

COLLAPSING TIME: INDIGENOUS STORYTELLERS AND THE
'EVERYWHEN'

by

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The Aboriginal protest slogan ‘still here’: a statement that suggests a temporality and a place, still *happening or existing before now and continuing into the present here in, at, or to this place or position*. ‘Always was, Always will be’: Indigenous protest slogan, past, present and future are enfolded in what becomes a statement on sovereignty not just of Country¹ but of Country’s time.

*“I still practice my law and culture,
I still live off the sea
I know where I belong.”*

-Rohanna Angus

As any Indigenous researcher/academic/daughter/sister/person has likely felt before me, a burden clung to me while creating this thesis. Recording something that can be seen as a reflection of Indigenous people was at times asphyxiating. This project began as a mission to record activists’ stories. I came to see my thesis itself as a part of Story, one singularity in a web of many stories told by Indigenous people across our vast land. The story morphed and was birthed anew with my narrators, the things they told me and the lives they lived carried this story, the liquid of their being creating tides and currents that I was at the mercy of. Imperative was recording the life histories of my narrators so that their children, families, and communities may hold them. My responsibility as a community member and as a Wiradjuri woman vitalised by the concept of *Yindyamarra*² meant that I had to above all, create a story that would fulfill a cultural purpose. Cultural knowledge was shared with me that I am deeply grateful to have been trusted with, and I have tried to cushion this knowledge with care. The documentary I refer to throughout is multi-part and Episode One centres on Rohanna Angus.

¹ See glossary.

² Wiradjuri for respect, to go slowly, take care.

INDIGENOUS TESTIMONY AND SETTLER CONTROL OF THE FUTURE

Indigenous testimonies in Australia and abroad are frequently co-opted by the State to tell a certain story about itself. Aboriginal voices are often called upon at times of great national need, in transitional periods, or where the nation must prove its character on the world stage. In the early decades of colonization, Indigenous testimony was not accepted in courts, and Indigenous witnesses were held in chains with the accused. It was only in the face of pressure from evangelical leaders in Britain and reports of the colony's inhumanity reaching foreign shores that Australian governments decided to loosely introduce Indigenous testimony into courtrooms in a series of weak Acts that held little weight. When Indigenous witnesses were allowed in courtrooms, their testimony was blatantly disbelieved. Statements in a 1920s massacre inquiry included 'you can get a native to say anything' and 'the statements of natives can hardly be trusted.'³

Seventy years later, Indigenous voices were used to provide the image of a reconciled Australia in *The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families* that occurred in 1992, which took into account the testimony of survivors of the Stolen Generation. Despite decades-long Indigenous calls for this inquiry, it only happened after Australia faced significant pressure due to other nations beginning to undertake so-called Truth and Reconciliation Commissions. The inquiry had very strict parameters and a touted vision to 'bring that chapter to a close.'⁴ Aboriginal voices were heard not to rupture or reveal, but to foreclose the past and effectively 'put the issue to bed'. Survivors received no monetary compensation. John Herron, who was then Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, stated that 'what we must recognise is that a lot of people have benefited by that [*policy of removal*]... and in regards to compensation? Money might compound the problem... From my own experience as a medical practitioner⁵ a great deal of benefit will occur just purely out of the process of people being able to go before that inquiry and talking about what has occurred to them'.⁶ When the full report was released, containing mostly oral historical

³ Words from Forrest River Massacre of 1927

https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/digitised_collections/remove/93281.pdf

⁴ Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, Apology to Australia's Indigenous People

<https://www.indigenous.gov.au/reconciliation/apology-australias-indigenous-peoples>.

⁵ Herron was a surgeon, not a psychologist.

⁶ 1996 'A FORGOTTEN GENERATION?', *Tharunka (Kensington, NSW : 1953 - 2010)*, 15 October, p. 14. , viewed 25 Jan 2023, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article230434853>.

evidence, right-wing historians used the political moment to air out their critiques of the ‘mythology’ of brutal colonization and to question the legitimacy of oral history.⁷ These testimonies sparked what came to be known as the ‘History Wars’ and outright denials of the Stolen Generation. This revealed an important fact—for settler-colonial nations, redressing the ill treatment of indigenous people via monetary compensation as opposed to symbolic performances of ‘lending an ear’ would deeply threaten the legitimacy of the settler state. Challenged by legitimate Indigenous claims to sovereignty, the continuing colonial future would be destabilized. In this way, ‘hearing testimony’ becomes weaponized as a way to locate Indigenous sovereignty in the past and ensure colonial stability in the future.

As Elizabeth Strakosch and Alisa Macoun point out,

Colonial sovereignty makes a fundamental claim to ‘own the future’ because its jurisdiction cannot be divided so it refuses the possibility of sharing that future in any ongoing way [...] it is in an endless process of fixing and re-fixing this possession in the face of a persistent indigenous sovereignty that disrupts its claims [...] colonial sovereignty is a performance claiming to be an essence, unlike Indigenous sovereignty which is the resilient existent. The unrecognised investment in colonial defined futures suffuses the settler approach to [...] policy, academic work and progressive allyship. The settler future is taken to be the most urgent political consideration and somehow inevitable, foreclosing other futures [...] and this shapes our orientation to the *now*.⁸

Strakosch and Macoun furthered my thinking about the settler hold on past and future, and its implications for the present. They point out that “the inevitability of that future legitimises intensive and violent work in the present.” This creates a falsified innocence of the settler state through which “we can avoid confronting the political demands Indigenous sovereignty makes on us in this moment...justified as preparing us all for a future in which settlers will belong.”⁹

⁷ Even when accompanied by substantial written evidence and policies specifically crafted for Indigenous child removal.

⁸ “Elizabeth Strakosch & Alissa Macoun ‘Dismantling settler futures’ *Undoing Australia*,” University of Melbourne Faculty of Arts, published November 2022, <https://arts.unimelb.edu.au/australiancentre/critical-public-conversations/undoing-australia-2022/dismantling-settler-futures>.

⁹ “Elizabeth Strakosch & Alissa Macoun ‘Dismantling settler futures’ *Undoing Australia*.”

For many years, Indigenous people have been requesting a ‘Voice to Parliament.’ The Voice would provide an Indigenous advisory body that must be consulted on issues that pass through parliament that pertain to Indigenous people. Despite constant talk of future desire and hope, the proposal continues to face constant pushback. Macoun and Strakosch cite a December of 2022 statement from the opposition government that exemplifies the extremely noncommittal attitude that is given to this issue, stating that the party “continues to aim to work in a bipartisan way to support constitutional recognition.” The colonial state, for purposes of its own self-preservation, wants to hear only those voices that may justify its own existence.¹⁰ It seems that Aboriginal oral histories are relentlessly subject to colonial imposition. Today, Indigenous witnesses are at a significant disadvantage in courtrooms, due to a lack of cultural competency from judiciaries, low literacy levels, as well as racism.¹¹ Even outside the courtrooms, Indigenous testimony faces manipulation. ‘Native informants’ were often used throughout the 19th and 20th centuries to further the colonial mission and to undermine Indigenous sovereignty. During the 2022 Oral History Association Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, I was relieved to encounter, in discussions with a group of Indigenous oral historians, familiar stories of the over-mystification of Indigenous voices, the misappropriation and romanticizing of Indigenous testimonies, and the ever-nodding head of misinformed (though well-meaning) non-Indigenous listeners. When Indigenous people spoke, they did not speak to be heard but as part of a performance of symbolic listening that served merely to confirm the upright moral character of the listener.

I discussed this phenomenon with my narrators. Strangleholds. Peering eyes. Nodding heads. A reconciled (colonial) future. We floundered at ways to find freedom. Describing my project to others magnified my discomfort. My Indigenous audiences, elders, and friends were enthusiastic about my aim of recording the simple stories of people and of Country. Non-Indigenous audiences seemed more impressed by ‘Indigenous activists’, the implication that I was doing something ‘of use’ within existing settler-colonial redress structures and the recording ‘painful’ stories seemed to resonate. I realized that colonial expectations of worth were seeping into my practice. What was their demand? Why is an Indigenous story more

¹⁰ See Berber Bevernage, “Writing the Past Out of the Present: History and the Politics of Time in Transitional Justice,” *History Workshop Journal* 69 (2010): 111–31.

¹¹ See Eades, Diana, “I Don’t Think It’s an Answer to the Question: Silencing Aboriginal Witnesses in Court,” *Language in Society* 29, no. 2 (2000): 161–95.

relevant when it is a story of suffering? There are roles we play, stories we tell, and certain voices that are recognized as more important than others. The conditions of settler colonialism ensure that its expectations reproduce themselves again and again, shapeshifting through the public imaginary. How can we escape this? Wiradjuri woman Jaja Dare and I had a lengthy discussion about temporality and her resistance as a Wiradjuri woman to imposed forms of time that go against lore and culture, but which Indigenous people are expected to abide by unquestioningly. Wiradjuri man Shane Runciman and I discussed the question of how to leave ‘whitefellas’ out of the story entirely. Both of these discussions influenced my approach to narrative in this project. However, it was Bardi woman Rohanna Angus’s answer that stuck with me the most— ‘just let the tide take it’. The tides, an important feature of Bardi life, are holders of Bardi temporality. I began thinking about how I could succumb to the tide. As I began to film, I realized that the uniquely non-linear narrative structures used by my interview subjects could have powerful discursive implications. Aboriginal voices, once set loose in the polity, are subject to the settler pull to foreclose stories of colonial imposition and suffering and in doing so place ‘the past’ definitively in the past, making way for a united future. The cold hands of a delineated settler past and future build an edifice supplanting Indigenous understandings of time and experience. My narrators, in contrast, were collapsing time in their approach to storytelling. What W.E.H Stanner had written in an essay in 1956 about Aboriginal temporality was coming into my vision. Time, in Indigenous conceptions tied to the Dreaming, is most accurately understood as the ‘everywhen’.¹²

¹² W. E. H. Stanner & Robert Manne, *The dreaming & other essays* (Black Inc. Agenda: Melbourne, 2009).

OUR STORIES LIVE IN PLACES /COLLAPSING TIME

*'In contrast to Western historical narratives, which often move along progress-oriented journeys toward modernity, Indigenous ways of understanding time eschew the flatness and linearity of timelines.'*¹³

*'To talk about time, you have to talk about the spiritual and you have to talk about Country. Buru is place and time.'*¹⁴

Indigenous Australians, despite differences across mobs, nations and clans, all have some iteration of the Dreaming. Notoriously difficult to define, the term refers to

manifestations of ancestral beings as the physical landscape, as the social and ecological order that the ancestors created, and as animals, plants, or natural features such as wind and fire.¹⁵

Importantly, the Dreaming is;

not conceived as being located in an historical past but as an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these life-forces, symbolized as men and as other natural species.¹⁶

Taking seriously the notion that time is “a dynamic and historical force in its own right”¹⁷, I took to elucidating Indigenous temporality for myself. Indigenous temporality posits that the typical distinctions between time are not applicable, ‘the eternal is always present’ and ‘the ancient past that lives in the present determines everything.’¹⁸ Gungalu and Birra Gubba

¹³ Ann McGrath, Jakelin Troy, and Laura Rademaker, *Everywhen : Australia and the Language of Deep History. New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 45.

¹⁴ McGrath, Troy and Rademaker, *Everywhen*, 23.

¹⁵ C Braknell, “Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country,” in *Everywhen : Australia and the Language of Deep History. New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 77.

¹⁶ C Braknell, “Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country,” 79.

¹⁷ Berber Bevernage, “Writing the Past Out of the Present,” 113.

¹⁸ Importantly this is not to say that Indigenous people cannot distinguish between an event from years ago, and something that happened yesterday. This is a dangerous trap to fall into that many non-indigenous academics

woman Dr Lilla Watson articulated this future-past relationality laconically; “we see our future stretching out as far in front of us as it does behind us”.¹⁹

The settler imaginary persistently tries to represent Indigenous people as timeless, outside or behind time. The implication that Aboriginal people are ‘behind time’ and need to be brought into modernity is still commonly heard in Australian political debates. Australian missionary publications from the 1960s were insistent on this paradigm, one implying that ‘history itself was a Christian concept; only cultures that had received the Bible could wake from their “dreaming,” conceive of time as linear progress, and participate in history.’²⁰

To reclaim this and instead emphasize the complex relationship to time that aboriginal people experience, I want to emphasize a collapsed temporality and to engage with ‘the everywhen’ in an attempt to convey decolonial oral histories. The notion of Indigenous oral histories being outside of and out of sync with Western temporality was not a new realisation, but one that I had not articulated in such a way before. Time, in Indigenous philosophies, is not separate from Country, nor is it separate from Story.

In trying to capture resistance, I noted compelling themes in the attempts of both my narrators to break through colonial systems—Shane trying to break hierarchy with his podcast in which Indigenous kids interviewed police officers, and Rohanna trying to give a voice to remote indigenous communities—but what I found most radical and most revolutionary in my narrators’ stories was their articulation of temporality. Past and future were not viewed as separate or less or more important. Old and young did not definitively exist in hierarchies of above and below. I wanted to give space to this complexity, on the path to nurturing a space where we can radically define our own stories, not as past or future, but as a layered now.

In the opening moments of the documentary, Rohanna talks about the importance of story in her community and her culture: ‘Our Story [...] that’s what we value the most [...] it’s very important in our communities, in our culture’. In historical scholarship,

have found, often relying on romanticised notions of Indigenous cultures rather than the words of indigenous narrators.

¹⁹ “Elizabeth Strakosch & Alissa Macoun ‘Dismantling settler futures’ *Undoing Australia*.”

²⁰ C Braknell, “Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country,” 78.

Story was once dismissed as mere legend or myth. But the word denotes Indigenous modes of history telling or historical practice—particularly those valued oral traditions associated with landscapes of significance. The word “story” is preferred to “history” because it has no need to be written down and because it is not history in the sense of being located wholly in the past. It is part of something larger, continuous and ongoing. Story can be about any and every time; it persists in and outside time, with time itself refusing to be pinned down.²¹

Rohanna’s relationship to Story was one of extreme importance. She speaks of the impact climate change is having on her sea-girt community.

‘Our ecosystems are changing. Global warming is starting to affect our communities. Our waters are starting to rise. There’s a lot of changes [...] but all in all, what’s changed was we don’t have our old people left [...] to tell us those stories. Stories have to be passed on.’

Often Western oral historical ideas around the importance of keeping stories alive range from sentimentality to avoidance of historical revisionism. For Bardi and other Indigenous people, the pressure of colonialism and the impending destruction of climate change add a layer to this. Story is essential for survival. Story, by observing time in a non-hierarchical fashion, without sacrificing the present for an imagined future, is a reaffirmation of the now.

Historians such as Ann McGrath and Bruce Pascoe have grappled with the idea of a ‘deep past’. The conceptualization of the deep past—or the term I prefer, the deep present—or the ‘everywhen’ has some resonances with the thinking of theorists who grapple with disrupting ‘white time’²² or ‘settler time’. Caswell reminds us that ‘to view time progressively is to posit a sense of linear temporal movement marked by the improvement of the human condition.’²³ Mark Rifkin’s *Beyond Settler Time* took as its focus indigenous temporality. Rifkin was determined to refute statements of Indigenous timelessness or notions of their being behind time:

²¹ McGrath, Troy, and Rademaker, *Everywhen*, 14.

²² Michelle Caswell, *Urgent Archives: Enacting Liberatory Memory Work* (Routledge 2021), 10.

²³ Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 11.

“employing notions of temporal multiplicity opens the potential for conceptualizing Native continuity and change in ways that do not take non-native frames of reference as the self-evident basis for approaching Indigenous forms of persistence, adaptation and innovation.”²⁴

Musicologists alike have noted the temporal richness of the Everywhen. Noongar musicologist and composer Clint Bracknell studied the songs and language of his people to find that Noongar ‘have a word for long ago that roughly translates to ‘in the cold time of long ago’, likely a reference to the ice age.’²⁵ The deep time of Indigenous storytelling is important to note. He affirms that “conceptualization of the deep past could be reframed as something relational rather than linear.”²⁶ Linda Barwick notes that for the Walpiri people of central Australia, dreaming “is not conceived as being located in an historical past but as an eternal process which involves the maintenance of these life-forces, symbolized as men and as other natural species.”²⁷ A colonial observer who spoke to members of this community lamented his inability to tell whether the people Indigenous people spoke about were ‘living, or belonged to ancient times, or . . . [were] merely imaginary beings.’²⁸ Barwick notes that song systems are not fixed or rigid, and acclimatize with Country; “the song system is able to adapt, to find new contexts for meaning making’.²⁹

During my time with Rohanna’s family, Rohanna’s son Buddah, was facing court for the charge of ‘assaulting a police officer’ after he pushed an officer off him who was holding him to the ground when he had a broken collar bone. When Buddah and I arrived back to the house after having been at the courthouse that had been adorned with aboriginal art on its walls, I asked him for his thoughts on the experience. On the drive back, he had been telling me about the judges and lawyers wanting to only hear themselves, that they were not willing to listen and only wanted to hear him through themselves. I was expecting an answer similar to this when I asked again, but he gave me a different one this time. He simply said, ‘they didn’t care about time...yeah...they didn’t care about time’. He wasn’t concerned that they

²⁴ Mark Rifkin, *Beyond Settler Time: Temporal Sovereignty and Indigenous Self-Determination* (Duke University Press 2017): 6.

²⁵ C Braknell, “Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country,” 80.

²⁶ C. Braknell, “Old Dogs and Ice Ages in Noongar Country,” 81.

²⁷ L. Barwick, “Songs and the Deep Present,” in *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History. New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 109.

²⁸ L. Barwick, “Songs and the Deep Present,” 109.

²⁹ L. Barwick, “Songs and the Deep Present,” 110.

didn't care about *his* time, but rather that they didn't have respect for time at all. Oral historian Sarah Yu, when recording oral histories of Kimberley elders, received the following answer when she asked about time for their people— 'We respect the time. Bugarrigarra (the dreaming) made this for us, and we carry the Law for Bugarrigarra. People must stay with the time, stay with the Law of the Country. It is ongoing and never stops.'³⁰ Indigenous temporalities 'pay attention' to time, rather than trying to control it. If one cares about or listens to time, as Buddah says, then you will 'find yourself'. In the settler-colonial temporality, listening to and paying attention to time does not have this effect. Rohanna described the younger generation's ability to listen to the tides and to Country and thus to adapt. Living off the sea, attention must be paid to time. Time, more broadly, must be paid attention to, so that we do not *lose* ourselves. Colonial society is all too focussed on justifying its own existence and ensuring its own future that it necessarily refuses to pay attention to time, to the layered present. Rather than being separate from Country, the two are unavoidably related. The time that colonial states create represents the surface, while deep time is always calling from beneath. In Indigenous ontologies, the question of who you are is not separate from Country, nor is it separate from the Dreaming. As one of Yu's narrators told her 'People must stay with the time, stay with the Law of the Country. It is ongoing and never stops... People are always talking Country and therefore always talking history'.³¹ As Stanner said 'One cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in time: it was, and is, everywhen'³². The translation of the term 'Dreaming' comes into question here. Something as complex as Indigenous ways of knowing the past and the future, and the interconnectedness of all of this could only be comprehended by English imaginations as a 'dream'. So far from the safety of delineated time periods, colonial assertions that events are fully 'over' and blind barges toward an untenable future were these Aboriginal conceptions of temporal fluidity and life-form interconnectedness that it could be grasped only as something subconscious. The dreaming should perhaps more accurately be called 'the awakening'.³³ How can these oral histories shape our understandings of time and how is this, in itself, a form of activism?

³⁰ S. Yu, "Bugarrigarra Nyurdany, Because of the Dreaming," in *Everywhen : Australia and the Language of Deep History. New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 57.

³¹ S. Yu, "Bugarrigarra Nyurdany, Because of the Dreaming," 57.

³² W. E. H. Stanner & Robert Manne, *The dreaming & other essays* (Black Inc. Agenda: Melbourne, 2009).

³³ This leads me to think about the term 'tradition'. Indigenous people are deemed 'traditional owners' of our lands when there is a land claim case. We are not 'historical' owners, nor are we simply 'owners', we are bound to a suggestion of repetitive pastness in our claim for that which is ours.

Refusing colonial time comes to be a way of asserting Indigenous sovereignty and asserting an Indigenous temporality through oral history.³⁴

The oral histories I recorded expressed a unique temporality, and in turn the ways in which these stories were captured needed to reflect an Indigenous temporality. By tuning into indigenous temporality, activism and advocacy can become more in tune with Indigenous ontologies. Only by valuing indigenous autonomy and temporality can stories be conveyed as living in places. It was important to creating my documentary that I reflected the importance of Story, and within that, time. When Rohanna talks in the beginning of the documentary about Story, and says “stories must be passed on”, she is not speaking of just any stories, but of ways of knowing and living, and ways of being in observance of time. The importance of Lore, culture and story to Rohanna’s family was important not as a personal endeavour, but out of respect to Country and to community. Every time a story was told, this was kept alive. It was essential to travel to the place to find the story. I came face to face with the Everywhen at several points while completing this thesis. Rohanna barely spoke of her work in our interviews. To her, this was not as important as telling me about her family. From the beginning, what was meaningful was fishing and collecting oysters. The storying related to the fish and the oysters was something greater than it may seem in a typical narrative structure. For this reason, I oriented the time world of my documentary around fish and fishing. The documentary begins somewhat linearly, we see Rohanna packing the car, we see the journey to Ardyaloon, driving out of the town to the long dirt road. In the space of the car, we are able to somewhat linearly discuss Rohanna’s past, her triumphs and sufferings, but once we step onto Country in Ardyaloon, this shifts. I tried to structure the documentary in a way so that the viewer steps out of the car at Ardyaloon and is no longer bound by linear structure. From this point on, distinct periods blur. Our orienting points are fish on the fire, song and story. It is unclear when we return to Broome, at what points of the journey we are on. It is unclear how we end up with Buddah. But the viewer has no choice but to observe Buddah’s wishes; to listen. Just hours after being silenced by a colonial court and having his Story rendered irrelevant, we sit with Buddah and simply listen, care about time and learn.

³⁴ The characterization of Aboriginal Australia as the ‘oldest continuous culture’ still renders aboriginal people as ‘timeless’. In a society that purportedly values adaptability, progressiveness and change, this figures as little more than romantic idealization of a long-lost Western fate or a pleasant, yet decidedly ridiculous, fantasy of another life lived. The assertion is that Indigenous people are timeless. The opposite is true; we are full of time. Time stares us in the face, we acknowledge its interconnectedness, rather than separating it into neatly packaged ‘objects’.

On our third day of filming, my narrator Shane and I drove by a house that formerly belonged to a slave-owner. The woman who had told him this story was the daughter of the slave-owner. She told him a lengthy story about a slave auction where Aboriginal slaves had been sold. We turned to discussion of the animals and their remembrance of these traumatic pasts,

‘Since colonization, right? That’s a blip on the map - that length of time. But the spirits of the animals still haven’t lost the language—they’re still here. Language is from the land...the animals still know that. The animals still know *their* language of what’s happened, and that language hasn’t been lost...it’s there, you know? It’s just there—it’s just ready to be reborn, you know? You’ve just got to listen to it.’

A reflection from a Ngarigu scholar expresses a similar notion:

‘She always told my daughter, “When you get off the lift at the top near the eagle’s nest, you’ve got to go and speak to this group of rocks.” She had never said anything like that until quite recently to my daughter, but she was adamant about this. The crow moiety—that is, the people whose Country was up at the top of the mountain—has disappeared today. But there are crows (yukumbrak) everywhere, and they talk to you all the time.’³⁵

I am reminded of Boandik professor Irene Watson’s observation that our ‘natural world is still singing even though the greater part of humanity has disconnected itself from song’³⁶

What songs are being sung? What stories are being told by the animals? Country, “whose trajectory incorporates not only the ground that we all walk and live on today but also its earlier formations and iterations, which include the sea, the stars, and the wider cosmos” is a place of deep time. McGrath describes it as a place with “agency [that] transcend[s] the human. And history is embedded within and inscribed on them.”³⁷ Memory shows up in

³⁵ J. Troy, “Standing on the Ground and Writing on the Sky,” in *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History. New Visions in Native American and Indigenous Studies* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2023), 39.

³⁶ Irene Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), 33.

³⁷ McGrath, Troy, and Rademaker, *Everywhen*, 16.

country and shows up in place. Shane's observation suggests that the biological memory of the animals is such that they have evolved due to colonization. It is not located in the past but in the now—in the living. Indigenous people remember history in a different way, so their oral histories must be approached in a different way.

An often-heard condemnation of humanity's current apocalyptic state is that 'people only seem to be concerned about the now', that people are stuck in the present and this is to blame for widespread inaction regarding things like climate change and dire over-consumption. But this thesis made me wonder, is it really true to say that people are concerned about the present, and all it holds, if they are mindlessly engaging in hyper consumerist destruction? Or is it more accurate to say that they are not aware of time at all? Perhaps it is more true to say that people are tragically unaware of the everywhen. The conceptual chopping-up of time, in which the future (no matter how emphatically it is referred to) remains ontologically distinct from the present, leads all too often to inaction. People are clearly not motivated by apocalyptic films depicting our self-made destruction, nor are corporations spurred into action by scientists giving well-informed warnings. What if we became aware of the everywhen? ³⁸

Michelle Caswell in *Liberatory Archives* expressed her desire to 'reposition the archivist as a liberatory memory worker, activating records for the liberation of oppressed communities'³⁹ to 'dismantle old ways of being and doing.'⁴⁰ Caswell believes that to do this, it is essential to do away with 'white time'. Caswell declares that she does not know what these liberatory archives will look like yet, but her desire to do away with white time is a starting point. I wanted to take up her proposal. If we do away with one kind of time, what can we put in its place? The everywhen.

In his essay on the potential for Black Affect,⁴¹ Tyrone Palmer discusses the potential of 'turning away from the World'. The World with a capital W in this case refers to something constructed by colonialism and imbued with normative ideas of Man—Palmer's implication being that the conception of the World in critical theory is inherently inscribed with colonial

³⁸ We must instead, become aware of the everywhen and allow the *jindida balgun* to do its work.

³⁹ Caswell, *Urgent Archives*, 93.

⁴⁰ Caswell, *Urgent Archives* 116.

⁴¹ Tyrone S. Palmer; "Otherwise than Blackness: Feeling, World, Sublimation," *Qui Parle* No.29, 2 (December 2020): 247–283.

and anti-Black meanings. In this thesis, I suggest we turn away from the World and then some. I suggest that we give in to the ‘everywhen’, resisting our periodization urges and instead embracing the decolonial capacity of buckled time. Such radical potential can be incorporated into our oral historical practice if we are willing to do something as subversive as it is propitious—to turn away from the world and collapse time.

AFTERWORD: INSPIRATION/GRAPPLING/CHALLENGE

I was inspired by the shifting temporal focus of Taylor Thompson’s ‘Tell me About that World’. Thompson in her thesis spoke of the revolutionary capacity of imagining an elsewhere “listening carefully to the worlds our narrators imagine, we might be able to hone our own capacities to dream deliberately about liberatory futures.”⁴² I wanted to apply the same liberatory focus to what was already there for my narrators, for the world, not that they imagined, but that they lived through Indigenous temporal frameworks. Intrigued too by Amy Starecheski’s presentation on COVID stories at the 2022 Oral History Association Annual Meeting in Los Angeles, an oral history of the present made me ponder contemporaneity in oral history, and how reassigning what memory can be is a way to shift our understanding of time and our relationship to time. Christina Sharpe asking of continuing Black oppression “how do we memorialize an event that is still ongoing?”⁴³ Reminding us that delineation of time cannot happen for those who pay attention; “in the wake, the past that is not past reappears, always, to rupture the present”⁴⁴ Inspired in part by speculative oral history, but also by decolonial oral history, instead of prompting a future my narrators may envision or a past they may see as never having left, instead I asked them to tell me about the now, in all its layers.

Circular temporality came up throughout my thesis creation. Composing the music for this documentary was another opportunity to implicate lack of linearity and circularity. I recorded everything on my guitar and piano using circular rhythmic and melodic patterns.

Conversations in a coffee shop in Chelsea with Elizabeth Povinelli provoked more discussion of temporality. Much of her work interrogates Indigeneity and temporality, and one thought

⁴² Taylor Thompson, ‘Tell Me About That World’: *Speculative Archives and Black Feminist Listening Practices*, <https://tw.sandbox.library.columbia.edu/>.

⁴³ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being*, (Duke University Press, 2016): 3

⁴⁴ Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 73.

in particular spurred my thinking; “late liberalism combines the *autological subject*, who lives in the future tense, and whose future is freedom, with the *geneological society*, who live in the past tense and are a world of constraints. In late liberalism, animists can have their place but are always backward, and ‘traditional.’”⁴⁵ Also resonant was “that things exist through mutual attention. Things are neither born nor die. Things turn away from each other or change states. Things can withdraw care from each other. The earth is not dying. It is turning away from certain ways of existing.” Povinelli’s refreshing de-structuring approach encouraged me.

The promise of the untethered nonconformity of oral history made me think that I would be free from creating a strangulated piece. But tied into all academic practices, even one so perforated and creviced as oral history, is the pull of Western time and of Western expectations. I decided in order to create something that I felt was divorced from this as best as I could, I had to abandon my own notions of ‘creating a documentary’ from point A to point B and create something more circular. I was asking for such recent memories, and these memories are not at all separate from the now. The situation for my narrators, these community leaders, has been the same for many years. Though they took interest in my project as activists, we all came to see that their role was more comprehensively defined as community leaders. We resisted simply by speaking. Simply by living. By refusing to arrive at an end point, refusing to arrive at an answer, a deduction, and instead passing through the everywhen.

Liane Leddy’s oral historical practice was a confidant, her writings a hand on my shoulder. As simple as it was, her assertion that ‘it is not uncommon for participant interviews with Aboriginal people to take the form of more informal conversations than highly-structured question and answer sessions’⁴⁶ became my sticking point.

Leddy’s thoughts on the need for rejuvenation of oral history processes with Indigeneity in mind were more and more resonant as my work went on

⁴⁵ Elizabeth A. Povinelli, *Geontologies: A Requiem to Late Liberalism* (Duke University Press, 2016).

⁴⁶ Lianne Leddy, “Interviewing Nookomis and Other Reflections of an Indigenous Historian,” *Oral History Forum/d’histoire orale*, no. 30 (2010): 13.

“the ethics process defines Aboriginal people as a —vulnerable group, ‖ which by implication positions the researcher as representative of a less-vulnerable group. This is problematic when the researcher, too, is Aboriginal. It creates a distance between the interviewee and researcher where none existed before, a distance that is harmful both to the interview and to the career and cultural aspirations of the Aboriginal researcher.”⁴⁷

This is the constant tension of recording Indigenous stories as an Indigenous scholar. I found myself constantly wondering if what I was doing was right, as an Indigenous scholar. From the beginning, I realised that what I would create would not fit neatly into an oral history project, a question could not be answered. What I would create would not be able to employ a lot of the methods that oral historians employ to ‘relax’ their interviewer, this seemed more like deception. What I had to become comfortable with creating was something that reflected what my Indigenous narrators wanted to be said. I was emboldened by a determination to not make some kind of assertion that Indigenous people are *just as* this, or *equally* that.

Liane makes suggestions for what can help here, citing “the need to change some university processes to increase collaboration between Aboriginal academics and First Nations communities”⁴⁸ noting that “some scholars have already recognized the need to incorporate oral consent, where appropriate, into accepted university research ethics practices, as this is more consistent with how First Nations people learn and communicate.”⁴⁹

Indigenous women who experience violence rarely are the authors of their own stories. Rohanna was cast by the media as a violent, aggressive Black woman. Indigenous Australians are the most incarcerated people on earth.⁵⁰ Indigenous boys and women are the target of police brutality at a far higher rate than other Australians. Before interviewing Rohanna, I found myself imagining the kind of story she would tell me. I was partly expecting a story about the incredible feats she has achieved, the hardships she had overcome. My end product implied these stories and accentuated what was momentous. My original questions had been this:

⁴⁷ Leddy, “Interviewing Nookomis,” 15.

⁴⁸ Leddy, “Interviewing Nookomis,” 16.

⁴⁹ Leddy, “Interviewing Nookomis,” 17.

⁵⁰ <https://www.iwgia.org/en/news/4344-aboriginal-people-in-australia-the-most-imprisoned-people-on-earth.html>.

‘How do we create change in a way that doesn’t reinforce colonial systems? How is our activism uniquely indigenous? How do I record that change in a way that honors indigenous temporality?’

I realised the solutions to these questions were much less active than I had imagined. There was no new thing for me to discover, no innovation, nor progress necessary. Rather, I simply had to respect time, look backwards, look forwards and observe the Everywhen.

GLOSSARY

Mob: One's people. Indigenous people will ask each other "Who's your mob?" to ascertain which country or people another Indigenous person belongs to

Whitefella: typically, a white Australian but often applies to any non-Indigenous Australian.

Black/Blak/blackfella: Indigenous Australian person

Country: C capitalized. My country, my land, a place imbued with lore and everywhen. Place of Story

Ballanda: long ago in Wiradjuri

Story: The dreaming

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