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Camille Roulière

- 1 As a brief preamble, two aspects of this work require explanations.
- 2 First, the presentation of this essay is unconventional. It is primarily visual and to be understood, literally and figuratively, as a *tableau* in the dual French meaning of the term, i.e. as both table and picture. The graphic aspect of this non-linear *vis-à-vis* format was deemed the most constructive manner to achieve the article's aim of preserving the opacity of Ngarrindjeri discourses, while shedding new light on the interdependency between the "hyphenated" histories (Johnson 2014: 318), both current and historical, of governmental and Ngarrindjeri ontologies and practices in relation to waters.
- 3 This format allows for the author's interpretative imaginary to be made explicit: this is its picture side. Ngarrindjeri quotations, extracted from material released and/or compiled by the Ngarrindjeri to support their projects, are separated from the body of the analytical text and presented as a *picture* framed between two dotted lines. This clear demarcation and relational apposition between the authorial voice, italicised theoretical definitions used as epigraphs and Ngarrindjeri discourses appearing as quotes generates a productive tension, the aim of which is to deconstruct the representational practice of the "Other".
- 4 This format also allows for autonomous and spontaneous connections between the cells, visually placed in dialogue: this corresponds to its table format. These reactional interactions are not designed solely as oppositions, but as infinite potential "juxtapositions" (Binney 1995) of multiple and multiplying realities. As each reader becomes involved and (re)(dis)connects the cells, the ontological divide between governmental and Ngarrindjeri discourses is to be interpreted as a deforming space

filling with burgeoning polyphonies, rather than as the manifestation of an unbridgeable and absolute schismatic void. I also decided to insert a set of photographs which I took in 2015. These seemingly innocuous illustrations contribute to further disrupting the expected linearity of the reading experience by requiring yet another type of engagement from the readers. As they transition between text and photograph and unconsciously translate one into the other, their responsibility becomes involved: they are themselves bringing a vision of Lower Murray Country into being.

- 5 Second, I must stress that the insights I offer come from a specific perspective: I am white, French-Australian, middle-class, and tertiary-educated. My “gaze” (Pratt 1992) belongs to the dominant majority which still continues to define and shape Aboriginality from the outside, and writing this article indubitably raises a number of ethical issues. The representational challenges posed by such an endeavour are sorely rooted in centuries of colonial practices, ranging from a denigrating essentialism to a mode of celebratory appropriation. My aim here, in an attempt to avoid reproducing these oppressive patterns, is to disrupt representational boundaries: left to speak for themselves, Ngarrindjeri quotations retain their opacity (i.e. the expression of what cannot be articulated) as I abandon, to a certain degree, a performative discursive authority by way of the renunciation of a purely demonstrative and/or argumentative logic.

Understanding the Waters of Lower Murray Country

Birds in Lower Murray Country

All pictures by the author.

<p>Western Discourses: the government's voice</p> <p>The quest for water, deemed to represent a source of mobility, development and commerce, whose hypothetical presence and abundance were tantamount to a good omen, figured at the centre of the European colonial imaginary in Australia. Australian waters nonetheless proved a source of disappointment and frustration: difficult to locate, lacking permanence, behaving unexpectedly and disappearing prematurely (Carter 1987: 54-60). When European explorers stumbled upon Murray River Country in the 1820s, it nonetheless 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, as a result of which this fertile region was promptly settled. An agricultural industry burgeoned. In the settler's imagination, this fast-growing industry quickly emerged as a business of national importance upon which potential development success rested, and rests still (Robin 2007: 207-209; Alexandra and Riddington 2007: 326). Water management, centred on agricultural needs, became indispensable to support this ever-expanding pastoral vision (<i>Regulation Impact Statement 2012</i>: vii, 1-2; <i>Angles, 4</i> 2017).</p>	
<p>Aboriginal Discourses: Ngarrindjeri voices</p> <p>Lower Murray Country is home to the Ngarrindjeri Nation: eighteen</p>	

Western science

The Basin Plan (the MDBA's regulating project governing uses for Murray River Country's waters), is informed, through and through, by the "best available" Western scientific knowledge (*RIS* 19, 85; *Report 62*; MDBA Website's "Publications" tab). As such, Western science is the systematic rationale behind water understanding and management, as promoted in and through governmental managerial practices in Murray River Country and, consequently, in Lower Murray Country. This can be no surprise: in Australia, as in other settler colonial countries (Dunlap 1999), there is a century-long history of governmental promotion and use of science as the nation's building tool to move forward and into the future (Robin 2007).

Such scientific foundations mean two things in terms of the articulated water understanding: first, it is rooted in Western ontology, and is thus globalising; second, it is capitalistic and builds an antinomic conception between ecological and economic waters.

Government promoted centrality and authority granted to Western science secures the understanding of Australian waters within a wider Western

ontological frame. As part

Apples, 4, 2017
this transposition, scientific technicality is anchored as a universal truth, to the detriment of a location-bound

Bulls on Kumarangk (Hindmarsh) Island

	<p>Embracing changes</p> <p>Ngarrindjeri emplaced, technical and eco-sentient understanding of waters is expressed through a large variety of artistic means. This media-polymorphic propensity in itself serves and contributes to its expression.</p> <p>One shared characteristic of the way water understanding is expressed across these media is that it is oral-in-essence. The repetitive quality of orality is essential to the expression of what is being said. It is as much a way of conceiving it as of spreading it. What is expressed is constantly altered through different genres, forms and sites. It is tailored to place and audience. It moulds itself on them; it talks to, and through, them.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Repetitive quality of orality. Redundancy – Media within the medium. Break: the systematic character of genres. PROLIFERATION (similarly to Nature). “Le ressassement du discours est la mesure d’un Nous.” (Glissant 1981b) The dialectics between oral and written spoken and sung grounded and flowing is being played on.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Repetition in this case does not represent a missed encounter, with place or people.</p> <p>Repetition is the articulation of a constantly transforming encounter, or of waves of encounters which endlessly transform.</p> <p>Repetition highlights the relational nature of Ngarrindjeri understanding of waters: it is flexible, organic, flowing; it shifts and evolves with the environment, through human and non-human meetings.</p> <p>Repetition protects and guarantees the opacity of these discourses. It focuses on the specific, not the singular. Ngarrindjeri imaginary is transmitted through obscurities. Examples are followed by other examples: this layering creates a profusion of images. These “inventories of the real” (Kullberg 2013: 972), favoured over summarising grand truths, bridge a potential distance which could distort and fix the real through abstract theoretical constructions. Truths come from the unarticulated within each located example.</p> <p>-----</p> <p>“Ringbalin – River Stories”: websites, application, documentary film and trailers, social media, and annual ceremony.</p>
<p>Fixing</p> <p>Measuring also fragments and compartmentalises Murray River Country. It contributes to “fixing” the waters by transforming flows into predictable and manageable data, through increased regulation. This transformation, combined with mathematical metonymy, turns waters into completely disconnected and disembodied resources: a non-existent ecological entity.</p> <p>Angles, 4 2017</p> <p>Australian waters tend to spread out and form “distributaries” rather than permanently flowing streams “by way of</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>Repetition is humid.</p> <p>“Humidity”: the indeterminate</p>

Dredgers working at the Murray Mouth

Lower Murray Country

Future-oriented	Continuous Present
<p>This understanding of waters means that future-oriented discourses emerge as viable solutions for managing the present environmental crisis (RIS 38, 83). Pro-active water management, built on the postulate of dealing with future needs and orientations over immediate ones, is favoured. Further alterations are implemented to reinforce control and potentially counter a predicted disastrous ecological future. This silences the potential alternative solutions in the present, and prevents ecosystems from naturally balancing the impact of the Anthropocene. By fixating the solution in the future, such an approach does indeed effectively negate the concepts of natural resilience and regeneration, or downplays them as being less primordial than “engineered resilience” focused on efficiency, constancy and predictability (Muir et al. 2010:262). Every action is part of a larger plan for a brighter outcome, and some places and species are sacrificed for the benefit of specific others—termed “iconic” according to government-designed evaluating standards (Brown et al. 2015)—or for the system’s overall better functioning. This dissociation allows the MDBA to articulate half-truths about the state of Murray River Country. By focusing on and privileging selected elements, the extent of the devastation is rhetorically diminished. Neglected sites, deemed of lesser importance or interest, or which simply do not fit into the overall ‘grand plan’, become “shadow places” (Plumwood 2008; see also Gibson 2002, Tumarkin 2005). Under this understanding, wetlands are often destroyed to favour more efficient water movements throughout Murray River Country.</p>	<p>Ngarrindjeri tellurism is multi-temporal: it rests on the notion that the past and the ancestors are contained within the present (“Murrundi Ruwe Pangari Ringbalin” 2010; NL: 40).</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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. (Ngarrindjeri/Ramsar Working Group Paper 1998 in Birkhead et al. 2011: 7)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>[...] interwoven within the spiral and woven coils of Ngarrindjeri weaving from the past, present and future are continuity, identity, diversity and cultural voices. (Rita Lindsay Junior in NL 56)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>Weaving can connect people across time, from the past into the future. (Yvonne Koolmatrie in “Riverland: Yvonne Koolmatrie” 2015)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The Coorong represents a bond with the past, a closeness to the earth. (Rankine 1974: 9)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>The present is not simply the present, it is the “continuous present” (Stein 2008: 220). This non-linear division of time represents an important ethical positioning (Rose 2004).</p> <p>-----</p> <p>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. (Matthew Rigney in Birkhead et al. 2011: 1)</p> <p>-----</p> <p>It makes “situated engagement” possible, as an antidote to the power of universals (Howitt and Suchet-Pearson 2006: 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 1990: 175).</p>

<p>(Re)centring English: Rooted Thought</p>	
<p>This destruction is particularly significant. Empirically liminal places, often historically imagined as miasmic, wetlands threaten the ontological security of governmental discourses by suggesting transgression (Potter 2007: 250). By presenting wetlands as useless expanses which impede the creation of better places, governmental discourses manifest their propensity for “dry thinking” (Carter 2004: 107), i.e. place-making through exclusions and oppositions, in order to gain and/or retain command. This “drying principle” operates as an insulating, intransigent and smothering monolingual intellectual framework which rejects discursive diversity, non-linear time and instability in the production of place.</p> <p>Most notably, Indigenous modes of knowledges are subdued through a past / future disjunction in which authority is conferred upon the supposedly better-suited settlers (Rose 2004; Byrne 2003; Calderon 2014; Wolfe 2006; Altman and Markham 2015). This Aboriginalist construction reinforces the “possessive logic of patriarchal white sovereignty” (Moreton-Robinson 2007: 112) by collapsing the Native into Nature in accordance with notions of pre-modern harmony, and by negating Indigenous presence in the present (e.g.: Berndt et al. 1993; Newland 1965; Cleland 1936; Power 1977). The articulation of environmental flows as sufficient to satisfy Indigenous communities’ water needs is thus justified (Weir 2009: 23), and the same “bridge the gap” rhetoric (<i>RIS</i> 20, 85) is employed to discuss</p>	<p>Decentring English: Rhizomatic Thought</p> <p>Ngarrindjeri understanding of waters, while strongly rooted in and through Lower Murray Country, does not constitute a root language (see adjacent cell). Instead, it is simultaneously (and perhaps paradoxically) rhizomatic.</p> <p>Rhizome: crucial tenet in the work of philosophers Édouard Glissant (1997a), Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1980). The rhizome, through its enmeshed root system, offers an alternative understanding of identity which does not rest on a predatory and totalitarian rootstock (Glissant 1997a: 18). This can be linked to Homi Bhabha’s notion of difference, as opposed to diversity (1994: 34). By extending “each and every identity [...] through a relationship with the Other” (Glissant 1997a: 11), the rhizome combines groundedness with openness and mobility (Massey 2006: 38). It calls for “act[ing] with one’s place, think[ing] with the world” (Glissant 2006: 150).</p> <p>This rhizomatic aspect is palpable through Ngarrindjeri artistic multilingualism (see above). This multilingual propensity also manifests itself linguistically: Ngarrindjeri words are regularly incorporated within primarily English discourses (e.g.: KNY; Chance 2001: 99).</p> <p>Additionally, the rhizomatic thought is visible through Ngarrindjeri search for and reliance upon the richness of intercultural connections and exchanges to spread and render their voices widely audible. Connecting is surviving.</p>
<p>Aboriginals, 4 2017 Indigenous and environmental issues. The chronological order also acts as a form of legitimisation, “continu[ing] to confuse routes</p>	<p>-----</p> <p>[...] it doesn’t matter what language group or what group you belong to, there is a common cause, there is a common thread</p>

Lower Murray Country

<p>Imperialist Discourses</p> <p>Imported from evergreen Great Britain and imposed on the pulsative water ecologies of the Australian continent, the articulated understanding of waters is a copy-pasted grand verbal delirium anchored in Western aesthetics. Ecologically unadapted and disconnected, these discourses encapsulate a declamatory language of abstraction through which oppression is recorded and sustained (Tjukonia 2003, Glissant 1981b). A capitalist, metonymic and drying narrative of progress is used to generate a “destructive breach between human and non-human worlds” (Potter 2007: 251-2). This justifies the (ontological) separation of humans from their distinct non-human environment, which is relegated to being a <i>décor</i>, a theatrical space and territory primarily designed for a performative self-demonstration of technological skills and engineering ingenuity, leading to the creation of a vast agricultural heartland open to exponential economic profits. Waters do not belong to place. Severed from their entangled and intertwined ecosystems and the complex web of relations they form, they have become the epicentre through which disembodied geographies can be created. Waters are reduced to the status of a non-existent ecological entity metonymically symbolised by numbers, a quantified and thus manageable resource, which can and should be controlled and exploited.</p> <p>Governmental discourses are thus languages of colonialism: they sustain and seemingly justify the implementation of mutated colonial practices, exhibiting a clear genealogy to old forms of colonialism over humans and non-humans alike, in order to satisfy “a vision of drought-proof Australia” (Potter 2007: 247). Part of a “practical reconciliation” agenda, they present “the final colonial act (normalising the outcome of Angles, 4 2017, as justice (Hattam et al. 2007: 110-117).</p> <p>Over two hundred years after their first implementation on Australian landscapes,</p>	<p>Baroque Speech</p> <p>Ngarrindjeri ethnopoeitics can be interpreted as Baroque speech, as defined by Édouard Glissant, i.e. a “worlded” yet highly localised speech.</p> <p>The Baroque: historically, “a reaction against the rationalist pretence of penetrating the mysteries of the known with one uniform and conclusive move” (1997a: 77; also 1987: 18). The Baroque represents a crisis of meaning. It eschews transparency and stands against monological uniformity achieved through the dissection of the world and its expression into conceptually fixed, separated and bounded forms and datasets (1997a: 79; also Plumwood 2002: 49; Latour 1991). It is extension, proliferation, redundancy and repetition (1995: 70; 1990: 57). It is unstable and plural, constantly and endlessly reformulated through extreme inclusion and expansion (1997a; Carpentier 1995: 93). The Baroque is thus born and thrives from “precipitate” cultural contacts and exchanges (1997a: 163). Social relationships and cross-fertilisations are crucial to its formation and development (1987: 19). Such a Baroque is a world philosophy which goes “beyond an aesthetic mood to represent the contemporary global cultural dominant of creolisation and Relation” (Oakley 2011: 276). Glissant writes: “In sum, there is a ‘naturalisation’ of the baroque, no longer only as art and style, but also as a manner of living the unity-diversity of the world [...]” (1997a: 79; also 1987: 19). Despite this worlded connectivity, the Baroque remains strongly dependent upon locality. It is always rooted in and shaped by a <i>terroir</i>: “it is literally identical to nature, directly expressive of nature” (Hallward 2001: 123). Such an understanding of the Baroque has been termed a “New World Baroque”, a “rebellious Baroque” which can be assimilated to “a decolonising strategy to deform—creolise—the metropolitan standard” (Zamora and Kaup 2010: 622). It plays with representation and transculturation, performing as a counter-conquest form of expression which deconstructs and decentres (re-arranging and re-presenting) the Western cultural “storehouse” (Tuhiwai-Smith 1999).</p> <p>This conception of the Baroque is particularly tangible in language and Glissant develops the related notion of Baroque speech, propelled by similar relational yet rooted propensities (1990). Baroque speech offers an essential “disturbance against certainty” and represents the “intersubjective extension of a favourable site for the multiplication of a multitude of diverse and new realities” (1997a: 79, 203). It is “world-music”: polymorphic and multifaceted, “inspired by all</p>
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The Lowelr Lakes

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ABSTRACTS

In the context of severe environmental degradation, this article analyses governmental and Ngarrindjeri discourses surrounding the understanding and management of water in Lower Murray Country (South Australia). It shows that mutated colonial practices around water management in the Murray-Darling Basin have placed the Lower Murray region under unprecedented environmental threat. Future-oriented, paternalistic and linguistically

intransigent poetics of elsewhere are used to justify the implementation of these monolingual practices, which gag alternative epistemologies. In response to this imperialistic water management (labelled as a second wave of dispossession), and strengthened by the growing recognition of Indigenous rights worldwide, Traditional Owners from the Basin have developed the concept of Cultural Flows to subtly subvert these silencing discourses and reclaim their right to a voice within governmental agencies involved in developing water management policies. This article argues that this reappropriated and re-rooted concept of Cultural Flows is merely the tip of a larger poetic shift in language, and can serve as a pivot around which to understand the mechanisms through which Aboriginal Nations, and in particular the Ngarrindjeri, weave their cultural practices, both figuratively and literally, within mainstream artistic and ecological discourses. Current manifestations of this shift, as expressed through visual arts (Riverland: Yvonne Koolmatrie, Art Gallery of South Australia), music (travelling performance project *Ringbalin*) and environmental politics (National Cultural Flows Research Project), are examined to demonstrate that this shift creates a new language which can be understood as a mode of highly localised Baroque speech (following Édouard Glissant's definition of the term).

Dans le contexte d'une grave dégradation environnementale, cet article analyse les discours gouvernementaux et Ngarrindjeri autour de l'eau et de sa gestion dans le Lower Murray Country (Australie Méridionale). Cet article montre qu'une gestion de l'eau aux relents coloniaux dans le bassin Murray-Darling expose la région Lower Murray à une menace écologique sans précédent. Une poétique de l'ailleurs, tournée vers le futur, paternaliste et intransigeante dans sa langue, est mise en œuvre pour tenter de justifier ces pratiques monolingues qui bâillonnent toute épistémologie alternative. En réponse à cette gestion impérialiste (décrite comme une deuxième vague de dépossession), et soutenus par la reconnaissance grandissante dans le monde du droit des populations indigènes, les propriétaires traditionnels du bassin ont développé le concept de Flux Culturels pour détourner ces discours étouffants et réaffirmer leur droit d'être entendus au sein des agences gouvernementales chargées de la gestion de l'eau. Cet article émet l'hypothèse que le concept ainsi réapproprié de Flux Culturels ne représente qu'un infime aspect d'un glissement poétique du langage et qu'il peut servir de pivot pour comprendre comment les Nations Aborigènes, et en particulier les Ngarrindjeri, (mé)tissent leurs pratiques culturelles, au sens tant littéral que figuré, dans les discours écologiques et artistiques dominants. Des manifestations contemporaines de ce glissement qui se dévoilent dans les arts plastiques (Riverland: Yvonne Koolmatrie, Art Gallery of South Australia), la musique (le projet-voyage *Ringbalin*) et la politique environnementale (National Cultural Flows Research Project) seront examinées pour démontrer que ce glissement crée un nouveau langage qui peut s'interpréter comme un discours baroque localisé (d'après la définition qu'en fait Édouard Glissant).

INDEX

Mots-clés: Lower Murray Country, Ringbalin, flux culturels, tissage, Ngarrindjeri, baroque, écopoétique, Australie, aborigène

Keywords: Lower Murray Country, Ringbalin, cultural flows, weaving, Ngarrindjeri, baroque, ecopoetics, Australia, Aboriginal

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