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# Country is Alive: Indigenous Australian Philosophy

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**Abstract:**

Exploring approaches to the incipient field of Indigenous Australian philosophy (IAP), this essay traces the influence of the author's numerous encounters with knowledges and practices that might inform the field. Central is the concept of Country (as opposed to 'land') that is increasingly considered to be animate, in line with ancestral relational systems that have been labelled 'animist' and 'totemic'. A focus on some unique concepts in traditional languages from North-West Australia distances IAP somewhat from objectivist and positivist reductions that have characterised the social sciences to the extent that they perpetuate the singular concept of Nature, and the familiar nature/culture divide. As an outsider writing on what an Indigenous Australian philosophy might be, the author negotiates epistemological and methodological difficulties while sketching the complexity of Indigenous worlds that are replete with metamorphoses, rituals, practices, myths and mysteries.

**Keywords: Indigenous Australian Philosophy, Country, animism, totemism, kinship.**

Many years ago, my teacher, Paddy Roe, a Nyikina leader, used to talk about 'living Country'. I was at first sceptical. The phrase was unusual for me as an English speaker and descendant of settler-colonials. I had to write books with him to learn what he meant by the word 'Country' (_____ 1984; _____ 2020). Country is now such a central concept in Indigenous Australian philosophies (IAP) that it is given a capital letter. Settlers, farming people especially, would use the word 'land'. Land can be quantified, as in: 'I need to buy more land'. But Country is an absolute concept, indivisible, inalienable, as indicated by the lack of an indefinite or definite article preceding. Here's one definition from the environmental philosopher Deborah Bird Rose:

> [Aboriginal] People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy…country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness, and a will toward life (Rose, 1996: 7).

This sounds like animism. It speaks of the pervasiveness of life and the centrality of life. And since all kinds of life exist on Country, Country is therefore seen as a source of power and energy. The old anthropologist Bill Stanner tells a good story:

> Scholars familiar with Aborigines have usually had one impressive experience in common: to be taken by Aboriginal friends to places in the wilds and there shown something – tree, rocky outcrop, cranny, pool – with formality, pride and love. Conversations follow rather like this: 'There is my Dreaming [place]. My father showed me this place when I was a little boy. His father showed him.' Perhaps a child stands nearby, all eyes and ears. Here is a tradition being made continuous, as in the past, by overlapping life-spans. What had his father said? 'He said: "Your Dreaming is there; you want to look after this place; you don't want to let it go [forget, be careless about it]; it is from the first [totemical] man." The historical link is thus made: from the now old to the still young; from the living to the anciently dead; from the very first true man to next true man; from the oldest time to the here and now…
> What did the father do there? 'He used to come here every year with the old men, the wise men; they used to do something here [hit, rub, break off pieces, brush with green leaves, sing]; that way they made the [totem] come on, come back, jump up, spread out.'
> *How* did that happen? *What* is it that is in the place?
> 'We do not know. *Something* is there. Like my spirit [soul, shadow, invisible counterpart]; like my Dreaming [naming the totem entity].'
> Will he think more? What else did his father say? That there was something in the Dreaming-place? The dark eyes turn and look intent, puzzled, searching.
> 'My father did not say. He said this: "My boy, look! Your Dreaming is there; it is a big thing; you never let it go [pass it by]; all Dreamings [totem entities] come from there; your spirit is there."'
> Does the white man now understand? The blackfellow, earnest, friendly, makes a last effort.
> 'Old man, you listen! Something is there; we do not know what; *something*.' There is a struggle to find words, and perhaps a lapse into English. 'Like engine, like power, plenty of power, it does hard work; it *pushes*.' (Stanner, 1985: 165-66)

As you learn about animism and totemism you gradually learn to use the right word for a so-called totem; it might be a *jalnga* (_____ 2020: 29), or a *ngurlu* or a *warpiri* (Rose, 82, 83) or a *jarriny,* depending on the language, and who you are talking to. This is complicated by the fact that many Indigenous Australians do not speak a traditional language. My Walmatjarri friend Edwin Lee Mulligan speaks traditional languages (Walmatjarri, Nyikina) and versions of Aboriginal English, ranging from creole to something closer to Standard English. Here he discusses his 'totem':

> I left myself stranded. But I managed to… swim with my little, with my little fish. Part of that (*words in Walmatjarri*) I'm a particular fish. That's my personal representative. And if I want to deal with my problems, my Indigenous problems, I turn my eyelids into a fish lens to see the situation through.
> (…) That's my little *jarriny*, it's like a birthmark representative, a particular animal that represents you. (Mulligan, 2027: 107, 110)

I like talking to Edwin about the concepts in his language. He also said:

> And I'm like, 'what are the questions that you mob are asking?' I can simplify it for you and I will make it simple and sweet enough for you. We all are living proof of a particular concept. I don't know if I'm making any sense to others, but people might think, 'Edwin, when you're talking about this, you sound so certain'. But I say, well, look, there's another part of me that wants to actually take people to these places.
>
> And when they're there, they can actually say, no, this story is actually alive and well. It's actually here. (Mulligan, 2027: 108).

What Edwin knows, you can't get from books. He has to take you there, to the Great Sandy Desert, and tell you the story in that place, the place of that story. Sitting in his *ngurra*, his camp, you might realize that there is more to the story than words. A warm wind is blowing off the desert, and you smell the snappy gum coals in the fire, while the stars are bright and crowding the night sky. Your other senses open up as well, and he might even talk about *pirlyirr*, the concept of 'gut feeling' that is common across Australia, a kind of intelligence that rationality would reject. (Mulligan, 2027: 107: 111)

His stories and his Countrymen's stories will be about how people have to help keep things alive in their places, caring for Country, with 'Everything standing up alive' as Ngarinyin philosopher David Mowaljarlai put it in the subtitle to his 1993 book. More recently, Nyikina leader Anne Poelina is attributing authorship to the river she is caring for and seeking to protect, as she insists on its status as a 'living ancestral being'. (RiverOfLife, 2020).

I would like to approach this animist philosophy of living Country without reference to any other philosophies, in its purity. But I'm not Indigenous, I'm not *inside* an Indigenous Australian system of thought. I can only comment from outside and try to translate the concepts as best I can. Someone will say, 'you got that wrong,' and, if encouraged, I will have to try again. It's one of the intercultural philosophy methods, as Niels Weidtmann would say, flip-flopping from one philosophy to another, not so they hybridize, but trying to respect the integrity of each. (Weidtmann , n.d.). Unfamiliar concepts from an Other philosophy can defamiliarize those we carry as baggage in our own cultures. I say 'cultures' because Western philosophies are embedded in our languages, ideologies and beliefs.

The Western metaphysics I have inherited starts to look more strange and inadequate in these days of increasing emphasis on ecologies of sustainability, that is to say, the interconnection of multiple forms of life, something that, in fact, looks more and more like 'living Country'. That Western metaphysics was constructed, painstakingly, over hundreds of years, around one polar opposite, among others: an invisible singular God up in the heavens and an abstract singular Nature down here on the ground, managed by humans in the middle who think they have a capacity to 'transcend'.

That abstract singular Nature, as opposed to all sorts of different natures which behave differently, was a convenient invention. It fits with the related ideas of *objectivity* and *realism*. Christianity had already chased away the multiple pagan gods in the West, with inquisitions, torture and death for the heretics, but then post-enlightenment humanism and secularity finished the job by imposing its universal scientific laws over nature. Flattened and objectified, those old multiple natures, in their cosmic complexity, gave up the ghost. They became matter. Passive, dead matter. And if not dead, about to be dead.

Swinging on another pole was the subject/object distinction, well-known to phenomenologists. It privileges a human consciousness experiencing an object, and the

reality of what that object is is constituted in a mutual becoming of subject and object. But that *correlation* of subject and object, and their very distinction, is sacred to this kind of metaphysic (Meillassoux, 2008). A few thinkers have tried to 'unsplit' the subject/object distinction (Martin Heidegger, Michel Serres, Brian Massumi, Judith Butler), but few are willing to let go of the centrality of mind/brain/consciousness in the whole process. Perhaps only the 'acephalic' surrealist Georges Bataille (Gordienko, 2019).

IAP never took up the concepts of mind, soul, interiority, or even the individual. In this it has a friend in the French philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who was allergic to interiority because it is a concept indexed to transcendent unities, things that have no necessary connection to anything else, and which transcend the external world around them. Deleuze's philosophy is rigorously critical of all forms of transcendence. For him, philosophy is the creation of concepts on a place of immanence, and these concepts must come from outside philosophy (_____2024).

I found support for the crazy idea of 'philosophy without a brain' from a young rock-star philosopher form Oxford called Victoria Trumbull. She popped up on-line, talking about what *memory* was, and she seemed to remove it from the brain:

> What about just the pure, bare memory undergirding perception? So, the way that I'm speaking to you right now, I mean, I'm obviously remembering the things I just said before without consciously evoking them.
>
> Well, maybe the theorists say there's some hippocampal binding going on. So, the hippocampus is stitching back or glueing back together those fragmentary scenes, those instants that we originally had to break up for some reason. And so, the brain is constantly charged with creating continuity, recreating continuity.
>
> But the brain is just like everything else. It's just like everything else in the world. It's part of this continuous, indivisible, transformational whole.
>
> It's part of this totality. So, being part of this totality, how can it then be responsible for creating the continuity of this totality in the first place? Where does the continuity come from? Does the continuity come from the brain? Or is the continuity intrinsic to things because we live in time and because we are made of time? Aha! Because we are made of time (Trumbull, 2027).

Philosophers of mind will be deeply shocked. As will all the psychology professionals. But sometimes you have to go to the margins of philosophy to find provocative ideas. And if philosophy has any value, it is because it is keeping thought alive.

'Like Country', says an imaginary Indigenous friend, interrupting me (though they would never be rude like that). 'I disagree with that Victoria, whatsaname, Trumbull. We aren't 'made of time', that's an abstraction. We are made of Country. Country made us. You can see living things growing all around, then returning to the earth. Generation after generation.' Mowaljarlai says, 'We all come from the earth, live from the earth and go back to the earth.' (quoted in Porr, 182.

How can I learn to see living Country all around, from the rhizomes and fungi in the soil to the nitrogen-producing lighting in the storm clouds? I shall have to *derectangularize* my vision, to consider how conditioned our ways of seeing are by rectangles. Take a simple formal attribute, the frame, that offers the affordance of rectangular pictures within it. It was consolidated by European perspectivalism in the *quattrocento*, which not only had the rectangular frame, but rectangles diminishing to a point in the distance. This had the important effect of setting the viewer up as the person privileged to have that perspective. In that sense it invented, says Bruno Latour, a particular kind of modern subject and a particular kind of modern object. It's the aesthetic version of the invention of Nature that fixes subject and object in that kind of relation. (Latour, 2017, 16–17).

But if you are in an Aboriginal camp…
'We call-em *ngurra,* or *buru* in the Kimberley.'

Yeah, the *ngurra* aesthetic is quite different. It is simultaneously 360-degree vision, near and far, then and now. It's not a landscape anymore, like you capture it on your camera as a rectangle. I don't have a name for that kind of seeing.

It might be tied up with where cave paintings come from, the famous Wanjina figures from the Kimberley. Here is the writer Hannah Rachel Bell in a dialogue with David Mowaljarlai in an article on rock art and animism:

> I ask Mowaljarlai how the paintings got there originally.

> ‘We don’t make that image … ‘e paint himself. ‘E tell us and we listen. That man who listening, ‘e prepare himself—quiet time, no hot food, he listening. ‘E putting that ochre when ‘e listening. We not responsible for that image. Wanjina become a painting.’
>
> I return to the image and gaze some more, only now, with slightly unfocused eyes. After a time the image seems to pulse. Startled, I immediately restore focus and rationalise the experience away as illusion or aberration. I return to the unfocused gaze again, curious now. The pulsing eventually returns as the image seems to project itself out of the rock. Later I discuss this experience with Mowaljarlai. He is not surprised, and claims it is a common experience that everybody has. All the countrymen.
>
> ‘That’s why we gotta look after these places. They living images, images with energy’. (Porr, 2012: 198)

Hannah Bell learned how to look with ‘soft eyes’, as hunters do when looking for game, while Mowaljarlai turns the Western notion of authorship on its head (“‘e paint himself” ) and keeps repeating the word ‘living’ for everything on Country.

So, as an outsider to IAP, I just keep listening. I listen softly, letting ideas come in ‘from an angle’. (Mowaljarlai, 1993: 37–38). Because it is not all about words. If listening to Country is important, it is about hearing and feeling all kinds of intelligences. Walmatjarri elder, Kankawa (Olive Knight), explains:

> …a Walmatjarri word is *rinyi*, which does not translate into English, so we will call it ‘mystery language.’ Everyone needs to understand *rinyi*, meaning survival. It means we pay very close attention to the sounds around us. For example, we listen for the cricket who will warn us with a long shrill. We learn very early to be observational to see and ‘listen’ to what is around you. (Knight, 2024: 259)

I mentioned my teacher Paddy Roe at the beginning, and I want to stress that his knowledge was not all ‘in his head’. When we were out walking (and walking Country is very important) he pointed to some little tracks in the sand that I had failed to notice and said ‘*barni* (lizard)

heading that way', or announced, 'might be water in that old *jila* (spring), over that sand dune', his skill was not sharp eyesight or a special psychological attribute, but something collective embedded in generations of practices: looking at the sand dune while also attending to the angle of the sun, the way the seasonal wind was blowing and understanding how finches flock in this part of the world. Here's a bit of handy know-how for you, should you run out of water in the Australian desert: follow the flocks of zebra finches.

The lesson I took away is that philosophy is not sitting around and thinking as much as it is know-how, experience and engaging with practical issues. Michel Serres also said that 'reason should learn the lessons in composition from the world itself' (Webb, n.d.) in a process of relational encounters that would test reason's relevance and its concepts' ambitions for universality.

A hundred years ago, Alfred North Whitehead's metaphysics went against the status quo because he, too, viewed nature as 'alive and purposeful'. In his view, it wasn't a question of whether to engage in metaphysics or not; because what he called 'the orthodox view' was already metaphysical without saying so, 'a materialistic reductionism of the Democritean-Cartesian variety that his follower Waddington called a "lousy philosophy".' McHenry writes that 'Reality, for Whitehead, must be conceived as experience from beginning to end; there is no radical emergence of mind or consciousness from insentient matter or living things from non-living things …in his later metaphysical works, he speaks of events as tiny organisms that form the basis for a biological view of the universe.' (McHenry, 2023).

After what Mowaljarlai kept saying about energy and power, I wanted to ask about the sun. Isn't that the source of all power?

'That one up there? Nah, 'e not boss for everything'.

Of course! That is all *unprocessed* energy pouring down. What Country does is *transform* the sun's energy into different forms of life, specific forms of life in different bio-regions. Transformation of power thus becomes a metaphysical principle for IAP, just as bodies are painted up and transformed in ritual.

And then we find out that Mowaljarlai's story about the creation of the Sun relates it back to Country: 'The Sun in the sky is the daughter of the Mother Sun.' The daughter comes to her mother because her power starts to wane in the afternoon: '"Mother, I got bitten by that snake because he was jealous that I was brighter than he is." Then the mother hugged the daughter and said, "Daughter, you are all right now. Tomorrow you will go again. I am giving you some of my power. I'll watch you every day as you go." She gave the daughter some of her power. And every day the mother sends her off with her powers from right inside the earth, and she watches her go across the sky.

That is the Sun Story. It's a story for the future generation, because the life today is very difficult. But with the restoring powers from inside, the young people can still carry on, generation after generation. In spite of the poisoning of the world, they still have a chance. That's the story. The mother is represented by a big rock.' (Mowaljarlai, 1993: 48)

I should have known, even the power of the Sun comes from Country. But it is not one way. It is necessarily *relational*, and alternating, from the Mother Sun in Country to the Daughter Sun who moves every day. With this story, IAP has made the alternation of day and night part of their metaphysics. The circadian cycle is so fundamental to life that modern philosophy overlooks it. It's a given, not a problem. Nevertheless, our bodies are attuned to this cosmic order, to the rotation and orbit of the Earth and the moon. Is it not appropriate to take everything into account that orders our life, and to fit it into a system? Mowaljarlai's Ngarinyin people have incorporated the day/night alternation into the kinship system as a mother/daughter relationship. And as we can see night and day opposed in this Warlpiri kinship diagram. Their kinship system, like most others, is divided into two exogamous moieties.

The rules of kinship control who one can marry, care for, learn from or avoid. It is very important that these rules are passed on down the generations, such that *continuity* is another abiding principle. Every day the Mother Sun gives some of her power to her daughter; that makes sense. The kinship system incorporates non-humans, as we saw with totemism. Not only does a child quickly learn to address others in kinship terms (and typically all of her mother's sisters are called 'mother'. They share maternal responsibilities, making babysitting a breeze), but she also learns that she has a special reslationship with at least one totem, a pelican for instance.

Kinship is the ‘genius’ of Aboriginal Australians, someone once said. And totemism is a way of extending kinship to non-humans, to life on Country. If certain philosophies like to think of themselves as having mathematical precision and calculable truth, then kinship systems might be a kind of living version of this, not abstract symbolic logic, but actual lived relationships. Not only do kinship systems ‘contain’ and manage a great deal of knowledge, but they are the focus of a great deal of thinking, discussion and negotiation. J M Field sees his recent book, *The Eagle and the Crow*, as a ‘call to other Gamilaraay mari [kin] to think deeply and *often* about our kinship terminology.’ (Field, 2025: 88). Thinking as kin, and through kinship, can never be distant or ‘objective’, it is always positioned and relational.

Kinship-based philosophies need not be seen as dying out, supplanted by modern objectivity, but always in play if one thinks of ceremonies as collective practices that intensify knowledge. J. M. Field again:

> For millennia, ceremony – both big and small – ensured that knowledge found us when we were responsible enough to have it, and this has not changed. Though it sometimes looks very different, ceremony, like us, is still very much here. It remains in the big corroborees to sing the rain, as well as in our seemingly modern moments of making tea for your Aunties. In many ways, to Gamil people who crave the details, I am simply saying this: make more tea for your Aunties. (Field, 2025: 25-6).

As a mathematician, Field is not seeking to explain his whole kinship system. He says he has left ‘holes’ where it is appropriate for the reader, who might be his own people, to sit with the right relatives and wait. The ‘hole’ might be like the ‘x’ in an algebraic formula.

For his non-Indigenous reader, the onus is to think about the philosophies that have ‘spread imported knowledge on stolen lands’ (Field, 2025: 26), and how they do this and why, and what might happen if they thought of philosophy seminars as ceremonies for intensifying knowledge with a greater range of participatory roles. Making tea, perhaps.

The right to know is authority and knowledge appropriately distributed. The privileged locus for knowledge is neither the individual human brain nor the city library. It is Country-based, and comes out in ceremony when different kin groups take on appropriate roles to bring out this knowledge and distribute it intergenerationally. On this point, Ngarrindjeri scholar David Unaipon reveals himself to be something of a pragmatist:

> When the boys and girls have passed through these initiations they are declared to be men and women, and they are then expected to take upon themselves responsibilities of manhood and womanhood. They must think of their duty to their tribe and to the whole of the race belonging to other tribes. They fulfil this role not by work in teaching, not in writing on rock or tree, *but by deed*. (Unaipon, 2001: 137, my emphasis).

Kinship does indeed extend potentially to 'the whole of the race', as one's acts work towards including others in what David Mowaljarlai called 'pattern thinking'. The pattern is not something one thinks up, but it is already there in Country, in the complex interactions of its many forms of life. 'Country tells you' writes Debbie Rose, 'the proposition prioritises country's communication, and positions human responsibility as knowledgeable action in response to country.' (Rose, 2005: 300).

Kinship relationships, Warlpiri ones for instance, are difficult enough to understand as a complex web of relationships among humans, but the kinship system, developed over thousands of years, is also the 'totemic' system, which in itself embodies philosophical principles that contemporary ecological thinking is catching up to again. From the point of view of IAP, 'pattern thinking' necessarily includes non-human rights and responsibilities, and from this point of view it would be complete madness to take the 'Law' (*tjukurpa*, *bugarrigarra,* etc*)* away from Country and give it to a society seen exclusively as human. Saying the Law comes from Country is not just to emphasise its continuity and its eternal presence beyond our brief human existences, it is saying that the Law necessarily networks non-human beings as well.

Totemic beings—specific plants and animals—are incorporated into social life via ceremony and kinship relations: 'totemism', says Deborah Bird Rose, in a brilliant revisiting of the concept, 'is a common property institution for long- term ecological management' (Rose, 2013: 127) , a relationship that becomes obvious once one acknowledges that the nature/culture binary is not a given. Nature is on one side of an arbitrary divide and humans have their cultures exclusively on the other? Precisely the mad scheme that has accelerated the destruction of those things called natural, deprived, as they are, of their capacity to

answer back—that answering back, by the way, is what totemism allows for with rules like not eating and caring for your totem animal. If you do the wrong thing, you risk getting sick.

Looking after specific non-human beings might not only be common sense, but a kind of rationality. When asked a fundamental metaphysical question, 'How come I am in the same world as that pelican?', the 'Western' 'naturalist' (Descola 2013: 172-192) solution is to put humans firmly in cultures and the pelican, along with all other non-human beings, in Nature. But the solution in so-called totemic societies, that refuse the singular concept of Nature, is an extraordinary invention: totemism that we would now provisionally define as an *expert Indigenous philosophy pertaining to the crucial importance of the continuity of 'nature' and 'culture'.* While the 'Western' system has radically divided nature from culture, the better to exploit the former, IAPs invented 'totemism' as an extended multispecies kinship system that makes rights and responsibilities in relation to non-humans explicit in the Law.

Totemism is often considered a kind of animism, where everything has an agency, but more specifically the underlying proposition that your life is not just your own; it is shared with something else. This is also how ecosystems work, with 'connectivities [that] are recursive: this is an account of an ecosystem that flourishes through looped and tangled benefits' (Rose, 2005: 296). Caring for Country means being aware that it's not all about us; IAP is not a humanist philosophy. For example, we have to bear in mind that '…plants that have no particular or direct benefit to humans, [may be] useful to other living things' (Rose, 2005: 296). Rose elaborates another example:

> … when the March flies bite, the crocodiles are laying their eggs, and when another type of fly arrives, the bush plums are ripe. Such information connects events that are spatially extended with other events that are relatively localised. It is not necessary to keep going to the billabong to check to see if the crocodiles have laid their eggs; it is simply enough to be bitten by a March fly. That can happen almost anywhere, but only at a given time. A similar pattern concerns the river fig... The communicative event that announces both ripe figs and fat turtles is the cicada song. Cicadas sing turtle fat, people said. (Rose, 2005: 296).

And she adds that 'country tells what is happening; it announces its own patterned eventfulness and invites engagement.' (Rose, 2005: 298). David Unaipon seems to embrace a

more pervasive animism, extending life to things normally not considered alive: '… there are many spirits which exist in the elements— Myeyea, (Wind Spirit); Pa nee, (Rain Spirit); Kallitthie, (Hail Spirit); Sunlight Spirit, Cloud Spirit. Then there are spirits that take the form of Trees, Bush Shrubs, Plants, and Rocks. Everything that exists has some life apart from itself.' (Unaipon, 2001: 53). His concluding sentence, 'Everything that exists has some life apart from itself' could be a major axiom for IAP.

Totemism makes good sense. If '…"totems" are your kin in a world of sentient beings' as Deborah Bird Rose wrote to me before she died, as if this were the most obvious 'fact' that the older anthropology had missed. That anthropology, Lévi-Strauss in particular, was systematically modelled on language and symbols, such that certain animals and plants were 'nominated' to arbitrarily structure human into groups.

But when a Nyikina person says 'that *mayiarda* [pelican] is my *jalnga* ['totem'] they are talking about an inalienable life force running through them both, not a 'representation' bridging nature and culture. This 'animist' or 'totemic' system is one of extended kinship and mutual care. The human/pelican cohabitation, their age-old sharing of a particular world, is *reason-able*, and complex: multiple species means multiple attachments and multiple practices. A world without pelicans or other *jalnga* 'makes no sense' in Australian Indigenous philosophy, or in ecology.

Australian totemism can be seen a 'solution' to one problem in a *philosophical way of life*. The problem is 'how does one live with other beings' and the answer is not 'any way we like because we humans are superior', but a more complex set of rights and responsibilities that include both killing for food and caring for.

Indigenous thought has been interpreted mostly through the lens of anthropology, and it deserves to be liberated from the social sciences to the extent that they are complicit with the flattening of Indigenous worlds. I am thinking of the reduction of these cultures' multirealist complexities with the pervasive application of a modern discourse of positivism and objectivism. But recent developments show an increasing interest in conceptual frameworks in Indigenous thought. I am thinking of the 'ontological turn' associated with Bruno Latour or Eduardo Vivieros de Castro, a discussion that might have to wait for another occasion.

I would have liked to slip quietly into this essay, a speaking subject, but in the end silent and unauthorized, so as to give more weight to a larger conversation that has been going on for many millennia in the southern continent where I happened to have been born. I don't even speak any of the many languages that have been murmuring, discussing, narrating, and singing for all those generations and seeking wisdom in that Country: a philosophy that was good enough to enable thousands of years of continuity and coexistence with one of the greatest degrees of biodiversity on the planet. I am the wrong kind of person to be telling this story, a descendant of White settler-colonials. Often in the wrong kind of place, like a lecture theatre. Using only language for a philosophy full of metamorphoses, whose richness is embodied in rituals, practices, myths and mysteries. Next time go walking on Country with my friend Edwin Lee Mulligan. He knows.

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