotonous regroupped in repetitive rhythmic units played in unison in between sections (with generally a division of first and second violins, and viola, cello and bass). This creates a sonic structure that is reminiscent of tidal movements. The oboe solo is primarily rhythmic as well, with a similar monotonal outline as Llewellyn's other transcription. It is, however, more thoroughly developed and ornamented, with a progression in terms of both the rhythms and the tonalities. Llewellyn details her motivation for composing this piece and links the basket to the present-day Coorong:

When I wrote this in 1993, Milerum's homeland, the Coorong was a fertile home of fish, bird and wildlife which I enjoyed as a camper. The musical tradition of the Ngarrindjeri reflected the abundance of food in the Coorong which gave people time and energy to develop a rich musical lexicon. I shaped his tunes with my memories of the beautiful Coorong in one long non-repeating narrative like the 100km long Coorong itself. However as the River Murray has increasingly lost the ability to take water to its mouth, the Coorong has been depleted of its ability to sustain many plants, birds and wildlife. Song of Death seems to foreshadow now, not just the loss of the Ngarrindjeri's traditional living but of the Coorong itself. With its plaintive oboe sounding over strings, this tone poem is indeed a funeral basket of musical bones of what the Coorong used to be and what we have lost since settlement. (AMC)

Further than engaging with and transmitting Ngarrindjeri culture, this composition represents an attempt to raise awareness—to promote a heightened sense of awareness—among listeners and performers alike. This desire to use musical composition to raise ecological awareness and promote new languages to express this awareness is also visible in *Wind and Water (Weatherings)*.

## Creative Work: (Re)Connections and Languages

Written and produced by poet and sound artist Mike Ladd in association with long-term collaborator sound engineer and musician Stuart Hall, *Wind and Water (Weatherings)* is an electroacoustic “soundscape investigating links between art and nature with a focus on time erosion” (AMC). Originally created to be part of *Australian Perspecta 1997* (themed “Between Art and Nature”) at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, this piece is computer-generated and can be tailored to the space in which it is played. After the exhibition, *Wind and Water (Weatherings)* made its way to the air and was broadcast on the ABC’s *The Listening Room* several times (8 September 1997; 19 April 1999). I am working with the fifty-minute recording aired on 5 June 2000 and subsequently released on a CD.

Introduced on air as Ladd’s attempt to explore “some connections between art, technology and nature in its most elemental moments”, this composition combines watery and windy sounds from Victoria (a storm in the Saint Kilda Marina at an unknown date), Queensland (cyclone Tracy, which hit Darwin on 24–25 December 1974) and South Australia (Ladd’s backyard, Vivonne Bay in Kangaroo Island and the ferry ride from Glenelg to Kangaroo Island, Sturt Creek in the Adelaide Hills; all of these happening around 1995–96). In the on-air introduction, these elements—wind and water—are presented as the “the creative and destructive energies which animate this work; the forces which, over time, alter everything in their paths”. They are destructive because they erode and wear everything away, but also creative, as they “produce strange new forms”. And indeed, in the piece, wind and water guide the “delicate drawings” of the sculptor, and propel the raft of Odysseus, but they also bring Darwin to the ground, destroying most of the city in just one night. Their sonic materialisation within the piece translate this destructive and creative reach into an auditory format. Human voices are also added around and within these environmental sounds: sculptor and wind artist Cameron Robbins discusses his practice and inspiration in an interview; Ngarrindjeri Elder Major Summer recites part of the Ngurunderi Dreaming; a child (Ruby Brooks Ladd) declaims and sings wind/weather-related poems and tunes. A narrator joins all the pieces together through periodic poetic and/or didactic contextualisation of the sounds and stories unfolding in the piece. Archival and/or recorded material is

interlaced with this poetic narration. Her voice also declaims a re-setting of the Odysseus story (7:00 to 12:16). While the narrator's voice weaves together the bits and pieces, the child's voice serves to open and close sections, creating structural expectations which both disconnect—marking beginning and end—and further intertwine—enclosing within the same space—the different components of the piece.

- The child's voice precedes (3:50) and closes (12:17) the section on Ladd (4:00 to 6:55)—as he records himself hanging up one of his tape sets in an apricot tree in his backyard in the first week of spring 1995, and another set at the second site in Sturt Creek—followed (from 7:00) by the re-setting of the Odysseus story.
- It precedes (12:17) and closes (25:37) the section on Ladd checking on the Sturt Creek tape (13:17 to 15:55), followed by the artist interview with Cameron Robbins, and Ladd again, this time checking the tape hung in the apricot tree (24:55 to 25:36).
- It precedes (25:37) and closes (35:43) the section on Cyclone Tracy which devastated Darwin on Christmas Eve and Day of 1975.
- It precedes (35:43) and closes (46:32) the section on Ladd checking the Sturt Creek tape again (36:29 to 37:23); followed (from 38:35) by the ferry trip from Glenelg to Kangaroo Island intertwined with Major Summer's rendition of a part of the Ngurunderi Dreaming.
- It precedes (46:32) and closes (50:58) the section on Ladd collecting both sets of tape, almost a year after he had installed them (47:14 to 49:25).

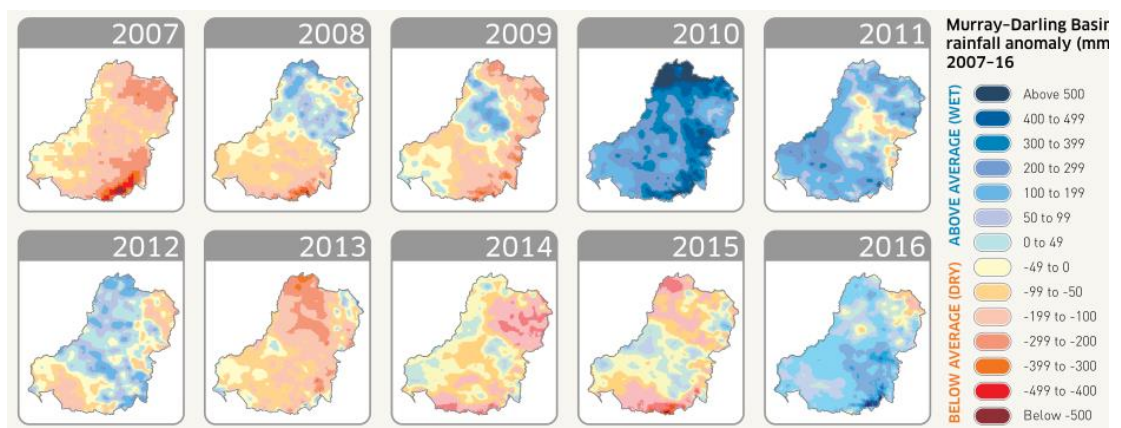
The first and the last poem that she recites are the same: "Whether the weather be cold, or whether the weather be hot; we'll weather the weather, whatever the weather, whether we like it or not." Composed by an anonymous British author, this children's poem creates a cyclical pattern within the piece. It comes full circle as she repeats these lines, giving it a sense of both closure and departure. The composition could stop or start again, infinitely declaiming these verbal and non-verbal sounds, or reiterating them *ad libitum*. The child's voice is always followed by a heavily hammered note with pedal on a Steinway piano (in the same style as

the note that opens the entire piece). This note is then progressively distorted as the sound seems to reverberate across space. Note becomes notes, as the child's voice repeatedly comes back within the piece.

These piano notes were recorded on strips of analogue audio tape. These sets of tape were subsequently left out in the weather for about a year: one set was suspended in an apricot tree in Ladd's backyard and weathered by the wind; another set was suspended in a tree by the waters at Sturt Creek (in the Adelaide Hills) and eroded by water. Throughout the composition process, Ladd undertook regular seasonal visits—every three months—to check the state of the tapes and the erosion rate of the sounds. With great logic in a circling creative process, piano notes played in a similar fashion also encircle each section featuring Ladd's voice as he installs, checks upon or retrieves the tapes. This original piano music, composed and performed by Stuart Hall and Steve Adam, also figures at the start and end of the piece: it begins with a rendition of the original recording with slight distortions (2:50 to 3:49)—the sound of slowly scattered ascending notes pounded on the piano, each eventually vanishing into silence; and finishes with a playing of what is left of it (51:19 to 52:00)—the sound of a blank tape, full of static with intermittent rhythmic taps and cracks. The cyclical—repetitive—pattern of the composition, which progresses and yet constantly returns to a variation of Ladd's and the child's voices accompanied by the piano notes, provides a sonic illustration of the notions of change and continuity. It vocalises the passage of time. Discussing the piece, Ladd writes: “the central idea in the work was to evoke a sense of time passing, to capture that emotion sonically” (“Notes” 165). While the child's voice demonstrates continuity, the piano tapes represent a particularly strong metaphor for the changes that nuance that continuity. Besides Ladd's voice describing the evolving physical aspects of the tapes, the instrumental recordings also speak for themselves from a sonic perspective: the pristine piano notes progressively lose their tonal quality, are distorted, and project evocative reverberations throughout the piece. In the end, only ghostly whispers of these notes still exist—static rustle. As the environment shapes and bends them (as they become part of the environment), these notes show the limits of technology in terms of persistence and longevity. They imply that, as time passes, continuity is to be artistic. It reminds us

of the precarious fragility of the human experience with the finite “things”<sup>248</sup>—the coming-into-ruins—which are built to surround us, and which isolate and separate us from nature. These instrumental recordings spaced out throughout the piece give it its rhythms and textures: that of continuous renewal and elongation/prolongation. Discussing radio poems and poetics—or “what gets lost in translation onto a page”—Ladd writes: “Like words, these sounds have associative power. They have social and historical meanings and can be used as symbol or metaphor” (“Notes” 163). I hear the piano notes also acting as metaphors for the pitiless passage of time itself: the “cycle of effacement and renewal” described in the on-air introduction to the piece. Decaying sound, in terms of acoustic quality and audibility, eventually becomes inaudible sound—a memory of past sound; a sonic ghost. To the listener’s ear, this slow metamorphosis of sound is translated in terms of the environmental evolution: as the piano notes run away and disappear, the listener is reminded of the running waters of the creek—these are off to somewhere else—or the wind that has started blowing in a different direction—it carries different smells and forces. Time passes and the environment changes. As the piano notes become static (as they die), a realisation comes to mind. Everything returns to dust—to silence. Yet, there is hope. This silence is not complete: if technology has lived its time (if humans have too, alongside it), the environment remains—changed but still present, grounding all, the human and more-than-human alike, in an undifferentiated fashion.

*The Revised Basin Map*  
provides graphs of  
rainfall variability:



It varies.

<sup>248</sup> In an extrapolation—nearly a paraphrase—of Derrida (“Force of Law” 278).

Besides instrumental recordings, the piece also overflows with voice recordings. These include environmental background sounds, which sometimes take over and flourish in the gaps between the spoken words and sentences.

When Ladd is around the tapes, as much sonic space (if not more) is given to his verbal/vocal description of his actions as to what is happening around him, and the way in which he interacts with his surroundings:

- the clinging sound of the ladder in the tree (4:10);
- the running waters of the creek in spring and the sound of Ladd walking in these waters (5:00; 36:29; 47:18)—he interjects: “It’s cold” (6:00);
- the rustling of leaves as he walks towards a site (5:00);
- the trickling waters of the creek in summer—he interjects: yabby, blue claw, tennis rackets; as lots is found in the waters before he locates the tape which he is pleased to notice has survived (14:00), or disappointed to realise that only one metre of it is left there, while most of it has gone (48:00);
- the branches cracking through the tapes (24:55) and being pruned with secateurs so that Ladd can collect the tape (48:58).

When the re-setting of the *Odysseus* story is told, as much sonic space is taken up by the narrator’s voice as by the environmental sounds bringing the story to life as they complement the words:

- the wind beating against poles generating metallic vibrations;
- the growing growls of waves roughing up a raft (10:15 to 11:15);
- the calm lapping waters as the raft is dissolved (11:16 onwards).

When Robbins is interviewed, as much sonic space is dedicated to his explanations as to the sounds that arise from his workshop as he demonstrates how he creates his wind compositions:

- the rustling of papers as he sifts through the different drawings (18:00);
- the bubbling—as if blowing through a straw—and then running waters that power the machine he uses to create a studio version of the wind drawings; a machine also adapted to live gallery performances (18:42 to 19:30; 23:50);
- the mad swirling of the wind and the scratching of the pen on paper as the machine creates a drawing (22:26 to 23:49).



When the cyclone that hit Darwin is remembered, as much sonic space is dedicated to the winds and crashing waters as it is to the humans narrating the story:

- the endless gushes of wind that deform and twist corrugated iron panels (25:48 onwards);
- the silence—the complete and utter silence—as the narrator’s voice recites (33:20): “next morning: silence. Complete silence ... everything that was green and vertical is now grey and horizontal”;
- the explosion of shattering wind tunnels (29:20 and 30:57)—a voice warns: “It’s coming, get away!” (29:30);
- the chipping of crickets and the chirping of birds (34:50 to 35:40).

When Kangaroo Island is featured and Ngurunderi’s story is told, as much sonic space is occupied by words as by incidental and contextual sounds around these words:

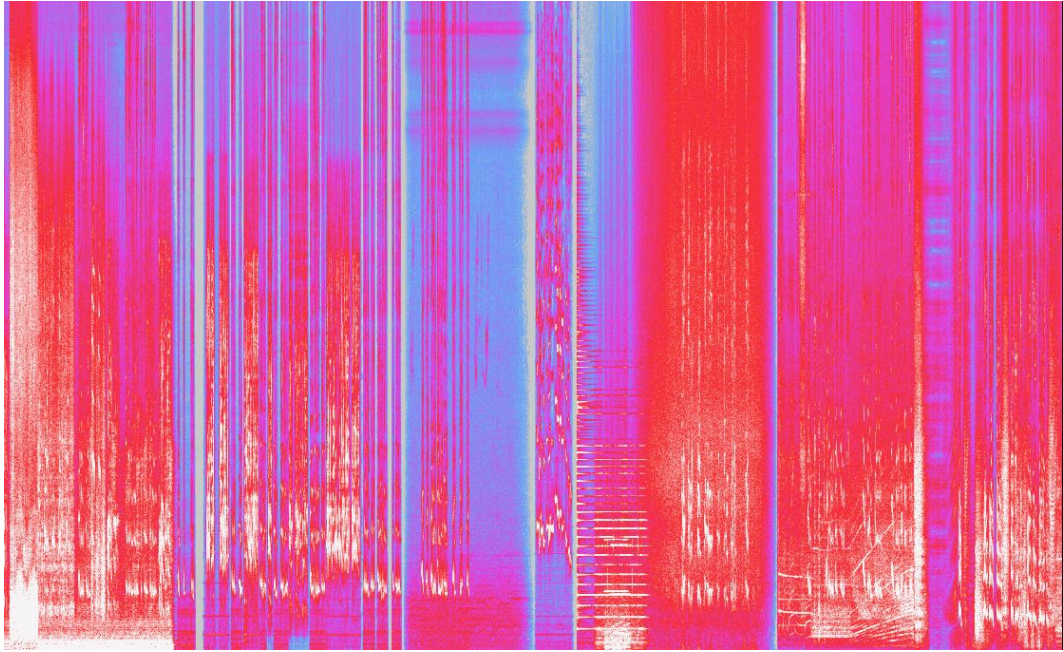
- the noise of the hydrofoil ferry’s engine as it departs from Glenelg to travel to Kangaroo Island (37:24 to 37:45);
- the crashing of waves against the shore and the hulk of the ferry (38:35 onwards);
- the brouhaha of impenetrable voices as the ferry is loudly unloaded (43:50 to 44:27).

“In the Dreaming, Ngurunderi travelled down the Murray River in a bark canoe, in search of his two wives who had run away from him. At that time the river was only a small stream below the junction with the Darling River. A giant cod fish (Ponde) swam ahead of Ngurunderi, widening the river with sweeps of its tail (Ponde’s tail also made swamps and cliffs along the way). Ngurunderi chased the fish, trying to spear it from his canoe. Near Murray Bridge he threw a spear, but it missed and was changed into Long Island (Lenteilin). At Tailem Bend (Tagalang) he threw another spear; the giant fish surged ahead and created a long straight stretch in the river. At last, with the help of Nepele (the brother of Ngurunderi’s wives), Ponde was speared after it had left the Murray River and had swum into Lake Alexandrina. Ngurunderi divided the fish with his stone knife and created a new species of fish from each piece.”

*(Ngurunderi—An Aboriginal Dreaming 4)*

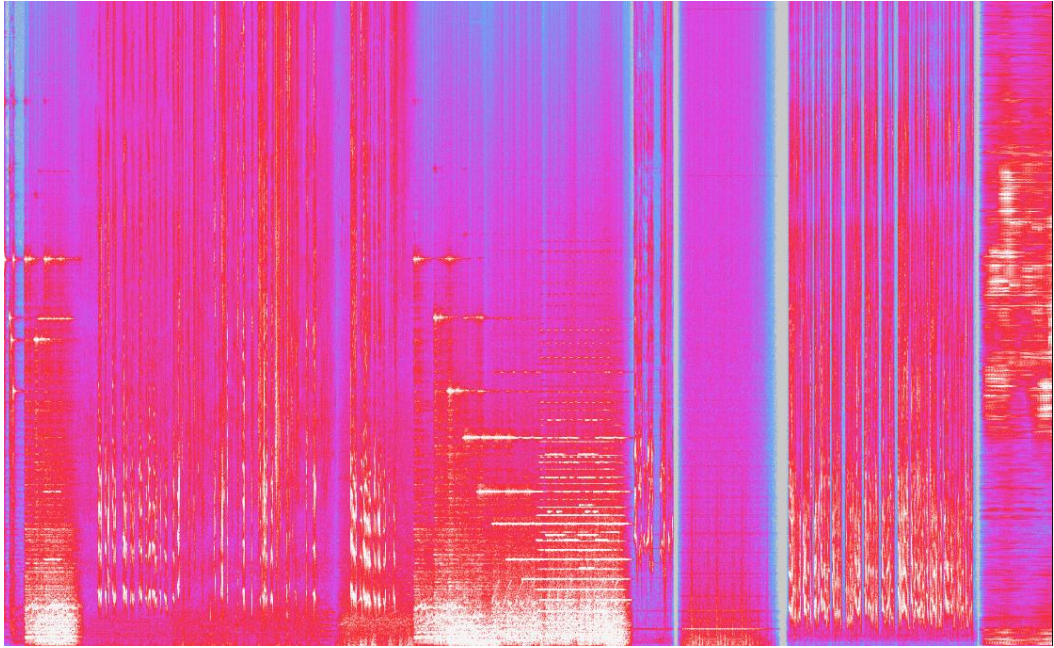
In this piece, non-verbal sound is of equal importance to verbal sound (to words). Texture and content are indissociable. Only through the combination of both is the message of the piece able to be carried across to the listeners. Such entanglement demonstrates the importance of sonic environments—their impacts on “protagonists” (both humans and more-than-humans), and the shape and reach of their (his)stories. It makes the listeners wonder: is it the human voice (words) leaving space for the environment (the “other”, more-than-human, non-verbal sounds)—or vice versa? Both appear on the same plane, and this contributes to (re)defining the terms of the relationships of humans with their environments.

Ladd makes specific use of non-verbal sounds. Following composer Jane Ulman, Ladd adopts “sound assonance”, his rhyming of non-verbal sounds with a similar morphology but coming from different sources: “a playful and musical way of bringing disparate elements together” (“Notes” 166). In this piece, resonances arise from these sound assonances, rather than mimesis: similar sounds from diverse times and spaces are brought together to compose (or highlight) infinite resonances between places and cultures. These sound assonances correspond to the expression of polyphonic conjunctions above repulsive contrasts. They make geographically distant worlds and cultures collide and merge sonically. These become entangled in the listeners’ auditory imaginary. As Ladd argues: “Sounds make us work imaginatively to interpret them. They operate through feeling as much as intellect, and give scope for different interpretations. We can project ourselves into them” (163). By bringing together, in one creative piece, all these sounds from different spaces and times, recorded for different purposes in different manners, Ladd contributes to generating connections across places, times and entities—across vocal bodies. As these sounds are collated together, sound arches of (re)connections are built between and across these bodies. Imaginaries are transplanted. As such, rather than purely mapping an evolving space, the spectrogram of such a composition maps interconnections between places and times. It maps how the salt waters of Lower Murray Country connect and interact with other waters, and their stories.



Deep Map 10. Connecting Waters in *Wind and Water (Weatherings)*  
(from 32:00 to 39:00)

In terms of stories, verbal sounds also generate levels of resonance besides those between voices and environmental inclusions (sound and noise). On-air, the piece is described as being about landscape, and more precisely about the “personal and collective myths” contained in this landscape. The intertwining of the voices connects and entangles these “personal and collective myths”. In the section on Cyclone Tracy, news reports collide and give way to emergency sirens, announcements and guidelines, and to home-made recordings of Christmas carols (“Silent Night” and “Jingle Bells”). The narrator’s voice mingles with these different voices—interspaced by battering elements: those devastating winds. Such an assemblage generates time collisions: the narrator’s voice leads to a reinterpretation of the other, earlier voices. The boundaries between times and perspectives become blurred. Similarly, in the section about Kangaroo Island and Ngurunderi, Summer’s recitation is interspersed with security announcements (what to do in case of a maritime emergency) and scenic remarks from the ferry speaker system. Such entanglements connect modern to “traditional”: as ferry announcements punctuate mythological stories, the piece demonstrates how these two different components intertwine and coexist in the waterscapes unfolding in front of the imagination of the listeners. Time passes and yet stories remain—waters contain and mix these stories, which indefinitely build from one another.



Deep Map 11. Mixing Stories in *Wind and Water (Weatherings)*  
(from 46:00 to 53:00)

As part of its radio broadcast on 5 June and on the CD, *Wind and Water (Weatherings)* had a companion piece which functions in a similar fashion. Also arising from material from the Coorong, “Coorong Breathing” (previously and subsequently aired on 15 September 1997; and 25 February 2002) is a 2:19 minute composition for the radio which belongs to the larger work *Fundamentals*. This radiophonic suite of environmental music was created by sound artist Clayton Elwyn Dennis based on field recordings done in the Coorong and on the Black Range near Stawell in Victoria. Tape mastering was done by Chris Lawson. Besides being linked by the Coorong, Elwyn Dennis’ piece also “evoke[s] a sense of time passing” as its sonic base evolves around progressive inclusions above it. The piece was presented on-air as:

reflect[ing] structures that are too vast, too slow, too minute, too quick for us to experience directly. It seeks to register the sequences, the spaces, the times and the events of the bush because they are accurate, complete, independent, but also because they are compelling.

Elwyn Dennis explains that “[t]he processes in the Coorong are everywhere; the clarity of that place reflects all places. ... We grow by comprehending things we

cannot see, by admitting beauty beyond our own.” From the beginning of the piece (53:20) to its end (55:37), there is a sonic frequency that echoes as a wave—a fast pulse, or a rapid succession of breathing processes. Left to stand on its own, this sonic frequency decentres humans, who are no longer shaping the rhythms of the Coorong. All other inclusions, such as crickets and birds, are tailored around this rhythmic cue, which grows louder or softer and travels from left to right speakers through careful equilibrating choices. Changing and yet persisting geographies flow together as sound arches of connections are restored and new ones drawn. This sonic fusion of supposedly disconnected elements does more than highlight interconnections. The composed resonances also highlight interdependences. Sounds evolve in parallel, and what affects one sound affects all the others. This represents a sonic materialisation of the interconnectedness of all elements. It implies that perceiving and relating to the salt waters of the Coorong also means perceiving and relating to other waters. As such, caring for them means caring for all others, and vice versa, in line with the work of Plumwood, for instance. Such an understanding of interdependence means that it becomes possible to go beyond exploitative shadows and separations to (re)compose new languages of awareness and care which constantly remake salt waters by re-writing encounters.

Composed by Llewellyn in 1995, “Whales Weep Not!” was released on the CD of *Milerum’s Basket* in 1996.<sup>249</sup> It is a fourteen-minute tone poem for chamber choir, marimba and crotales based on the poem by D. H. Lawrence. Commissioned by Carl Crossin (the Director of the Adelaide Chamber Singers), it premiered in October 1995 at Peter Lehmann Winery Wool Shed in Tanunda in the Barossa Valley (South Australia), featuring percussionist Ryszard Pusz and the Adelaide Chamber Singers conducted by Crossin. The score that I am working on was amended after this first performance. Spreading over fifty pages and three hundred and nineteen bars, it is dedicated to Brenton Langbein, director of the Barossa Music Festival. Llewellyn writes about this piece:

Southern right whales have been quietly and wonderfully returning to Australian shores. These giant creatures bring us back to our

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<sup>249</sup> As part of this release, it won the 1996 Sounds Australian Award, State Award South Australia for Best Composition by an Australian Composer.

mammalian roots, the warm-blooded milky world of our beginnings. In this piece, I have tried to evoke a dreamy half-remembered world using D.H. Lawrence’s poem of the same name, where the boundaries between human and whale sounds is ambiguous as are the voices and marimba and crotales, all intermingling. (AMC)

As Encounter Bay merges with, and is illuminated by, Lawrence’s poem, places and cultures fuse in a similar manner as in *Wind and Water (Weatherings)*. Humans and more-than-humans are also connected, but through a slightly different process. Further than playing with sound homologies and metaphors to amalgamate perspectives, Llewellyn also encourages cross-thinking ahead of the production of sound. The piece is prefaced by a composer’s note which details “How to ‘Think’ Whale ...” Her comments do not solely consist of recommendations for specific tone and pitch qualities, but also (and primarily) how to embody a whale: how to create bodily sensations that approach those of whales. For Llewellyn, the production of sound is to be governed by appropriate bodily transplantations—by empathic connections. She writes:

If you’ve opened your imagination through the above preparation, I think your heart will be ready to help your mouth. Be a whale and sing what you feel. Let what that evokes come up and out. It’s both so old and so new that there is no “right” or “wrong”—only your ability to take your listeners back to primal memories and understandings deep within themselves.

The porous nature of sound connects vocal bodies—listeners and whales through performers. It creates acoustic communities. Human and more-than-human entities fill these communities with equal importance, as agency is granted to all.

“Water Spirit or the Spirit of Water is the most multiple Spirit of all, because from it and into it there is a continual change of organism taking place from one form to another; life coming from it may be in plant form or weed. A life goes into it and comes out a quite different body.”

(Unaipon 53)

Commissioned and dedicated to Betty Sumner, “Salt is Rising” is a short three-minute piece for voice (with chords for accompaniment) composed by Llewellyn in 1999, which further illustrates this. It was first performed at the Maughan Church Ecology Conference in 2004. Written in E $\flat$  major, this piece consists of two verses, a chorus and a coda.

Oceans of sorrow,  
rivers of pain,  
streams of sadness and of fears.  
Salt is rising,  
Filling your heart.  
Can't stop the tide of your tears.  
.....  
The salt is rising.  
O, Mother!  
O, Mother.  
Please!  
Help us now ...

The lyrics anthropomorphise Country: it has a heart full of sorrows, which cries a “tide of tears”. As the feelings of Country are also anthropomorphised, this represents a way of granting it agency, and of recognising the superiority of this agency over human agency. Humans are powerless in the face of the current devastation and resort to a form of prayer for a different approach (a divine intervention), which appears to be the only option. As it entangles the fate of Country with that of its human inhabitants, this piece is also a tribute to, and acknowledgement of, centuries after centuries of sustainable Aboriginal custodianship. As it (re)writes the colonial encounter through music, it also remakes the meaning of salt waters, and humanly (re)creates human relationships to these waters. Country is tentatively sung back into health.

“Je tiens le flot de la  
rivière comme un  
violon.”<sup>250</sup>  
(Éluard 897)

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<sup>250</sup> “I hold the flow of the river as a violin.”

In conclusion, by engaging in composition processes which require exchanges and interactions across and beyond ethno- and anthropocentric boundaries, the artists redefine musical creation as a form of recuperative and restorative collaboration whose aim is to (re)compose<sup>251</sup> and nurture the salt waters of Lower Murray Country through rhythmic accumulations and proliferations of ontological significance, as both the environment and its traditional custodians, the Ngarrindjeri Nation, contribute to their formation. The viscosity of salt waters enables the artists to hear and craft resonances, and to consequently reveal and expose reverberating polyrhythms with which to compose beyond the exploitative shadows of a space devastated by salinity. Their compositions respond to the need to develop (or perhaps rediscover) new ways to imagine ourselves in salt waters, beyond the limitations of our current position.

The discussed music shifts and reconfigures how listeners perceive watery areas near the Murray Mouth. It invents and sustains new languages of awareness and care which are cognisant (rather than defiant) of salinity. These languages do not occupy these watery spaces, but nurture them through rhythmic layering. Therefore, through composition, artists develop the ability to find rhythms in areas that seem arrhythmic; they are able to craft and implement a sustainable acoustemology of salinity where humans finally listen, hear and sound salt waters by engaging with their diverse and interconnected rhythms. This acoustemology provides a rhythmic structure to understand and compose with the resonances of salt waters in our liquid era.

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<sup>251</sup> I use the term (re)compose to convey that this process happens on a space which is not empty but has already been carefully composed over many thousands of years. Even if somewhat decomposed by colonisation, this space cannot be reduced to a blank score; and it can therefore never be “composed” but simply subjected to attempts at (re)composition. I also use this term (re)compose to indicate that composers use previous layers, inserting them in their (re)composition of space. More than composition, they engage in a process which resembles an assemblage (a collage): they recompose something out of previous bits and pieces.



# Vision 4—

*Toute-eau: Love Thy Waters*

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

Edward Kamau Brathwaite  
("Caribbean Man in Space and Time" 1)

The first line of this fragment from poet and scholar Edward Kamau Brathwaite's "Caribbean Man in Space and Time" opens Glissant's *Poetics of Relation*. "The unity is submarine". Not only does it apply to Glissant's approach to Relation, but it also summarises the orientation of his lifework: waters, as the pivot around which to wrap our breathing bodies and imagine a shimmering totality; waters, where the world perpetually swirls and flows together as currents—both aerial and aquatic—carry its many different manifestations from one state to the other. Waters transform. They exchange through collision with others, and yet, they always retain their unity (unicity)—their (molecular) structure—even if invisible, buried, quietened (over)pumped groundwater. They remain waters, in their irreducible unity-diversity.

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

This vision is concerned with this submarine unity: a unity which is to be found underwater—within the waters. It aims to intertwine fragments—to study them whole—by using the rhythms of waters (both intrinsic and human-produced) to shift in between (that is, disrupt) states, perspective and chronologies. Here, I imagine how fragments drawn from previous visions combine so that I can study them (as) whole.<sup>252</sup> I (finally) listen to the intrinsic music of waters. This vision thus consists of hearing the echoes of Glissant's *Tout-monde* within the waters of Lower Murray Country; or more precisely, it aims to articulate these waters as *Toute-eau*

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<sup>252</sup> This also aligns with Carter's notion of "figurative thinking" discussed in the thesis' introductory chapter.

(*Whole-water* or *All-water*<sup>253</sup>) themselves: an imaginary realm of creativity emerging from the forever-expanding totality of all waters, in both space and time.

The fragments under scrutiny are disparate: I move in between (within) bodies of waters. I move in between (within) Lower Murray Country, the Pacific and the Atlantic—through my Glissantian all-connector. These fragments belong to the sonic realm: I explore the unity to be found in watery depth through sound, and forms of sonority. I discuss Ngarrindjeri and settler music, collaborative music that crosses ethno- and anthropocentric boundaries; the silence of the Murray River’s dried mouth with its brace-barrages, and the compensating loudness of atmospheric rivers—rivers in the sky.

This vision is both associative and cumulative. I approach it as a journey: I follow relationships and passages defined and informed by watery rhythms. I travel from the human to the more-than-human, from the micro to the macro, from the local to the global, from the sky to the earth, from me to (my) others. Glissant says: “To write is to speak: the world” (“From *The Whole-World Treatise*” 32). Relinquishing former absolutes, I slip inside and underneath sound to draw together a series of antagonisms which are progressively brought into collaboration to create, not a synthesis, but a mosaic where each constituent of a pair carries within itself the totality of its counterpart, and of the world; a mosaic where each constituent pays attention to, and composes with, the other.

This journey is unrevised—I retrace my steps (I repeat myself)<sup>254</sup>; it does not follow a linear progression<sup>255</sup> but records twists and turns, unlike explorers’ expunged accounts of their journeys (see Carter, *The Road* 75-6). As Carter argues:

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<sup>253</sup> I have chosen to coin, and primarily use, the term in French so that my reference to the Glissantian *Tout-monde* never fades away as I progress through my argument and build on this term. *Tout-monde* has been translated as “the world in its entirety”, “whole-world” and/or “all-world”. I propose a dual translation of *Toute-eau*: “Whole-water”, which brings forth the unity to be found in waters, and “All-water”, which accentuates their diversity.

<sup>254</sup> See Carter (*Ground Truthing* 4); see also Glissant (*Poetics of Relation* 45).

<sup>255</sup> I am not interested in engaging in arrowlike nomadism (Glissant, *Poetics of Relation* 12). Rather, my “rhythm of walking generates a kind of rhythm of thinking, and the passage through a landscape echoes or stimulates the passage through a series of thoughts” (Solnit, *Wanderlust* 5-6).

To describe a country is not to stand back, as if one were not there, but to travel it again. ... History is not a form of writing, a linear archive manufactured after the event. Instead, history and the making of history are one and the same thing. (*The Road* 346)

This vision is therefore an exercise in imagination. The totality that I speak of is never totalising: this is precisely what imagination prevents. The silences of/in the text are due to its incomplete, partial and fragmentary nature; they are not reducing or essentialising. They leave the text open (to interpretation, to rewriting, to disintegration); open to become another text already. It is a text-in-becoming.

This vision is conceived (built) as a chant to Lower Murray Country's waters—or is it a prayer? It rolls over these waters and sings them into textual being.<sup>256</sup> This is my contribution, and I wish it to account for a “horizon of possibilities”<sup>257</sup> that is not happily cradled in environmental degradation, but fights to spring again from the ruins of colonisation.<sup>258</sup> I am “breathing air” as I sing-write. Breath translates as *pneuma* (πνεῦμα) in Ancient Greek. It also means soul, spirit or creative life force. My breath carries my voice. Exhalations and inhalations give its rhythm to my strokes on the keyboard. My breathing is cyclical; it is tidal. The gestational power of waters<sup>259</sup> contributes to my state of mind. Waters run through my veins. With each breath I take, I feel them under my skin. I am pregnant with hopes. Waters show me how to hope. They are my “réalité source”<sup>260</sup> (Glissant, *Philosophie de la Relation* 47). They imprint my body with their rhythms. There is an affective dimension to “breathing air”. Breathing implies feeling. I am not alone.

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<sup>256</sup> I like this notion of chant. Glissant writes: “[v]ivre la relation, c’est donc pour chacun crier le chant de sa terre, et chanter longuement l’aube où elle s’apparaît et, déjà, se fond” (“Live relation is thus for each to yell the chant of the earth, and sing at length the dawn where it appears and, already, melts”) (*L’Intention Poétique* 209). Bachelard concurs: “[l]’imagination n’est pas, comme le suggère l’étymologie, la faculté de former des images de la réalité ; elle est la faculté de former des images qui dépassent la réalité, qui chantent la réalité” (“imagination is not, as its etymology suggests, the capacity to form images from reality; it is the capacity to form images that exceed reality, that sing reality”) (*L’Eau et les Rêves* 23).

<sup>257</sup> This phrase is used by historian Yuval Noah Harari to encompass “the entire spectrum of beliefs, practices and experiences open to each society depending on its ecological, technical and cultural limits” (61). We generally only call on a minuscule portion of this horizon; hence my desire to expend my perspectives.

<sup>258</sup> This is a bid against the failure of imagination when confined to data (hyperobjects), as discussed in the introduction to the thesis.

<sup>259</sup> This gestational power has been described as a constant source of (re)creation (Neimanis; Chen et al.).

<sup>260</sup> “source reality”.

My body-as-affect (my affective body) connects to others. Gibbs writes: “Rhythm traverses individual bodies, linking them in affectivity or responsiveness to the world” (“Writing as Method” 229). “[B]reathing air” generates fertile terrains of affective cross-pollination. It has the potential to transform through connections. This is why explorations of watery sound can be used to (re)create emplaced dialogues. “The unity is submarine”: the rhythms of waters intertwine the fragments. They are un-fragmenting.

Breathing air connects (dots); breathing air is the antidote to breaking rhythms. It reminds me of the whole from which the fragments I am scrutinising rose into existence. It also shows me that these fragments are still constantly mutating through the impulsion of this whole. I cannot deter them from moving, for I cannot stop breathing. Breathing air also reminds me that I have a body. I breathe in and through it. I perform the watery environments of Lower Murray Country (in text). Breathing intertwines the rhythms of my voice and watery flows on a physiological, sub-textual level: “the writing body must rehearse and recall, or re-enact, its active relations with the world in abstract and attenuated form” (Gibbs, “Writing as Method” 228). I also won’t forget Denning’s advocacy for writing-as-performance (“Writing”). I took it to heart: it is challenging to think of an audience, and probably irrational to attempt to engage with it through an academic product. However, how else could I “display ... the relationality needed to sabotage colonial systems of thought and power for the purpose of liberatory alternatives”<sup>261</sup>? And so, I cannot help but perform my text as I write it: I am a paper actor, an actor of (words on) paper. I sing-write. I continue to accumulate examples (Glissant is never far); I will continue to accumulate examples and turn them into texts. As literary critic and social theorist Michael Warner writes: “No single text can create a public. Nor can a single voice, a single genre, even a single medium ... [What does, though, is] the concatenation of texts through time” (90). As examples keep accumulating, what I perform here is a (re)actualising, self-reflective loop. I react to my supervisors’ feedback, to my colleagues’ comments, to the tides of the world around me. I mirror and respond to the thesis’ introduction; bringing my work over the last three-and-a-half years to a full circle. What can be learnt through sonic stimulation? (What

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<sup>261</sup> To re-use the quotation by Martineau and Ritskes (2) already given in the thesis’ introduction.

have I learnt?) I must discuss the potential of sound studies to finish and reach a full stop, a coda. This loop represents my final vision—the ultimate (or concluding) textual performance of my thesis; a conclusion which is unresolved, open. It represents the written account of my journey as a rhythm analyst.

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

My first pause is on a deserted stretch of coast between Goolwa and the Murray Mouth. All I hear is the steady drumming of the tide. The lack of fresh water reaching the Mouth intensifies and accentuates its loudness: there is nothing else to hear, but two hyperobjects—colonial mismanagement of water and climate change—beating (on) this coast.

The tide endlessly recesses and progresses.

It gives me the tempo, and I follow its cyclical rhythm. I listen to these drums of water, and I am transported elsewhere. I start to hear Pacific tides within them. Author and anthropologist Epeli Hau'ofa's voice resonates in my mind. It says: “[o]ur natural landscapes then are maps of movements, pauses, and more movements ...” (44).

The tide endlessly recesses and progresses.

There is a sonic pause in between its back-and-forth dance. A silence that contains the world in molten suspension.



In French, we call this musical symbol a *soupir* (a sigh, or a breath)—English, as always, is more prosaic: it is a rest. I keep breathing air. The movements and pauses that are mapped stretch beyond the confines of the Australian horizon. I sense a spectrum of hidden sounds under the surface, under my skin. These waters can no longer be conceived in autarchy—they have never acted that way. Spoken-word artist Paul Wamo Taneisi recites while shaking the *sonnailles*<sup>262</sup> attached just above his ankle:

D'où suis-je?  
Je viens du ventre de ma mère  
Je viens d'un Océan Pacifique  
D'un Océan coupé en deux sur toutes les cartes géographiques  
Je viens d'un continent oublié  
De l'Océan le plus grand et le plus oublié du monde  
Je viens d'un petit caillou séché par le soleil  
Je viens de là et de là, je suis arrivé jusqu'ici.<sup>263</sup>

Colonisation has traditionally isolated Lower Murray Country's waters. It has negated their belonging to the *Toute-eau*. Yet, as I stand on the shore, I feel trade routes unfolding over the watery movements that I hear. The waters of Lower Murray Country are Oceanic waters. When around such a watery place, my body falls next to the Pacific rim.<sup>264</sup> I am (in) Oceania: "I come from there, and from there, I have arrived to here." I remember Matthew Flinders' and Nicolas Baudin's trips: they both sailed right past the Mouth, failed to hear it, and continued their voyage—*en route* to Sydney, Mauritius, France and England. Had they been poets, they could have said: "I come from there, and from there, I have arrived to here." The musicality of these waters is interconnected: along watercourses, on the ground and in the sky, it maps a world of relationalities. As I listen to the stories that the tide whispers, my outlook is pan-Pacific, even global. It embraces the watery

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<sup>262</sup> A traditional instrument made from dried coconut leaves and/or cycas fruits. The performer's foot is stomped on the ground to produce rhythm.

<sup>263</sup> "Where am I from? / I come from my mother's belly / I come from a Pacific Ocean / a Pacific Ocean cut in half on all geographical maps / I come from a forgotten continent / from the largest and most discarded Ocean of the world / I come from a little rock [*caillou*, a colloquialism that designates New Caledonia] dried by the sun / I come from there, and from there, I have arrived to here."

<sup>264</sup> Interestingly, even within academia, there is still a common prejudice attached to Australia which means that it is traditionally excluded from Pacific studies. While this might sometimes make some sense from a sociological perspective, it cannot find any geographic ground. There is therefore no room for it in a place-centred exploration such as mine.

environments of Lower Murray Country along with those of other geographically distant locations. I perform a giant aquapelagic assemblage, that is, “a radically interdisciplinary writing of the meanings of place” (Maxwell 23). Yet, despite its global outreach, my assemblage negates the ontological homogeneity that colonialism has applied over waters. It aims to unravel the silencing of these waters: I engage with their specificities, and my voice is firmly located in the sounded environments. I dive deeper within the Pacific connections I heard in the tide and transpose a form of chorographic variation to Australian shores: I conceptualise the diversity of ontologies which arise when considering specific environments—in all their particularities—as generative contexts (Hayward, “The Constitution of Assemblages”, “Aquapelagos and Aquapelagic Assemblages” and “Sounding the Aquapelago” 116; Dick 2, 17). To borrow some of architect Michael Tawa’s words, I perform this chorography “as a way of construing and actualising” waters, “of recreating and remembering” them, “of orchestrating and reconstituting” their fractal parts (49); as a way to speak of watery tales from (t)here. *We Are the Ocean*, reads the title of a book by Hau’ofa. We are the ocean. And if the ocean dances, I must dance with it.

March 2018. This vision is drenched in imaginary aerial waters. After yet another summer of below-average rainfall, I long for a storm. I need to be reminded of the sound of water drops tapping against my tin roof. They are an infinity of “Hellos!” I need these greetings to calm me down. The droplets of perspiration running along my back as I sit in front of my computer and write this thesis simply cannot do it. I turn the pages backwards and find Miriam Hyde’s *Prayer for the Rain* within one of my many paper towers of PhD sources. I play it again in my head. Composed in 1970, it is a song for dramatic soprano and piano with the following lyrics:

Land waiting for rain,  
Land waiting for rain,  
Bones of dead sheep  
On pulverised earth.  
Land thirsty for rain,  
Land thirsty for rain,  
A kangaroo dropped  
By the sunken lagoon.  
Land longing for rain,



Land longing for rain,  
Watching for the clouds  
To give it rebirth.  
Land straining for rain,  
Land straining for rain,  
Life giving showers  
Oh come,  
Come soon!

Already, in 1970, waters were a thing of prayers rather than of reality. The “pulverised earth” longs to be turned into dough (again); it longs to remain dough. The quest for waters can no longer be confined to the ground. Explorers have long been and gone. Their desiccated faces are imprinted on the clouds. I imagine them smiling as rain pours: Murrundi/Murray River will flow and run again; it will flood the veins of Australia and Australians. Rivers in the sky will drop, reconnecting dry patches, creating one giant puddle after the other. Praying for waters becomes a form of pataphysics. It conducts and dictates behaviours: the heavens will open and pour—if only imaginarily. (It makes for lovely sounding augmented chords.) Because if it does not happen on the ground, it must eventually happen above. The water in the sky will surely loudly compensate for the quietness of the water on the ground. The equilibrium is restored; the equilibrium is kept, to paraphrase chemist Antoine Lavoisier whose statement has become an idiom in French: “dans la nature rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd, tout change”<sup>265</sup> (140-1). Vision 1, Vision 2, Vision 3. They have unfolded one after the other. This is Vision 4. It does not come after the others: it precedes them all. It is their imagined totality; it is how they open to, and contain, the world. It is how, breathing air, I return to my introduction. Returning (to previous visions) transforms journeying as an act of (re)joining and disjoining (*relier et délier*). Returning suggests a previous departure, or a multiplicity of departures. Yet, without retracing my steps and trying different junctions—including wandering and getting lost on side tracks—without the physical and imaginary journeying, my thesis would not be what it now is. H<sub>2</sub>O flows in between these lines. “Rien ne se crée, rien ne se perd, tout change.” Because the sky reaches other horizons. Vision 4 is (already) upon me. The rain must come from elsewhere. I must sing-write louder.

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<sup>265</sup> “In nature, nothing is created, nothing is lost, everything changes.”

This vision is my chant of and for the waters of Lower Murray Country: it explores reciprocities and antagonisms; it connects and disconnects; it recesses and progresses; it is loud (over-abundant) and quiet (blatantly absent). It is cyclical. I am breathing air. My chant is born in the Glissantian *Tout-monde*. It is where (my) *Toute-eau* finds its roots and routes. Glissant explains:

J'appelle Tout-monde notre univers tel qu'il change et perdure en échangeant et, en même temps, la "vision" que nous en avons. La totalité-monde dans sa diversité physique et dans les représentations qu'elle nous inspire : que nous ne saurions plus chanter, dire ni travailler à souffrance à partir de notre seul lieu, sans plonger à l'imaginaire de cette totalité.<sup>266</sup> (*Traité* 176)

Imaginaries and realities are interconnected. One flows into the other, while simultaneously receiving the other within its own flow. Similarly to this vision, they form a constantly self-actualising loop. One does not (cannot) exist without the other. Glissant insists on the indivisible nature of the swirling between the imaginary and physical aspects of his concept: it is "le monde que vous avez tourné dans votre pensée pendant qu'il vous tourne dans son roulis"<sup>267</sup> (*Tout-Monde* 208). These form "une alchimie indéchiffrable"<sup>268</sup> (Chamoiseau 320). Such a positioning anchors (once again) the subjective perception and interpretation of the watery environments which surround us all—from tap to swamp. Yet, this real-imaginary whirlpool does not mean that the physical is equivalent (or reducible) to its representation(s). The endless back-and-forth movements in between these two is primordial—being static in itself is movement: it is the refusal of movement. The waters contained in my *Toute-eau* illustrate the same principles as Glissant's *Tout-monde*. *Toute-eau* is our watery environments as we hear (feel) them and imagine them. It is our watery environments as they fill and surround us. *Toute-eau* is a *Tout-monde* of waters; a *Tout-monde* where waters inundate bodies and swirl them (with)in their sonic flows. This world I imagine and inhabit, though, somewhat diverges from the *Tout-monde*. It is feminine. An "e" is added to Glissant's "tout".

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<sup>266</sup> "I call All-world our universe as it changes and persists while exchanging; and at the same time, the 'vision' that we have of it. The totality-world in its physical diversity and in the representations that it inspires us: how could we sing, speak and work in pain from our own place, without diving into the imaginary of this totality."

<sup>267</sup> "the world you have turned in your mind while it turns you in its swaying".

<sup>268</sup> "an undecipherable alchemy".

It softens its consonants. Unlike the noun “world”, which is masculine, “water” belongs to the feminine realm in French. I am happy about this.<sup>269</sup> If I echo Glissant (if I repeat myself), it is *au féminin* (in the feminine form). I grow out of the *Tout-monde*, as much as I grow against it. I am not Glissant, and I cannot parrot his words without making them mine; without integrating them within my own and transforming them in the process—as much as each of them changes me. This is the last of the “liberatory alternatives” with which I wish to experiment in this thesis. For I am a woman, and that fact should be stated: it bends every sound I hear and shapes every word I write.

Divergent confluences  
Running towards one  
another  
Avoiding  
And dissolving into the  
other  
*Ad libitum*

and *ad libitum*  
still *ad libitum*  
*ad libitum* again

The *Toute-eau* is turbulence.<sup>270</sup> Waters generate whirlpools which rise against linearity. My discourse circles from their abyssal depth to their surface. It adds to its core with every passage. So does time. Shifting chronologies stand as a defence against the many gaps in the colonial historical narrative. In this associative and cumulative vision, I expand and contract time by shifting points of view mid-

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<sup>269</sup> This joins with feminist and environmental humanist Astrida Neimanis, who sees the feminine in waters as a way of rising against one more (academic) barrier. Bachelard also insists on the feminine character of waters—as a source of constant rebirth (*L'Eau et les Rêves* 20).

<sup>270</sup> Turbulence has its aesthetics: the world is *Chaos-monde* (Glissant, *Traité*). Glissant writes: “J’appelle *Chaos-monde* le choc actuel de tant de cultures qui s’embrasent, se repoussent, disparaissent, subsistent pourtant, s’endorment ou se transforment, lentement ou à vitesse foudroyante : ces éclats, ces éclatements dont nous n’avons pas commencé de saisir le principe ni l’économie et dont nous ne pouvons pas prévoir l’emportement” (22) (“I call *Chaos-world* the current collision of so many cultures which set each other ablaze, repeal each other, disappear and yet persist, fall asleep or transform, slowly or at lightning speed: these slivers, these bursts whose principle and economics we have not started to understand, and whose impulse we cannot foresee.”) The unpredictable creative turbulence of waters is also discussed by Carter (*Places Made after their Stories* 64, 141), along with the notion of chaos as elemental creation (*Ground Truthing* 70).

sentence, or mid-paragraph, and thus merge past, present and future together. Through this disruption of the chronological order, I attempt to remember in-between, occulted, unrecorded histories; and it is these histories which connect me to my watery surroundings. Following a cyclical pattern, time no longer matters. In the *Tout-monde*, time becomes irrelevant in terms of hierarchical organisation. Glissant insists that a newborn status characterises all in the *Tout-monde* (*Traité* 230). All fill the present (are present), while simultaneously carrying all pasts and foreseeing all futures. For how could there be a beginning if there is no end to the transformations that are taking place? I am writing a Möbius strip of text. I follow in Glissant's path as he develops this thought:

Je ne sais pas à quel âge, dans mon très jeune temps, j'ai rêvé d'avoir développé un texte qui s'enroulerait innocemment mais dans une drue manière de triomphe sur lui-même, jusqu'à engendrer au fur et à mesure ses propres sens. La répétition en était le fil, avec cette imperceptible déviance qui fait avancer.<sup>271</sup> (*La Cohée du Lamentin* 20)

Repetition is the reflection of a quest for totality: endless accumulations sketch a picture of what this totality could be. It becomes a protective mechanism against reduction and appropriation. I constantly repeat myself, but in every repetition, I slightly shift what I am saying and add a layer of meaning to it, making it more complex, and thus impossible to reduce or appropriate. And if I use definitions by negation—if I explain what something is not rather than what it is—it is to leave what it is open. Repetition is also how to transcend the dryness of concepts—the speculative nature of pure abstractions. As words vary, they become picture-words. Rather than defining, they illustrate. They associate and cumulate to form moving images despite their imaginary quality. They come to life on their own through repetitive movement. The colour of sounds tinges them. Examples pile after examples (in an extremely Glissantian fashion), and their combination allows me to imagine a potential totality, while not reducing this totality to a bounded and fixed concept. A tumultuous cumulus saturated with meanings is forming; it

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<sup>271</sup> "I don't know at what age, in my youth, I dreamt that I had developed a text which would innocently coil around itself but in a vigorous and triumphant manner, until it engenders its own meanings as it goes. Repetition was the guiding thread, with that imperceptible deviation which pushes forward."

connects sky and earth through torrential water drops. These word variations, like musical pieces, flow *ad libitum* (at will), in their unity-diversity. And, as the words are introduced (declined), my body travels with them. It follows the pictures they raise in my mind. I am projected elsewhere. I am moving forward.

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

Forward implies journeying. Let me return to my first vision: the passage of watery environments from humid terrains to a d(r)ying site. I am back on the colonial theatrical stage.

The river pauses.  
It is held—behind five  
maestro barrages.

Dredgers are playing angry staccatos over the pianissimo melody still escaping its  
mouth.

1 2 3 4 5

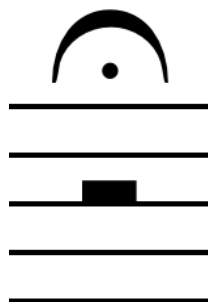
They are obstinate,  
spiked with rarely  
oscillating  
key changes.

They are metronomes  
rocking  
in slow motion.

1 2 3 4 5

Shut!

I am (not) holding my  
breath.



Should I?

5 4 3 2 1

D(r)ying

*Ostinato continuo.*

I take my second pause on top of Goolwa Barrage, one of five barrages enclosing the Murray Mouth. I find it difficult to dance to silence. There is not much to hear, beside the deafening quietness of the concrete and metal protruding from the waters like gigantic unmarked tombstones. Perfectly aligned, they conduct and delineate sound. The river, Lake Alexandrina and Lake Albert stagnate and disintegrate into silence on one side; the wind of the Coorong and the sea noisily pound in the distance on the other. I face away from the sea. Pelicans and black swans glide across the still sheen of Lake Alexandrina—it is sunset, and life is silver.



Photograph 10. Sunset on Lake Alexandrina

Plastered notes and lyrics ring over these glistening waters. Colonial songs project the audience into a carefully crafted space: gentle and quiet waters framed by picturesque weeping willow trees sparkle passively under the sun so as to carry

settlers' epiphanies and dreams. Transposed musical styles finish bending Australian waters into European rhythmic folds. New rhythms lead to new behaviours: Australian waters are made compliant. Such musical construction and constriction provide a stage befitting for (imaginary) colonial projection and subsequent (physical, "real") manipulation; and these have been replicated over most colonised bodies of waters worldwide.

Five barrages enclose the Murray Mouth.

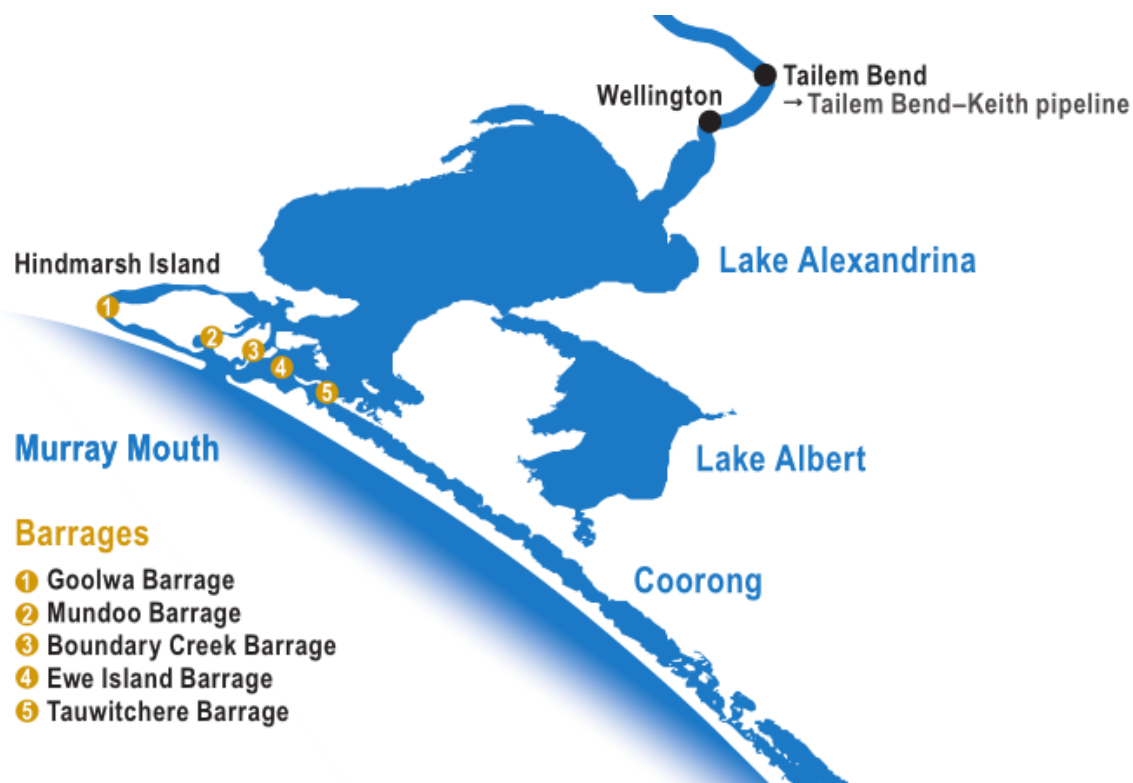
Five barrages enclose the Murray Mouth.

From the mid-1880s, arguments over the Lower Lakes' poor environmental health regularly surfaced in newspaper columns, and government agencies' reports. The lack of river flow due to excessive upstream water extraction meant that the sea intruded further and further: fresh waters turned to salt. The colonial solution consisted of erecting five barrages between 1935 and 1940. Conceived with a practical (read: neo-colonial capitalist) purpose in mind, these barrages have been shaping the sonic environments of Lower Murray Country for nearly 150 years. Its waters can no longer sing in tonalities that are not those of European waters.

Five barrages enclose the Murray Mouth.

Five barrages enclose the Murray Mouth.

The names are: Goolwa, Mundoo, Boundary Creek, Ewe Island and Tauwitchere. Together, these five barrages orchestrate the sonic death of Murrundi/Murray River's waters as they reach the Lower Lakes. Over the course of my PhD candidacy, I visited them several times. I needed to make sure: the concrete and metal are real, and they blend watery horizons into a singular piece of engineering.



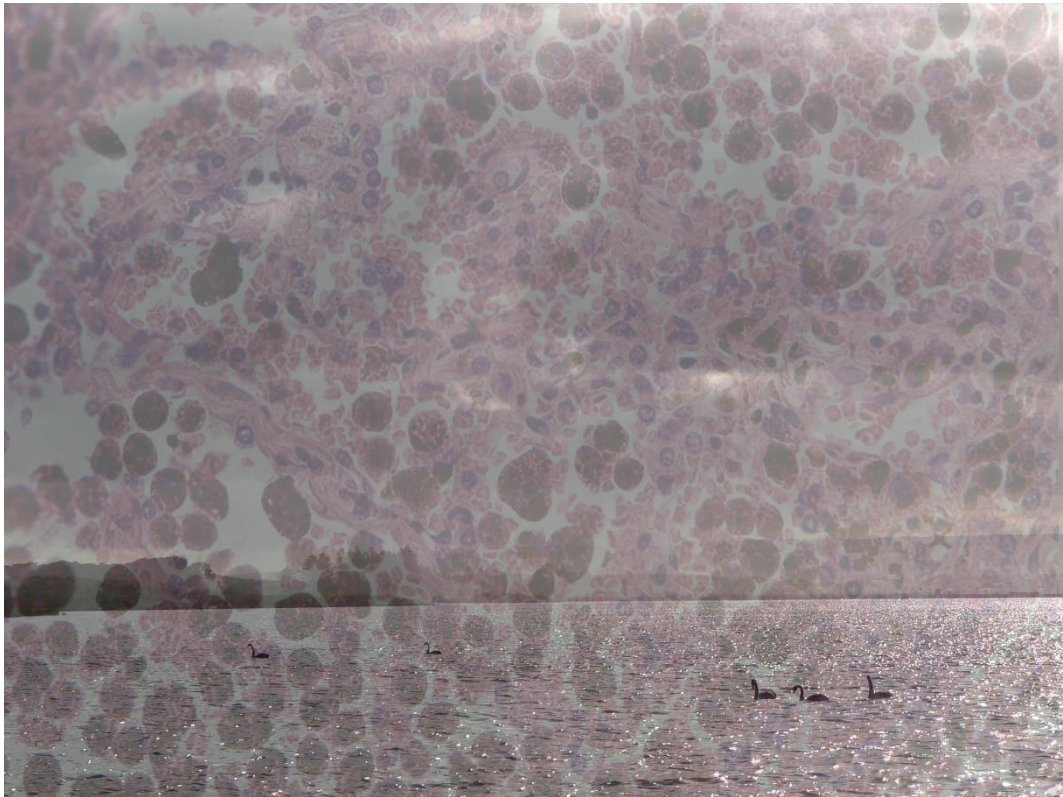
Map 5. Barrages 1 to 5.

(Source: MDBA)

A total of sixty gates dot these five barrages. On average—and more often than is sustainable—barely any are open. When it happens, though, beautifully organised and equidistant waves flow through. Clearly delimited by concrete and metal bars, their volume is engineered: from pianissimo to fortissimo at the push of a button which conducts the waters, day and night, night and day. The changes in the rhythmic character of these waters alter their metrical nature, and that of adjacent watery environments. Their music becomes measured, fine-tuned and controlled to suit the ongoing performance of the colonial act of “discovery”. The unending repetition of such a performance is not without physical consequences: lived terrains are d(r)ying. Such a design is effectively turning Australia into the “silent continent” that settlers thought it was. For it is easier to speak over silenced entities—it does not require yelling. The barrages stand proud and tall. As design theorist and philosopher Tony Fry summarises: “designed things go on designing” (*Design Futuring* 3). The sonic impact of such a continuation is so loud that it becomes barely audible: silence keeps on silencing. I feel, rather than hear, the detonating calm of stagnant water surfaces. I am breathing air, and it melts into these waters as much as into my lung alveoli. Muted bodies of waters become ill



bodies. Eulogies are composed. And author Aldous Huxley writes: “After silence, that which comes nearest to expressing the inexpressible is music.”



Deep Map 12. Breathing Air in Lower Murray Country

Lungs full of waters scream: they suffocate. Tubes and monitors record these oppressive rumblings. They are confronting: a patient is given a dose of morphine which is supposed to do more than relieve their pain. The voice flows with air: silence translates as an absence of flow, as a blockage of airflow. Flows are the breath of waters. Around the Murray Mouth, technology mostly records silence. There, data *does* speak in “quiet conjecture”. Measuring points register absences—of flows, of species, of freshness. Barely any water gushes through the Mouth. Its sealed banks are shaken by sea waves rather than by river currents. Wind dominates this engineered sonic environment of silence. It bites my ears ferociously.

Barrage #1  
Goolwa Barrage

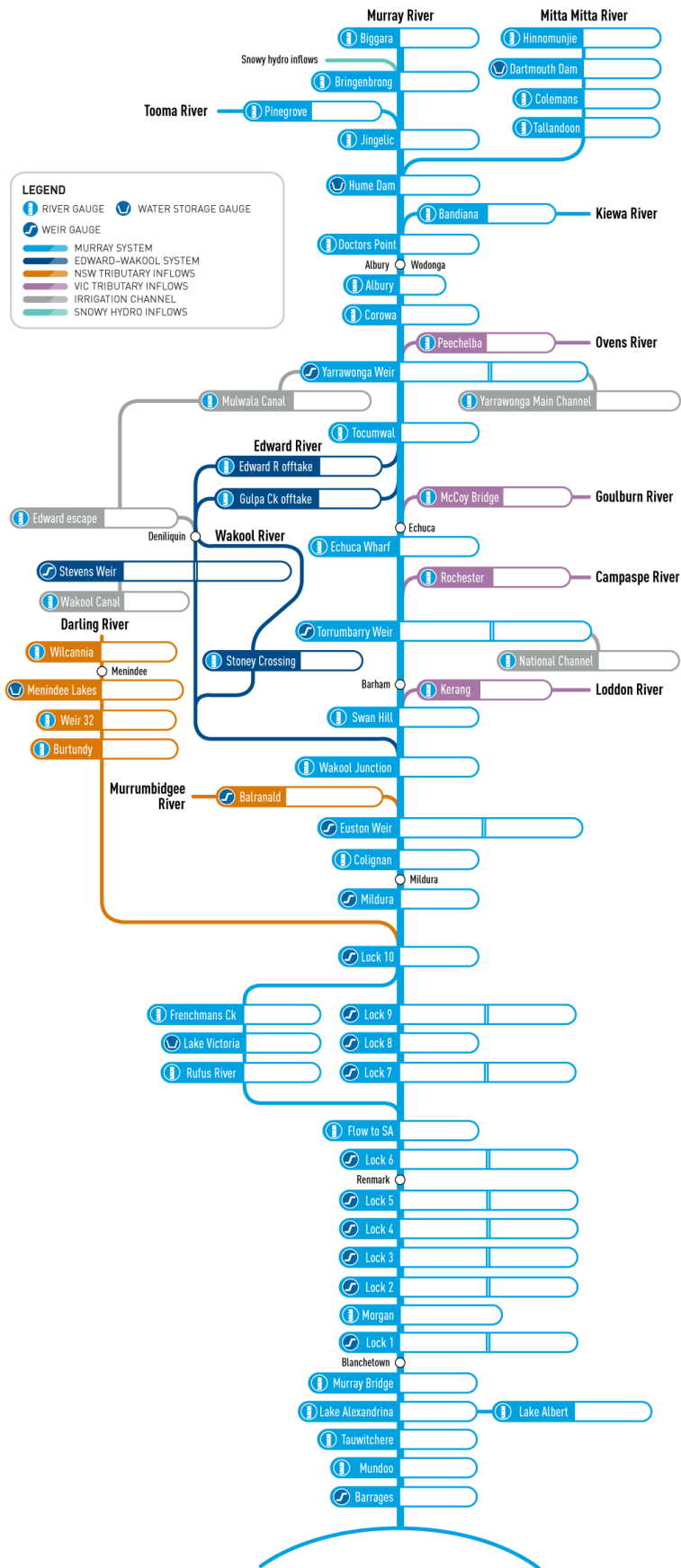
Barrage #2  
Mundoo Barrage

Barrage #3  
Boundary Creek  
Barrage

Barrage #4  
Ewe Island Barrage

Barrage #5  
Tauwitchere Barrage

These five barrages are supported by over fifteen major structures scattered upstream. Environmental degradation seems to grow exponentially—the further downstream I travel, the worse it becomes.



Map 6. Plumbing in Murray River Country  
(Source: MDBA)

I read the signs next to Goolwa Barrage. The shaping of sound by these barrages is a performative technique—along with their maps and names. I am a tourist, and I am allowed to walk on it until its halfway point. Seals rest on its boulders. This is a public space.



Photograph 11. Concrete and Metal on Water

Design—like any other cultural product—is an ontological practice: it represents the “materialisation of a particular imaginary which is world-shaping” (Potter, “The Ethics of Rural Place-Making” 20). It represents a force that governs sonic environments, obscuring some frequencies to develop others. Public space “is defined by a (potential) openness to elsewhere” (18). It carries a “poetic and material actancy as a narrator and producer of ecological arrangements and complicities” (21). It is unfinished, multivocal; competing and converging discourses fill the air: this also makes it politically active. It is, above all, ephemeral. Yet, the design linked to colonial practices of water management in Lower Murray Country performs in the opposite way: it encloses space, severing connections to elsewhere; it silences voices in favour of a monological grand verbal delirium anchored in western aesthetics. It freezes and binds what it touches to enforce predictability. As it “go[es] on designing”, it becomes increasingly difficult to perform outside of the auditory framework that it imposes on these watery environments. It becomes difficult to perform beyond the ongoing repetition of the colonial act of “(re)discovery”. These barrages (and the structures dotting the river in general) are a failure of design to recollect what was/is already (t)here (cf. Potter, “The Ethics of Rural Place-Making” 22). Rather, they create something relatively new within the watery environments of Lower Murray Country: environmental arrhythmia. As Fry explains: “Until very recently, the consequences of what human centredness took from or imposed upon environments and ecologies was just not taken into account—expediency ruled” (*Design Futuring* 31).

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

My third pause carries me to Kangaroo Island. As I cross from mainland to island, I think of Ngurunderi—one of the Ngarrindjeri’s ancestors. Pursuing his two wives who were ignoring his call to stop, Ngurunderi called for the waters to rise and drown them. The terrestrial path between mainland and Kangaroo Island was submerged. Ngurunderi crossed to the island to mourn and prepare himself for the spirit world in the Milky Way. Whalers also inhabited the island nearly 40 years before the official settlement of South Australia in 1836. They took their kidnapped

Aboriginal wives along with them—another reason to hear mourning cries echo over the tide. Illness spreads as old connections are severed: arrhythmia has rolled over the waves.



Deep Map 13. Dreaming and/or Settling

Music has been composed with and for these shadow places, to use Plumwood's term once again; music which aims to hear (or recover) resonances despite rhythmic disfigurement, and to recuperate life-sustaining polyrhythms. Composers, sound artists and performers engage in composition processes which require transformative exchanges and interactions across and beyond ethno- and anthropocentric boundaries. Translation stands at the root of their creativity. Environmental inclusions develop sonic dialogues between humans and their environment, drawing a visceral link between the two; re-integrating one within the other in a balanced relationship. Sound distortions conceptually mimic environmental factors and their transformation due to colonial intrusion. Overlapping combinations of acoustic elements simultaneously contract and expand the sonic space-time continuum by suggesting the layering and amalgamation of different spaces and times. These compositions act as records of

change. They retrieve and revisit shards of histories buried in the waters; and translate them acoustically to render them audible again—that is, to open them to interpretation. Musical creation is redefined as a form of recuperative and restorative collaboration whose aim is to (re)compose the waters of Lower Murray Country through rhythmic accumulations and proliferations of ontological significance, as both the environment and its traditional custodians contribute to its formation. Such music responds to the need to recognise “denied places by owning multiplicity, envisioning a less monogamous ideal and more multiple relationship to place” (Plumwood). It resounds the environment sustainably; or more precisely, (re)sounding watery environments develops knowledge and awareness around these environments, which in turn enables sustainable connections and relationships.

Since 2010, the ancestral river ceremony *Ringbalin* has been revived on the initiative of Ngarrindjeri Elder Major “Uncle Moogy” Sumner. It aims to regenerate and revitalise Lower Murray Country’s waters and peoples. For this purpose, dancers and musicians journey down Country, and perform traditional songs and dances along the way. Its revival marked the end of the Millennium Drought. As dancers stomped the ground and musicians made the air vibrate, rain fell. I was there for it in 2017.



Photograph 12. The Fires of *Ringbalin*

Rain falls again. The wind renders it piercing, and icy drops stab me through my raincoat. The warmth of the fires surrounding the performers cannot reach me. These fires are so contained that they barely light the rushes behind them. I sometimes catch a glimpse of the waters hidden within their dancing daggers of light. An opacity that is beyond what I can see is revealed: I must learn how to listen to ineffability differently so that I can hear overwritten rhythms. Clapsticks ring hard against my ears. I forget whether they beat with the dancers' feet or the lapping flickers of shaking waters. This is where Ngurunderi crossed over. I hear it loud and clear when he speaks: as people nurture Country, Country nurtures them. Ecological and socio-cultural worlds collide in reciprocal and entangled processes of care. Ill bodies have caretakers.

These caretakers regroup and join forces. The Ngarrindjeri (and First Nations around Australia in general) draw on previous and/or existing actions taken by Indigenous Nations throughout the world: occupancy mapping (Hemming and Rigney, "Indigenous Land Use and Occupancy Mapping"); cultural flows models



(Tipa and Nelson); UN and Ramsar conventions.<sup>272</sup> These empowering exchanges map a chorography of connection, rather than disconnection. Australian and Indigenous studies scholars Stephen Hemming and Daryle Rigney describe this as “an Indigenous form of glocalisation which draws on the power and flows of international alliances creating new agendas and valuing old ones” (“Unsettling Sustainability” 761). Waters, and concerns about these waters, also connect Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, who come together to protect them. I am reminded of poet and Pacific scholar Teresia Teaiwa who explains that “[w]e sweat and cry salt water, so we know that the ocean is really in our blood” (qtd. in Hau’ofa 41). As cultures and cultural materials (inter)react, a slow, global melody of care and awareness rises from the waters; a humming which provides a pathway to compensate for their silencing. This relational component is at the heart of strategising how to (find space to) express diverse, polyphonic relationships with waters, in a society where waters’ musicality tends to be reduced to a monological trickle. It facilitates flooding, where floods are to be regenerating tumults of cacophonous voices mixing and separating through currents.

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

I return to the mainland for the last pause of my journey. (Re)tracing previous journeys also implies imagining journeys to come. It implies putting into words some of the possible futures, beyond the current scandals surrounding water management in Murray River Country and the doom-filled prophecies of politicians. Sound shifts and reconfigures how I perceive watery areas near the Murray Mouth. It invents and sustains new languages of awareness and care which are cognisant (rather than defiant) of environmental degradation. These languages do not occupy these watery spaces, but nurture them.

But watery spaces also speak for themselves. Atmospheric rivers stretch for thousands of kilometres; they account for over 90 per cent of the global water vapor transport. They travel from the tropics, and drench coasts from North America to

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<sup>272</sup> These tools and texts have also proved instrumental in native title claims.

Europe. They pour and scream with floods over the “quiet conjecture of data” produced about Lower Murray Country’s lack of waters. Uprooting floods scream for bygone nourishing heavy rainfalls. Extreme precipitation is occurring at an increased rate. Rhythms are bolting. Cycles are disturbed: rivers in the sky must loudly compensate for the silence of rivers on the ground. North America receives the water that disappears before reaching the Murray Mouth. Pacific islands sink while Lower Murray Country dies of thirst.



Photograph 13. The Immensity of a Dried Country

In recent years, there has been an amplification of relational and mimetic compositional processes: beyond the desire to make histories audible, stands the desire to (de) or (re)compose waters—that is, to thwart compositional perspectivism and use multivocality to remove hierarchies, and to destabilise the fixity and compartmentalisation of environmental concepts. Performatively constituted and geo-temporally located, these processes of composition are physical; they are suffused with polyrhythms.

“Mobilong” is a 12.5-minute piece for string ensemble and octophonic speaker array composed by sound artist Jesse Budel in 2016. Located near Murray Bridge, Mobilong used to be a swamp. Its “badwaters” were drained to provide arable, irrigated land in the early twentieth century. The Millennium Drought led to severe acidification of the soil in the area due to the lack of waters. As the land became unsuitable for pastoral activities, it was acquired by SA Water. This agency has been trialling remedial activities (such as revegetation and diversion) in order “to optimise the irrigation approach to minimise salinisation and acid sulphate soil leaching to the River Murray near our offtakes” (*Drinking Water Quality Report* 31). Budel’s piece sonically mimics the walking experience along Pump Road, an 800-metre unsealed road which crosses Mobilong. It maps sound evolution as the listener progresses through place in time, from the grass fields to the riverfront in time with sunset (Budel, “Creative Responses” 26). It re-affirms the well-known link between cricket stridulations and temperatures, but also highlights subtler relationships between fauna, flora and elements. This site-specific composition requires the listener to adjust to sound, that is, to take measure of the changing nature of what is happening around them from a sonic perspective, rather than simply relegating it to background noise when on this walk. Noise is transformed into sound by listening to the body; rhythms are found: arrhythmia, felt and heard, acquires a structure (Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis* 27). It has been argued that “we seem to know how to hear from birth. But in a certain sense, culture causes us to unlearn this natural hearing” (Zender qtd. in Schulz 14). In a way, site-specific compositions encourage listeners to learn how to hear again. In the case of *Mobilong*, what is audible is a story of waters that is about regeneration rather than simply depletion and destruction. As the listeners are sonically carried along the road, they are presented with sonic images of watery environments’ positive evolution, instead of with a negative sonic silence spreading deeper and deeper within these environments. As Budel explains: “[t]hrough change in habitats resulting from Mobilong’s restorative management in recent years, the sound walk experience along Pump Road proceeds first through open fields, before passing the plantation and dense reed beds to finally arrive at the rich biodiversity of the river front” (“Creative Responses” 27). This environmental crescendo also provides ground for the (electroacoustic) mimicking or (re)creation of multi-species collaborations through artistic sonic collations. String performers actively

participate in the piece: they are provided with a modular score that they play at their discretion, with time cues to remain synchronised with their environmental counterparts.<sup>273</sup> Instruments are made to mimic bird songs, cricket stridulations and wind in a process where “meaningful mimetic or formal representation” is favoured over “exacting authenticity” (27). This site-specific composition thus gives listeners a glimpse of “sonic symbiocene” between environmental and instrumental sounds. I borrow this term symbiocene from philosopher Glenn Albrecht, who defines it as an era characterised by the affirmation of the interconnectedness of all entities, “living together for mutual benefit”. In site-specific compositions, these entities are interconnected in the sense that they are sonically combined for sonic mutual benefit, either by the composer, the performers or through a randomised process. Through these different combinations, they acquire a greater impact and reinforce one another. Beneficial associations for artistic purposes structure sound and organise sonic units to generate meaning through patterns, volumes, pitches, ranges and so on. Mimetic cumulations and interdependences of sonic units generate meanings which posit a certain “inter-coherence of desires” (Mathews, “Planet Beehive” 9-10). Philosopher Freya Mathews argues that:

It is this inter-coherence of desires, so strikingly exemplified in the image of the beehive, that is the normative key to living systems generally, indeed to the biosphere. Only via such inter-coherence can aware-self-existence—the ultimate end of all our strivings—be generated. And such inter-coherence, according to which the desires of each individual also happen, incidentally, to secure the conditions necessary for the existence of others, is at the same time self-evidently a proto-ethics: a code of mutuality. (ibid.)

The site-specific composition moves from enclosed grass fields to the open riverfront, and this movement acts as an ear-opening journey: the monocrop-based enclosure of land fades away in parallel with the monological colonial imaginary of the auditory mind. Polyphonies are (re)discovered. These sonic expressions of “a code of mutuality” enable listeners to discover other ways to relate, explain and (re)construct watery environments. And indeed, Budel explains that he aims to

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<sup>273</sup> If presented as an electroacoustic work, pre-recorded samples are selected at random through an automated process (Budel, “Adapting Soundscape Ecology” 5).

move “past superficial engagement with place that might result in impressionistic or highly abstract, mimetically-unrelated responses, and also approaches that centre on specific environmental interests” to propose “a comprehensive and integrated method of engaging with place, and related ecosystems and soundscapes” (“Creative Responses” 28).

Long Island is a wound  
on the river’s body. It is  
where Ngurunderi  
threw his spear but  
missed Pondi.

Another one of Budel’s projects is “Long Island”, a 15-minute piece for strings, piano with four hands, and stereo speaker array that he composed in 2017. The piece starts with the terrestrial soundscape around Long Island, a small island located in the river near the town of Murray Bridge where boating activities are allowed on one side, but not the other. The piece opens with field recordings capturing bird calls, which are accompanied by transcriptions for string instruments. Suddenly, the listener is immersed into the aquatic soundscape surrounding the island, and a four-hand piano transcription (developed through spectral analysis and simplification of the underwater field recordings) is meshed within this soundscape. Progressively, sounds linked to boating activities are inserted above the other voices. These sounds come and go, with a slow crescendo, until they eventually overpower all other voices (both environmental and instrumental) present in the piece. The piece returns to the terrestrial soundscape towards the end, inserting the recordings linked to boating activities above the bird calls and their string transcriptions. A similar scenario unfolds, where boating sounds regularly overpower other sounds.

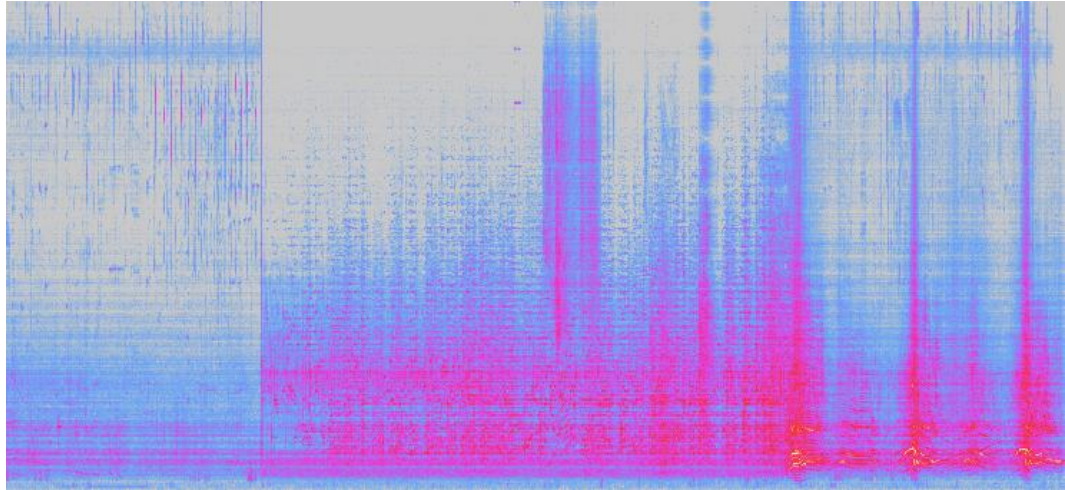


Photograph 14. The Colours of Lower Murray Country

In February 2018, I heard a slightly reduced version<sup>274</sup> of this piece presented as part of a Blue Touch concert at Beaumont House. This site-specific composition plays with the unsightliness of noise, usually left out of traditional scores and charts. This is fully coherent with the fact that “Sound Art owes much to the dissolution of the border between sound (in the sense of musical sound) and noise”—the distinction between the two being the arbitrary result of cultural learning, rather than based on physical differences (Schulz 14). Instead of blocking or removing noise (boat engines), Budel incorporates it prominently in his work in order to make a statement: human-produced sounds strongly impact ecosystems. As the piece unfolds, the listeners become aware of their detrimental impact on the sonic equilibrium of Long Island.

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<sup>274</sup> While pianists Dan Thorpe and Gabriella Smart were present to interpret the piano with four hands, there were no string players. The string parts were pre-recorded and played through the speakers along with the terrestrial, aquatic and boating sounds.



Deep Map 14. Boats and Birds in *Long Island*  
(Entire piece)

This brief peek into the world of sound art demonstrates how, through music, connective and cumulative polyphonies can be brought to the fore and heard—even if unbalanced—and how this unbalance can be denounced. These site-specific compositions exemplify how noise is never simply noisy, but forms part of a relational complex of sounds, each with a meaning and an impact on surrounding sounds—and thus on surrounding entities. Carter writes:

Regions ... are oceanic, waves forming in them spread to the edge of a collective dream. This is why the sea-like Mallee, magnificent but marginalised, matters beyond its region. Inside the Mallee is a reflection of the world. By looking into this reflection we gain a sense of what the worlds could be if we recollected, imagined and reinvented it. (*Ground Truthing* 5; see also 19)

Everything is contained everywhere. Every drop of water contains the imprint of others in its composition; and what impacts it radiates too (Potter, “Postcolonial Atmospheres” 80-3; Plumwood). Such awareness materialises the transformations of hard sounds into the soft sounds described by Serres. Parenthetical sounds—sounds that have, until recently, been ignored by the colonial imaginary—(re)emerge. I am reminded of Glissant who articulates parentheses as breathing spaces: these sounds evoke the breath of Country. Their progressive (re)inclusion into the score of Country prefigures the listeners’ auditory (re)integration within their sonic environments. It is because “[t]he activity of hearing refocuses our

attention on the *experience* of place, for we are asked then to take note of our connection to, and immersion in, place through sound” (Bandt et al. 1). By offering listeners another way of perceiving what surrounds them, sound art also presents them with another way of living with(in) their watery environments. As curator Bernd Schulz summarises, it is “music which possesses no defined beginning or previously determined end, which enters into a new fusion with visual phenomena and wants nothing more but to place realms of experience at the disposal of the recipient” (16).

Such works are recorded dialogically; they record dialogicality, between composers/artists and the environments, their sources (through extensive fieldwork, including community engagement and recording) but also larger networks. Recently, sound artists have also been collaborating with scientists. Such endeavours bear witness to the mutual feeling that there is a need to find other ways to express—record and convey—a message (an urgency) that is not being heard. Major pieces that caught global attention, such as Matthew Dewey’s *Symphony No. 2: Ex-Oceano* and John Luther Adams’s award-winning symphony *Become Ocean*, record the same urgency. Sound art captures a “resurrected ocean-based spatiality” (Wilson “Postcolonial Pacific Poetries” 64; see also “Becoming Oceania” 10) that is—once again—seen as defining the shape of the future on this blue planet: the *Toute-eau* speaks.

These processes of composition are nothing short of creolisation: they represent ongoing creation in language (including musical languages) through accumulations and deformations. Glissant argues: “[c]reolisation is not a synthesis. ... what it creates is new, unheard-of, and unexpected” (“Conclusion” 291). Creolisation is here used metaphorically, or even symbolically. It no longer (solely) refers to the Caribbean but is amplified to a global state—to the ineluctable fate of the entire world: “[l]e monde va en état de créolité ... De plus en plus émergera une nouvelle humanité qui aura les caractéristiques de notre humanité créole : toute la complexité de la Créolité”<sup>275</sup> (Bernabé et al. 51-2). The deracination spreads worldwide and acquires positive connotations. As historian and anthropologist James Clifford

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<sup>275</sup> “the world is turning into a state of creoleness ... A new humanity will increasingly emerge which will have the characteristics of our creole humanity: the entire complexity of Creoleness.”



argues: “[w]e are all Caribbeans now in our urban archipelagos” (*The Predicament of Culture* 173). Differences simultaneously and endlessly collapse, while at the same time, an irreducible and tangled diversity emerges from former absolutes. Author Raphaël Confiant explains that the term creolisation is:

éminemment moderne, et non passéiste et colonial comme d’aucuns pourraient le croire, et même postmoderne dans le sens où il signale l’émergence d’un nouveau modèle d’identité qu’on pourrait appeler “multiple” ou “mosaïque,” en train de s’élaborer sous nos yeux partout à travers le monde ... La créolisation a été en quelque sorte la préfiguration, au cours des trois derniers siècles, de ce phénomène irréversible.<sup>276</sup> (265-6)

Such a de/rerouting of the term has been criticised because of its historical racist/rooted origins in the slave trade,<sup>277</sup> but its strength precisely resides in this history: the reappropriation of the term permits the transition from a paradigm rooted in race to a *métissé*-rhizome model. It reflects one of the biggest, and most undervalued, impacts of colonisation. As literary and postcolonial scholar Edward Said writes: “[n]o one today is purely one thing. Imperialism consolidated the mixture of cultures and identities on a global scale. ... Survival in fact is about the connections between things” (408). Such an understanding of creolisation translates the “massive transformation in civilisation, which is the passage from the all-encompassing world of cultural Sameness, effectively imposed by the West, to a pattern of fragmented Diversity, achieved in a no less creative way by the peoples who have today seized their rightful place in the world” (Glissant, *Caribbean Discourse* 91). No longer about exclusions but about relations and exchanges, this creolising turn reflects an ethical moment (Glissant, *Introduction* 11). Unity-diversity—an infinity of interconnected diversity—emerges. Humans are not “being as such but rather a being or beings in constant flux” (*Introduction* 37). This

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<sup>276</sup> “eminently modern—and not backward-looking and colonial as some could believe—and even postmodern in the sense that it marks the emergence of a new model of identity that could be called ‘multiple’ or ‘mosaic,’ which is taking shape right in front of us all over the world ... In a way, creolisation has been the prefiguration, over the last three centuries, of this irreversible phenomenon.”

<sup>277</sup> It has been argued that it “is not possible to use the term *créole* or ‘Creole’ without referencing the single greatest historical forced transplantation of one race by another”, but also that, “in claiming ... the Caribbean as a historical laboratory of cultural contact ..., Glissant is distancing the concept from its historical scale and also from its unidirectional, biracial meaning” (Gallagher 106). The use of the term has also been criticised for the supposed superiority that is said to be attached to this “new” state of creoleness.

“transformative and even creative mobility of ongoing recomposition or reconstitution of identity” (Gallagher 102) does not solely apply to the human. It also touches the more-than-human and the abstract. Ecosystems and thoughts have also been creolised. Both are constantly evolving under rapid and diverse pressures: the introduction of non-endemic, invasive species (such as carp) has reshaped waterscapes; the tentative imposition of monolingualism has forced “other” languages and knowledges to compose themselves around illegality, denigration and exclusion. Creolisation signifies adapting, circumventing—finding different openings for new forms of expression. It implies being simultaneously opaque and open to the world. Author Mathias Énart writes about such a feeling of in-betweenness in thoughts—and the uncertainty that comes along with it:

parfois, ce qui était un peu déprimant, j’avais l’impression que mes considérations étaient comme le Bosphore—un bel endroit entre deux rives, certes, mais qui, au fond, n’était que de l’eau, pour ne pas dire du vent.<sup>278</sup> (85)

Yet, this sitting (or positioning)—almost *entre deux eaux*—represents a strength. Being in between two banks means being able to connect them: rather than a divide, waters act as a link. They illustrate hyphenated histories and practices. As they replace human societies within their environments, these in-between waters produce and reveal entanglements; those in between the banks, but also those of each bank with its human and more-than-human dwellers. At this stage, it is worth restating Said’s quotation, as he highlights that “[s]urvival in fact is about the connections between things”. It is about connections between entities, but also connections between (within) nature and culture in general. The creolisation resulting from a state of in-betweenness demonstrates how closely humans are tangled with—dependent upon—their environments. Further than providing mechanisms for survival, these connections reflect mechanisms for thriving. Entanglements are indeed generative of reciprocal sustainability, especially in terms of the nature–culture relationship. It has been demonstrated that there is a strong correlation between ecological and cultural health/diversity (Pretty et al.;

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<sup>278</sup> “sometimes, and this was a bit depressing, I felt that my considerations were like the Bosphorus—a beautiful place in between two banks, but which, fundamentally, was only water, not to say hot air.”

Higgins-Desbiolles 147; Hawke 244): cultures and environments engage “in a perpetual dance of co-constitution” (Chen et al. 13). It becomes evident that “the environmental crisis is a failure of culture” (Allen 414). The move from sameness to diversity represents a sustainable turn because it foregrounds dynamic, grassroots exchanges. As Dolar writes when discussing the ontological status of music: “it holds the key to a harmony between ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ the natural and the man-made law” (44). In its modes of production and diffusion, sound art connects: it feeds off the global while retaining the local; it speaks through times and spaces; it fosters the meeting of (supposedly) disparate elements and, in bringing them together, it demonstrates their intertwinement. These creolisation-generating/supporting compositions encourage sonic perceptions of the *Toute-eau* which sketch the premises of holistic yet local approaches to environmental design and management: watery imaginaries and realities enter into Relation to form a single entity, but this entity is not unified—its irreducible diversity is preserved and protected. As its components are constantly re-invented and subjected to competing claims in terms of audibility, sound art favours an ongoing (re)creation of waters and how we relate to them. The creolising tendencies displayed in such a musical genre act as a way of (re)learning how to hear waters. Being in between two banks indeed means being located: it means that it is possible to learn, “via place-centred perspectives, a transformative pedagogy for cultural and ecological literacy” (Satchell 104; see also Mathews, *Reinhabiting Reality*). Dyson writes: “Sound’s ephemeral and atmospheric nature is, like the environment, something that circulates outside of exchange, and refocuses attention on the space and environment of the subject rather than the subject *per se*” (149).

Creolisation, as constant change, joins author and activist Patrick Jones’ notion of “permapoesis”: it generates an ethics of permanent making. It is steering away from restoration, and instead favours creation, or reinvention. It dives into what author Patrick Chamoiseau has qualified as “l’impensable”<sup>279</sup> (323). He writes of “l’impensable, comme source et ressource pour de nouvelles effervescences de nos imaginaires. Le renoncement au sens non comme désespérance mais comme

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<sup>279</sup> “the unthinkable”.

vitalité”<sup>280</sup> (323). He continues, “l’impensable ... se trouve au cœur même de la création et de la créativité contemporaines”<sup>281</sup> (320). The unthinkable does not mean that it cannot happen; it simply reflects the fact that it is impossible to foresee the outcomes of exchanges, of Relation. As Glissant writes: “[m]ais la terre est différente pour chacun. Il y a tant de terres : la totalité résulte (bien plus que de leur somme) de leur relation à venir. On ne saurait conclure”<sup>282</sup> (*L’Intention Poétique* 90). While imagining the unthinkable might be considered utopian, these thoughts of utopia are vital for positive change and transformation. There is a real need to imagine solutions other than apparently “unavoidable” catastrophe (the “thinkable”)—to move past fatalist pictures—in order to be able to design solutions to environmental crises (Bradley). Imagination both morphs and constitutes the real: without imagination, there is no perception; and without perception, there is no emplacement or belonging. Embracing creolised imaginaries implies stepping outside of imposed frameworks. Such creolisation has thus been associated with a form of reverse colonisation. Ephemeral, unstable, performed, such a reversal is highly dynamic. It feeds off “magnetic liaisons”<sup>283</sup> which lead to the emergence of beauty and resilience in unity-diversity. It generates construing and actualising movements of remembrance and creation that orchestrate sonic interstices for imagining sustainable futures, lying in wait, somewhere within these in-between waters. Mapping such a turn generates visual representations (or meshing scenarios) in movement/action where humans are no longer part of a “one-dimensional world of opposing terms” (dichotomies) but “complex nucleic entities” (De Ville 101). This facilitates sociologist Ariel Salleh’s notion of enduring time—a time of continuity between past and future (137)—to emerge and structure a renewed understanding of the movements and interactions between entities. As such, the deep mapping of sound offers visual possibilities which illuminate the “plurality of times existing together” that should characterise the writing of history (Chakrabarti 28-9). It represents a legitimate alternative to the linear conceptualisation of time

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<sup>280</sup> “the unthinkable, as source and resource for new effervescences in our imaginaries. Renouncement not as despair but as vitality.”

<sup>281</sup> “the unthinkable ... is located at the very heart of current creation and creativity”.

<sup>282</sup> “But the earth is different for each and every one. There are so many earths: the totality comes (rather than from their sum) from their as-yet-to-be realised relationality. We cannot conclude.”

<sup>283</sup> I borrow this turn of phrase from Glissant (*Une Nouvelle Région du Monde* 136).

and space; an alternative that rests on rhythms, synchronicities, intervals, patterns and ruptures—that is, creolisation, in all its nuanced savagery and excess.

The creolisation of thoughts is also visible in—or answers to—Brathwaite’s concept of “tidalectics” (“tidal dialectics”) which invokes the continual rhythm of ocean tides to design an “alter/native” space for exploring entanglements and routes, past the monological and linear models offered through conceptual colonial spaces (Brathwaite, “Caribbean Culture”; see also DeLoughrey). “The unity is submarine” because currents reveal the connections between the different fragments—an imagined totality. This must be stressed once more—one last time.

The unity is submarine  
breathing air, our problem is how to study the fragments  
whole.

It is difficult to conclude a text-in-becoming, because the conclusion that I attempt to compose keeps flowing with the shifting music of waters. It rises with climate change, as much as it retreats in drought. Between overabundance and absence, how am I to find the appropriate melody to textually materialise infinite and humid sonic geographies? I write of/from an imaginary realm that emerges from the forever-expanding totality of all waters, in both space and time. Poet Muriel Rukeyser writes: “All is open. / Open water. / Open I.” I have positioned waters as contact zones between peoples, cultures and ecologies; as zones of cohabitation, interaction, confluence, repression and repulsion. I also wish to position them as creating a creolising sonic sphere—a sphere in *clair-obscur*, or open-opaque—where I can safely cultivate and accumulate what I am; or, to extrapolate from what author and musician Marcel Melthérorong says about art (1), a sphere where I can “trans-dance”<sup>284</sup> the limitations of my mythological framework and imagine—or perhaps rediscover—watery futures beyond apocalyptic predictions. Glissant writes: “[s]i la solution te paraît difficile, peut-être même impraticable, ne va pas crier tout à trac qu’elle est fausse. Ne te sers pas du réel pour justifier tes manques. Réalise plutôt

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<sup>284</sup> Melthérorong discusses how “trans-danc[ing]” builds a capacity and a space where one can safely accumulate what one is, in one’s unity-diversity; in adherence with both one’s roots and routes.

tes rêves pour mériter ta réalité”<sup>285</sup> (*L’Intention Poétique* 245). Transformation assuredly begins in imagination (in hope) because “[h]ope calls for action; action is impossible without hope” (Solnit, *Hope in the Dark* 4; see also xiv). It is in imagination that the ability (the power) lies to connect, conceive, anticipate, and prepare to react (James ch. 11). As Carter states: “[t]he trick is to remember forwards. This is where dreams come in” (*The Sound in Between* 190-1; see also 180, 185).

“On ne se baigne pas  
deux fois dans le même  
fleuve, parce que, déjà,  
dans sa profondeur,  
l’être humain a le destin  
de l’eau qui coule.”<sup>286</sup>  
(Bachelard, *L’Eau et  
les Rêves* 8)

Sound enacts plural realities that are audible through both its physical (technical) and imaginary (poetic) aspects and manifestations. It raises awareness to this plurality, to resonances and (re)sounding. It offers an avenue to hear and generate these different futures. It extends beyond rationality, and a listening aesthetics calls for learning how to hear as much as for learning how to act. As Dyson explains, sound “offers a way to negotiate the ‘unthought’ and the unspoken, to develop other vocabularies and other forms of political, economic, and social organisation” (149). Listening allows listeners to imagine a world moving towards decoloniality. In that capacity, through my research I hope to develop the bases for other ways of sensing: in Relation in the *Toute-eau*, or quoting Dyson again: for “a sense beyond cents”. Auditory imaginaries defy the static, uniform flatness of ocular-centrism to offer us another way of perceiving the tumultuous polyrhythmic variations of waters: no longer mapped but sounded, they resonate through bodies (Serres, *Les Cinq Sens* 23). Listening opens scholarship to a form of research akin to paying attention to

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<sup>285</sup> “If you find the solution difficult, even impractical, do not go instantaneously yelling that it is wrong. Don’t use the real to justify your shortages. Instead realise your dreams to deserve your reality.”

<sup>286</sup> “We don’t swim twice in the same river, because, already, in their depths, human beings have the destiny of running water.”

being-in-the-world. As attention is engaged, it becomes possible to engage with waters—despite and precisely *because* of the mutilations: shadow places (ruins) must be acknowledged. These ruins, often conveniently discarded and forgotten, are necessary to root our sense of belonging. Healy writes: “But ruins are never simply gone or in the past; ruins are enduring traces; spaces of romantic fancies and forgetfulness where social memories imagine the persistence of time in records of destruction” (3). Interacting with these ruins calls for an approach tending towards *bricolage*, that is, “the activity of roaming in the ruins of a culture, picking up useful bits and pieces to keep things going or even make them function better” (Muecke et al. 168). *Bricolage* is intimate; *bricolage* is caring. When it comes to sound, it requires the affective bond between waters and people to be heard. Listening to sound is thus about being able to love (maybe, to love again?)—where love is understood after bell hooks: as an interactive process which implies doing rather than feeling. She explains: “but love is really more ... about what we do not just what we feel. It’s a verb, not a noun.” Such a love is about ethical action—it rises from the Ancient Greek *agapē* (ἀγάπη), with its connotations of active participation and engagement. Through sound, I learn how to love and (re)invent the watery ruins of colonialism in Lower Murray Country. And, yes, I do love these ruins (Ladd’s piano tapes spring back into my mind). Because as Derrida summarises: “[w]hat else is there to love, anyway?”<sup>287</sup> (“Force of Law” 278).

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<sup>287</sup> This short quotation is extracted from the following passage of text (my emphasis): “Ruin is not a negative thing. First, it is obviously not a thing. One could write maybe ... a short treatise on the love of ruins. What else is there to love, anyway? One cannot love a monument, a work of architecture, an institution as such except in an experience itself precarious in its fragility: it has not always been there, it will not always be there, it is finite. *And for this very reason one loves it as mortal, through its birth and its death, through one’s own birth and death, through the ghost or the silhouette of its ruin, one’s own ruin, which it already is, therefore, or already prefigures.* How can one love otherwise than in this finitude? Where else would the right to love, even the love of law come from?” Love is humanised: the human is reinscribed at its centre—as active and yet passing. Humans and ruins are indissociable.

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