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2CUZ-FM

Abstract:

This is a work of indigenous knowledge. It involves creating an experience into Country and culture. This experience is specifically linked to Gundabooka corroboree place, the Baarka river, to Bourke, and to the voices coming through 2CUZ-FM outback radio. The research aim is to see how Country speaks and what it says, which includes what it says through the cultural productions of Barkindji and other people in town. We are using a mass-media setting and technology – radio, and now print – to discuss and send out messages about Barkindjiness, Country, history and modernity. It's about using the master's tools to dismantle the master's preconceptions. By bringing poets Jen Crawford and Paul Magee into the discussion and space, we are investigating communication between Barkindji Country and Barkindji people with white society. The discussion was broadcast live.

Biographical note:

Paul Collis is a Barkindji man. He was born in Bourke, in far north/west New South Wales. His early life was informed by Barkindji, Kunya, Murawarri, Wongamara and Nyemba story tellers and artists, who taught him Aboriginal Culture and Law. He is author of *Dancing Home* (University of Queensland Press, 2017) and *Nightmares Run Like Mercury* (Recent Works Press, 2021). Paul works as Director, Indigenous Engagement, at the University of Canberra.

Jen Crawford is author of *Admissions* (Five Islands Press, 2000), *Bad Appendix* (Auckland: Titus Books, 2009), *Napoleon Swings* (Soapbox Press, 2009), *Pop Riveter* (Pania Press, 2011), *Koel* (Cordite Books, 2016) and *Lichen Loves Stone* (Tinfish Press, 2016). With Rina Kikuchi, Jen co-edited and part-translated *Poet to Poet: Contemporary Women Poets from Japan* (2017), an anthology of 10 contemporary female Japanese poets. Jen is an Associate Professor in Creative Writing at the University of Canberra.

Ursula K. Frederick is an artist and academic working on Ngunnawal and Ngambri Country (Canberra, Australia). Her primary modes of art practice are photography, printmaking and video. As an archaeologist, Ursula's art practice is informed by her interests in material culture and the way people interact with each other and their worlds. Ursula works as a Senior Research Fellow in the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research (CCCR) at the University of Canberra (UC).

Denis Holyoake is a radio announcer on 2CUZ-FM, Aboriginal Community Radio, Bourke, NSW.

Wayne Knight is a Barkindji/Kunya person who was born and raised in Bourke, NSW. Much of his early life was spent with his mother, grandmother and grandfather. This is where Wayne learned much of the Barkindji and Kunya cultural practices and languages and how to recognise and care for Country. He is an excellent On-Country Ranger.

Paul Magee studied in Melbourne, Moscow, San Salvador, and Sydney. He is the author of *From Here to Tierra del Fuego* (University of Illinois Press: 2000), *Cube Root of Book* (John Leonard Press: 2006), *Stone Postcard* (John Leonard Press: 2014) and *Suddenness and the Composition of Poetic Thought* (Rowman and Littlefield: 2022). Paul is Professor of Poetry at the University of Canberra, where he directs the Centre for Cultural and Creative Research (CCCR).

Emma Philips has fourteen years of experience as a professional photographer in Australian media and advertising and ten years of experience in teaching communications and photography programs across Sydney and Melbourne. Her work merges her industry skills with traditional research to create unique, practice-based methodologies, with a particular focus on the ways that image-making might be informed by classist, sexist and gendered assumptions about women's sexuality, on collaboration and on the elevation of marginalised voices. Emma is an Assistant Professor in Visual Communication with the Faculty of Arts and Design, University of Canberra.

Keywords:

Barkindjiness, polyvocality, creative writing pedagogy, dialogic photography, poetry

2CUZ-FM

CHAPTER SIX OF *A Book that Opens*

DENIS:

Anyway, you're listening to 2CUZ-FM [1].

These fellas have come in to bother me once again.

Okay, what are we talking about, Paul?

PAUL C:

We're here to talk about why we're in Bourke. Paul Magee, Jen Crawford and I all work at the University of Canberra. We're all lecturers there, and all writers. It's the first time for Paul to be back here for a while and—

DENIS:

What do you lecture on, Paul?

PAUL M:

Creative writing.

DENIS:

Creative writing.

PAUL M:

Mainly poetry.

DENIS:

Poetry.

So what's your role here? Why are you in Bourke?

PAUL M:

We're having conversations in different places and we're recording them, to write a book. The idea is that every word that goes into the book was first spoken. So we're creating a speaking book [2].



DENIS:
A speaking book.

PAUL C:
Or a book that speaks.

DENIS:
Yeah?

PAUL C:
Through words.

Jen Crawford, can I ask you a question? Dr Crawford, last time you were here was 2018? 2017?
What was the country like then?

JEN:
It was absolutely dead dry.

PAUL C:
Dead dry. How was Barka, the river?

JEN:
The riverbed was almost 100 per cent dry.

PAUL C:

What was the conversation around town at that time – do you remember?

JEN:

I was really struck: every conversation we had, every time we met someone you knew – all the conversation was about the river and about the grief that people were feeling at seeing it in that condition.

PAUL C:

It was palpable, wasn't it?



We're in Bourke this time as a returning. We're returning to see Country to say hello, to catch up with some of our friends. We've got our great cultural guide, Wayne. So happy to see you, Wayne. And to bring you, Paul, out to Toorale.

Although we couldn't get to some of the places we wanted to. Gundabooka was closed because of floodwaters. Around Black Rocks was shut, as well.

But we got to the homestead. We've seen the Warrego filled with water – it was empty last time, too.

I was asking Wayne, "What's that plant there? One with the purple heads on it."

He said that old people'd grab it and rub it underneath the water. They'd rub the seed heads and fish would rise up the top. It deoxygenates the water. Another way of fishing.

WAYNE:

Numbs you – it's like when you go for operations. It's an anaesthetic. You only get it in the Warrego.



That's how the old people used to use it.

PAUL C:

Plant- and species-specific, that knowledge. There's a lot of knowledge in caring for Country and being on Country.

I wonder what country you'll be in, Denis, when you're no longer sitting there.

It's a good question.

DENIS:

What country?

I don't know – I probably won't even be here.

PAUL C:
That's what I'm talking about.



DENIS:
I'll probably get blown out of the sky – my bits and pieces will be everywhere.

PAUL C:
I don't want that to happen to you.

DENIS:
I'm going to be—

PAUL C:
Hunter S. Thompson – he was blown out of a gun.

DENIS:
Was that how he died?

JEN:
Ashes were everywhere.

DENIS:

I don't intend to die yet. Put it that way.

PAUL C:

Every time I come back, you're looking younger and fitter.

DENIS:

You know what it's
all about, Paul?

Living the dream.

PAUL C:

What's that mean?

DENIS:

Means living with
everything that you
ever wanted to live
with.

PAUL C:

Right, what about
the Queen?

DENIS:

Where's the Queen
come into it?

PAUL C:

Did you meet her?

DENIS:

Yeah, we met her
when she was here
in 2CUZ.

WAYNE:

What year was that, Denis?

DENIS:

2000.

Yeah, she came to our station. She was closer to me than you are now, Paul. Put it that way.



PAUL C:

Did you stay in touch with her after she left Bourke?

DENIS:

No, me and her tore the blanket.

PAUL C:

Ripped the blanket down the middle, eh?

That's all you can do when love is gone.

PAUL M:

Was Phil here?

DENIS:

No, Phil was out at Mantals, having a look at the operations out there.

PAUL C:

The cotton operations.

DENIS:

Yeah, Mantals. They went down the gurgler because—

PAUL C:

Because he looked at it.

DENIS:

Eh?

PAUL C:

Because Phil looked at it.

DENIS:

No, no, they went down the gurgler because of the water situation. It's all political. There were hardly any flows going downstream any more because the multinationals bought up all the water back when John Howard was in power. He separated the water licences from the land. Before, you bought the land and that water licence stayed with it. But the Liberal Government decided in their wisdom to separate them. People like the small farmer and the small irrigator missed out because the multinationals could buy the water from underneath them.



PAUL C:

It's always surprised me, that word, "irrigator". To irrigate, to me, means putting water on crops or plants, not putting it in a truck and going and selling it. That's—

DENIS:

No, it doesn't mean that – it's about transferring the rights. What it means is—

PAUL C:

I know.

DENIS:

—say you had say a million litres. This person is allocated a million litres and they turn around and sell that million litres to somebody upstream. So they take the million litres out. And this person who was supposed to get the million litres doesn't get it. It's been sold from underneath them.

PAUL C:

It's all theft to me.



Anyway, I want to ask Jen Crawford a question about travelling.

DENIS:

Go on.

PAUL C:

Jen, when did we come from Canberra? What day?

JEN:

Friday.

PAUL C:

Anything happen on Good Friday?

JEN:

Yeah.

PAUL C:

Could you tell us a little bit about that? Have you got something written there?

JEN:

I've got a ghost story, actually.

PAUL C:

Oh, a ghost story. I love ghost stories. I see ghost stories.



JEN:
But if you've got little ones listening it might be—

DENIS:
Is this the truth?

JEN:
It's absolutely dead true.

I don't think it was raining much or at all when I hit the pothole, which was one of the hundreds between Canberra and Narromine. Unusually wet weather and trucks had chewed up the roads. We seemed okay at first. But I had an uneasy feeling, as the sound of the car had changed just slightly. Over the next few minutes, a hard storm set in. I was already slowing right down for visibility's sake when a warning flashed up on the dash telling me to check the tyre pressure. By then, it was almost impossible to see enough of the shoulder of the road, to know whether I had the clearance to pull over. I took the risk shortly after a small bridge, and immediately a couple of vehicles whizzed past from behind.

The worst of the storm was through in ten minutes, and we found that the sidewall of the tyre was completely blown out and, after a bit of luggage-juggling in the rain, had to realise that the fancy-free Mercedes upgrade we'd been given had come without a spare tyre and with only half a jack. No roadside assistance could help – we were going to need

towing. It took a while to find a service who were answering the phone – it was after 4 pm already. But half an hour later, someone was on the way.

The next complication we had was that they didn't have any room for us in the tow truck. We weren't likely to get a lift for all three of us. So Paul Magee, an experienced hitchhiker, grabbed his backpack and stuck out his thumb, landing a ride with a bottle recycler from the Punjab not two minutes later. Paul Collis and I waited it out for the next lift. As a woman and an Aboriginal man, neither of us felt too comfortable hitching. But I suppose it felt safer because we were together.

The guy who picked us up was in his mid-50s and warm and obliging with a clear, open face. But he immediately started telling us about his life and it wasn't straightforward. He'd lived all over, worked driving cabs, and as a paramedic – he'd done any number of motor vehicle accident callouts. But he couldn't do any more of that kind of stuff. The one he couldn't forget was a body retrieval where they couldn't use the usual vehicle or equipment, including a body bag, for reasons of access. What got to him was the eyes of the woman opening and closing and opening again over and over as they drove out of the bush on a rough track.



I can't remember how we started talking about spirits. But his mother was a white witch, he said. She could see when there was a presence in a place, as could he and his sister. His dad was a drinker, used to hit their mum and the boys too, not like they were little but like they were adult men he was fighting at the pub.

One time his mum had got sick of it – she threw a mattress at the drunken dad in the lounge and told him he could bloody well sleep out there and she hoped he dropped dead.

The next morning, the boy came out to find his dad the worst colour you can imagine, black and blue and grey all over and completely still. He screamed and screamed and, when his mum came out of the bedroom to see what was wrong, he screamed some more.

She had blood all over her hands and forearms up to her elbows, although she didn't seem to know it. She looked at his dad and saw what was happening and began to shout, "Get away from him, leave him alone."

As the boy watched, handprints began to emerge on his dad's body and then immediately began to fade. A tiny bit of normal colour came back. He moved around a little bit and within half an hour he was fine.

His mother never knew the source of the blood – no cuts or injuries anywhere – and she didn't have her monthlies. The dad controlled his behaviour for a little while after that, but not much and not for long.

It took us about an hour to get back to Parkes and the Elvis Motel Paul Magee had sorted out for us ahead of our arrival. Our lift shared plenty of other stories in that time, but that was the one that spilled out of him the hardest and the first. Neither of us caught his name.

PAUL C:

The sky darkened like night, the storm hit us and we were out of sight, on the side of the road in a white car, a Mercedes with no tyre.

DENIS:

Why are you whispering?

PAUL C:

Because that's the way I talk these days.

Wayne, can you hear me, Wayne?

WAYNE:

I can hear you.

PAUL C:

Are you there, Wayne? Wayne.

WAYNE:

Yes, I'm here.

PAUL C:

You've been guiding us on these excursions into the Barkindji land, telling us stories for a long time now. I think this is the fourth time in seven years that you've taken us out to Toorale and to Gundabooka. Can I ask you a question? What does caring for Country mean to you?

WAYNE:

Caring for Country means protecting sites, protecting the waterways and the plants, keeping the culture strong.



PAUL C:

Can we protect burial sites and spirits?

WAYNE:

You can protect burial sites and spirits. Unfortunately, there's not many old people left. But there's a few young people willing to learn the knowledge of their elders.



PAUL C:
Who taught you a lot of this stuff?

WAYNE:
My grandmother. I was also fortunate enough to work with a couple of people who had strong values and culture.

PAUL C:
You also went out to Gundabooka when you were at primary school, didn't you?

WAYNE:
Yeah, many moons ago.

PAUL C:
Many moons ago. It couldn't have been that long – you look so young. You're like Denis, you're aging backwards.

Denis looks about forty.

DENIS:
About thirty-odd years ago.

PAUL C:
What are the main women's sites round here?

WAYNE:

There are women's sites, but I can't talk about that.

PAUL C:

And are there men's sites?

WAYNE:

There are men's sites. But not many know that, and again, it's best if only certain people know where those sites are.

PAUL C:

Is Bourke on an Aboriginal site?

WAYNE:

Bourke is, it's on a big meeting place.



PAUL C:

Not many people know that either, do they?

WAYNE:
No.

DENIS:
It's because all
the rivers come
in just above us.

WAYNE:
That's right.

One of the
streets in
Bourke,
Wertimerti
Street, is
actually
wrongly
pronounced. It's
a Barkindji word
and *Wartimutti*
is how it's
pronounced. It
actually means
"big river bank".

PAUL C:
My
grandmother,
before she
passed on, used
to live on that
street: "Big river
bank".



I think that was the happiest I saw her in all the years she lived in Bourke. Right next to the river bank.

DENIS:

What do you know about the birthing place out there in North Bourke?

PAUL C:

We don't know about it.

DENIS:

You don't know about it?

PAUL C:

We can't talk about it.

DENIS:

Oh, you can't?

PAUL C:

Women's stuff.

I'm going to ask you about Mundaguddah in a minute.

DENIS:

What?

PAUL C:

I'm going to ask you about the spirit of what the Nyemba people call "water dog".

DENIS:

Oh the water dog, yeah, tell me about that.

PAUL C:

No, I'm going to ask you in a minute 'cause you've been to Sydney.

DENIS:

Sydney's got no water dog.

PAUL C:

Yes they have. I'll tell you about it in a minute.

DENIS:

No, the water dog's down near the Catholic Church.



PAUL C:

Yes.

DENIS:

There's a few of them in there. What are they?

PAUL C:

Well, I'm going to ask you in a minute.

DENIS:

Tell me about the lip-biter. The serpent with the emu head.

PAUL C:

I believe they're from Brewarrina, the lip-biters. They must be—

WAYNE:

They're Nyempa.

DENIS:

But he's been swimming up and down the river.

PAUL C:

I noticed you've got no lips left, Denis. What's been happening there?

DENIS:

What's that?

PAUL C:

Have your lips been bitten off? Are you a lip-biter?

DENIS:

I can't swear on radio, eh?

PAUL C:

I'm glad that you mentioned radio. Paul Magee, you've had some experience with radio, haven't you? From a very young and tender age of what, 14, 15?

PAUL M:

At the age of 15, I became a student intern at 3PBSFM in Melbourne, community radio.

PAUL C:

What did a student intern do?

PAUL M:

We turned up on a Sunday morning at 6:00 am when no one else wanted to have a show. We would play our records and we'd help other kids to play their records: put them on the turntable, play promos on the old cassettes. We used to play all the alternative music, all the stuff you couldn't hear on the normal commercial channels. It was in St Kilda.

PAUL C:

Speaking of which, I think Paul's going to read us a poem.

PAUL M:

Yeah, sure.

It's something I wrote today when I learnt we were going to head in here to see Denis and try and get on the radio. Thinking about it brought back some of that enjoyment I had as a teenager, when I used to be on the radio on the Sunday morning, just when other people were getting ready to go to Mass.

DENIS:

This is enjoyment, is it?

JEN:

Only for us, Denis. You're doing penance.

PAUL M:

Old Shed

And a guy on the nearby banks of the Barka
 showed us a painted emu egg
 he was selling, unwrapped it from
 the tea towel and its colours
 intense and local as the dot of the Earth,
 to see it advertised was to hold it
 in the soft red dirt of your mind.
 To hold it still, hatched
 as the emus that flocked yesterday's dirt road.
 It's Country, gazetted or not.
 The radio in our ears at Toorale

sending out birds more numerous than the thoughts
 you can see clearly
 at each landing in the mind. A headful of birds
 in each call trail through the mind, already there
 and another arrives, the words of the Warego flowing by us
 and through the old shed, where we recorded ghosts
 that don't even need to advertise
 they're beyond exchange, being.

PAUL C:

Jen and Paul, I want to ask you a question about writing.

What weight does a story carry?



JEN:

We saw an ant while we were talking out at Gundabooka, the day before yesterday. We'd stopped by the side of the road. We were talking about the past and about the people that we carry around with us as we move through the place.

I was watching an ant, a big black ant, and it was carrying another ant: a dead ant. It carried it round and round for ages. It was like it was looking for somewhere to put it, and it seemed to disappear under some leaves.

I thought, “Oh, maybe it’s going down into the nest.”

We talked on out it came again, and it was still carrying that dead ant.

I did a little bit of research afterwards. I learned that particular ants have the work of carrying other ants. Sometimes they call them undertaker ants – that’s their role in the community, carrying something for everybody.

That to me is the weight of a story, sometimes.

DENIS:

I usually have something to eat outside there. When the ants come, they take all the crumbs away, everything, including a dead ant that you probably trod on, they’ll take them away as well.

I didn’t know they were called undertaker ants.

PAUL C:

We’ll talk to you more about ants in a minute, ant-killer.

Paul, do you want to comment on what weight a story carries?

PAUL M:

I think stories carry the weight of the world. I think that’s their job. Sometimes, they do it joyously – it’s not the slightest effort, it’s something lighter than air. At other times, stories bear that weight, and you can feel it, you can feel that it’s costing whoever comes into contact with the story, that it’s a big weight for them.

PAUL C:

Let me share one with you called *Through My Fingers*.

DENIS:

This book you’ve got, that’s all your poems, is it?

Nightmares Run Like Mercury.

Where can you obtain that book?

PAUL C:

Well, I don’t know.



DENIS:
It's all poetry, is it, Paul?

PAUL C:

Yeah.

Through My Fingers

It's a cold, rainy grey in the Can' today,
 so much the sodden ground sinks.
 Every step I squelch into ancient soil,
 broken by wind and rain
 and the bones of my people speak
 and in the north country the land is fire-dancing,
 burning life and limb. Farther away
 no eyes turn to see my love cough her last breath.
 I rush, rush, too late. Barka, Barka,
 oh God, I can't recognise her.
 Cold and dead spread she lays,
 I rush, I rush. I find two strokes with her dress.
 Without a sound they ripped her hip to hip.
 I have nothing to bury,
 my arms fall right through
 leaving me grasping dust
 not tears of salt water or whispers,
 bright yellow flames of heat and prayer will bring her back.
 I reach inside me to hold the spirit and fall sick.
 I understand that once given
 death won't give up her dead.

That's a weight. I've been carrying that for a long time.

When that river started to—

[*Falters.*]

When that river was empty—

[*Falters again; close to tears.*]

DENIS:

You okay, mate?

PAUL C:

Yeah, I'll be right.

Crime rates in these Aboriginal towns went through the fuckin' roof.



DENIS:
Yeah.

PAUL C:
Directly in response.

[*Pause.*]

It's lovely to see this rain on the land and to see—

[*Falters; close to tears again.*]





—yellow flowers all the way to the horizon, as far as you can see. When we were driving out on that Louth Road ... it was just beautiful. The country is so rich.

It's really fragile, all this floodplain. The soil is so soft. It's easy to rip up.

It's been farmed the wrong way out here, for so many years. We've drained the river.

We drained the river in less than 200 years.

They drained it dead.

[*Pause.*]

I asked that question, Denis, about what weight a story carries, for another reason, too. Is a river still a river when it has no water? What do you think? Is a river still a river, when it's empty?



DENIS:

But doesn't this river naturally go dry?

PAUL C:

We had a drought from '59 to '72, longer than this last one – longer drought by far: the Darling River never went empty.

DENIS:

Yeah.

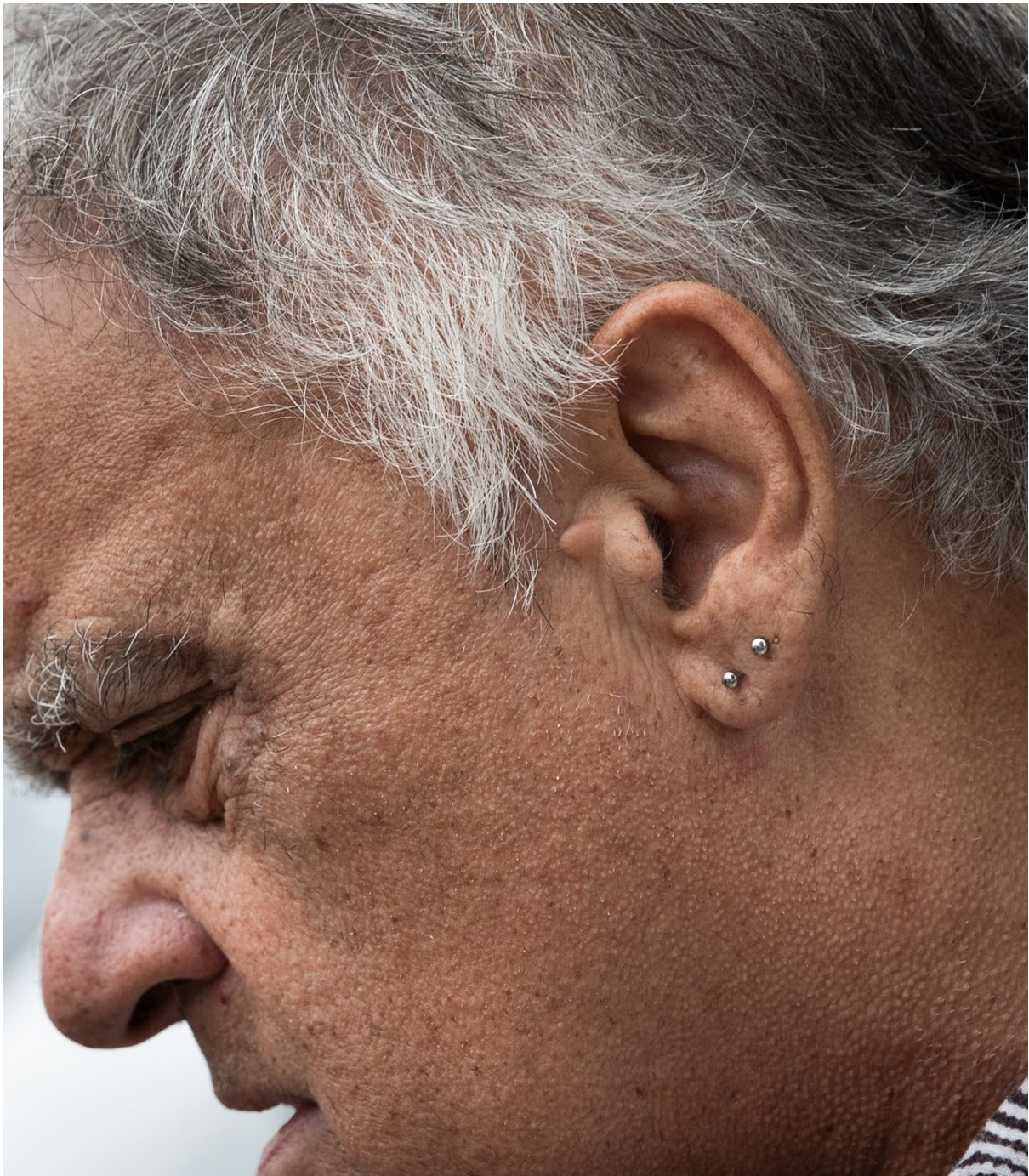
PAUL C:

In the poem, when I talk about how “they ripped her hip to hip”, that’s about the guys who rode knobby-tired motorbikes in the riverbed, doing wheel-outs and doughnuts.

Barkindji people cried. Where does Rainbow Serpent sleep? Where does that spirit sleep when that river’s empty and they’re doing that?

I was devastated.

[Falters; losing words.]



DENIS:

Yeah.

PAUL C:

To see that river empty out at North Bourke when we walked across it.

I was—

[Falters.]

in shock. I couldn't speak.

DENIS:

It gets drained upstream.

PAUL C:

I couldn't sleep. Those water licences that you talk about—

DENIS:

They should never ever have separated them from the land.



PAUL C:

They shouldn't have been allowed to sell it either.

DENIS:

I've got a friend here who's actually lost a lot because he no longer owned the water.

PAUL C:

Well, Barkindji people lost a lot too.

DENIS:

Yeah.

PAUL C:

Denis, were you born in Bourke?

DENIS:

Yeah, I was, but I didn't actually grow up here.

PAUL C:

When did you come?

DENIS:

I was a nine-year-old when I came here.

PAUL C:

Paul Magee.

Talk to me about the conveyance of stories through poetry. What is it that you love about the simple complexity of poems?

PAUL M:

What I love about the way stories come through poems is that the poet often doesn't know the story until they've told it. They learn what the story is as they're telling it. That's when they realise what they've actually got coursing through them, and that's why poems are exciting to read because you get that feeling, line-by-line, that the person's discovering—

DENIS:

Emotions.

PAUL M:

Emotions – at the moment they're emerging – even plot! Certainly, I didn't know this morning I was going to write about Toorale when I started writing about that egg.



PAUL C:

Jen, I'll ask you the same question Paul's just responded to. You're a wonderful poet yourself. Tell me a little bit about your poetry – what inspires you to write?

JEN:

I write poetry when I'm surprised, particularly when I'm surprised by language.

There are shapes you can make in language, kinds of reality that are not like any other kind of reality. That's what I'm interested in. I'm always looking for that in language.

PAUL C:

When you teach creative writing at university, what is your purpose?

JEN:

When I teach creative writing, I'm looking to make a space where people can explore their own voice in writing. A space where people can take that time to be with their own thoughts and find out what might come out of them.

PAUL C:

Are you ever surprised, or continually surprised, when you're teaching?

JEN:

Continually surprised.

I love to see people who never thought they could write come up with something, people who thought they didn't have enough words, or weren't smart enough. All they need is a little bit of time, a little bit of someone saying, "Yeah, you can do it, have a go."

PAUL C:

When you first met me – I don't know how many years ago it was now, five or something, maybe six, I don't know – what happened on that day? Why did you come and meet me?

JEN:

I grew up in New Zealand, in Aotearoa/New Zealand and my schooling was bicultural. I was taught by women who gave us Māori language training and cultural education in te reo Māori. That was part of my school experience, all the way through. It completely changed who I was.

I moved to Australia and studied as an undergraduate student. I got the undergraduate degree and started working on my PhD. It took a really long time. All that time – I was in Wollongong for eight years – I had almost no education in Aboriginal culture. And none of the little there was came from the voices and the perspectives of people who were Aboriginal.

Then I moved away. I went back to New Zealand for five years and had a further five years in Singapore. When I got a job in Australia at the end of that time, my contract with myself was that I wouldn't go back to Australia and teach that way. It bothered me more and more that that's the way things were in Australia, and that I had participated in it.

So when I met you, I was looking for a way to change. I'd started to include pieces of writing by Aboriginal authors in my classwork. But I found I wasn't culturally competent – I didn't know

enough to teach those things. I also didn't know enough about Australian racism to handle what happened in the classes when I did teach those texts. So I was seeking out guidance.

People said, "Oh, well, you better go and meet Paul Collis."

So I did.

I said, "Would you like to come and do a lecture?"

And you said, "No."

Then what happened?

PAUL C:

Why'd I say no?

JEN:

You said no for some very good reasons, and that was the beginning of my education with you. I didn't really understand at that time, but in institutions – not just universities, but lots of institutions – Aboriginal people are asked to do a lot of carrying water for white people. They're asked to give cultural education, they're given the work of carrying their culture, but it's in environments that are not Aboriginal, or that are not Aboriginal-controlled, without the conditions for safety. The weight of the story isn't supported by the weight of the community.



PAUL C:

I'm going to ask you a question about what erupted from that. What is *Story Ground*?

JEN:

Story Ground is the project that began when you and I started working together. It became clear to me that if we were going to work together, I had to do my part to find a way that was going to make it okay for you to engage, a way that would be sustainable. So we started a project which asked *What role does Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander story play in the teaching of creative writing?* When I looked around at that time, which was five years ago, there was very little teaching in creative writing that engaged with the long history of the real story here.



PAUL C:

The real story here.

I wonder if you could find a poem in the book there called *Hero Black Remembered*.

Could you read it out?

JEN:

Hero Black, Remembered

Biammii changed shapes at night.
 One became two. Two snakes—the Rainbow.
 One snake, Guldabira, danced North.
 The other, Wartanuring, danced South – down Menindee way.
 Rainbow Snakes made the rivers. Made them join, in love.
 Guldabira danced again, towards Wanaaring,
 leaving water stones and ochre.
 After the rivers joined, the Rainbow Snakes became one again.

Biammii left the skins' remnants on Earth, and then
He returned to the sky.
Water stones bring water, ochre paint bring spirits into the body.
My river, Barka, she's empty now.
But I know where the water stones are...
I'll paint-up in ochre, and crush mica to add,
to make my black skin shine.
I'll dance and Biammii will see me.

PAUL C:

Hero was my great-grandfather. Paddy was his brother. I believe they were both rainmakers.

DENIS:

They were what?



PAUL C:

Both rainmakers, dancers.

I won't talk any more on them, but I'll just say that they are very significant people in my life.

DENIS:

So who were the rainbow-makers here in the Bourke district?

PAUL C:

An old bloke called Jimmy—

DENIS:
Jimmy.

PAUL C:
I remember him from the mid-'60s. My Nanna – Wayne's grandmother – knew him. I don't know if he was Barkindji or Kunya.

WAYNE:
Murrawari.

PAUL C:
There's something like 27 language groups in this town: a lot of people from different backgrounds, different languages. But those Aboriginal language groups share enough of a common language to communicate to others in this area. When I say this area, I'm going from Cunnamulla right down to Victoria. Really, all along the Darling.

One of the things I want to ask you, Wayne, is about the headwaters of the Darling River, which are near Toowoomba, somewhere in Queensland.

Barkindji people don't occupy that far up, do they?

WAYNE:
No.

Barkindji goes from the Murray up to—



PAUL C:
Up to where?

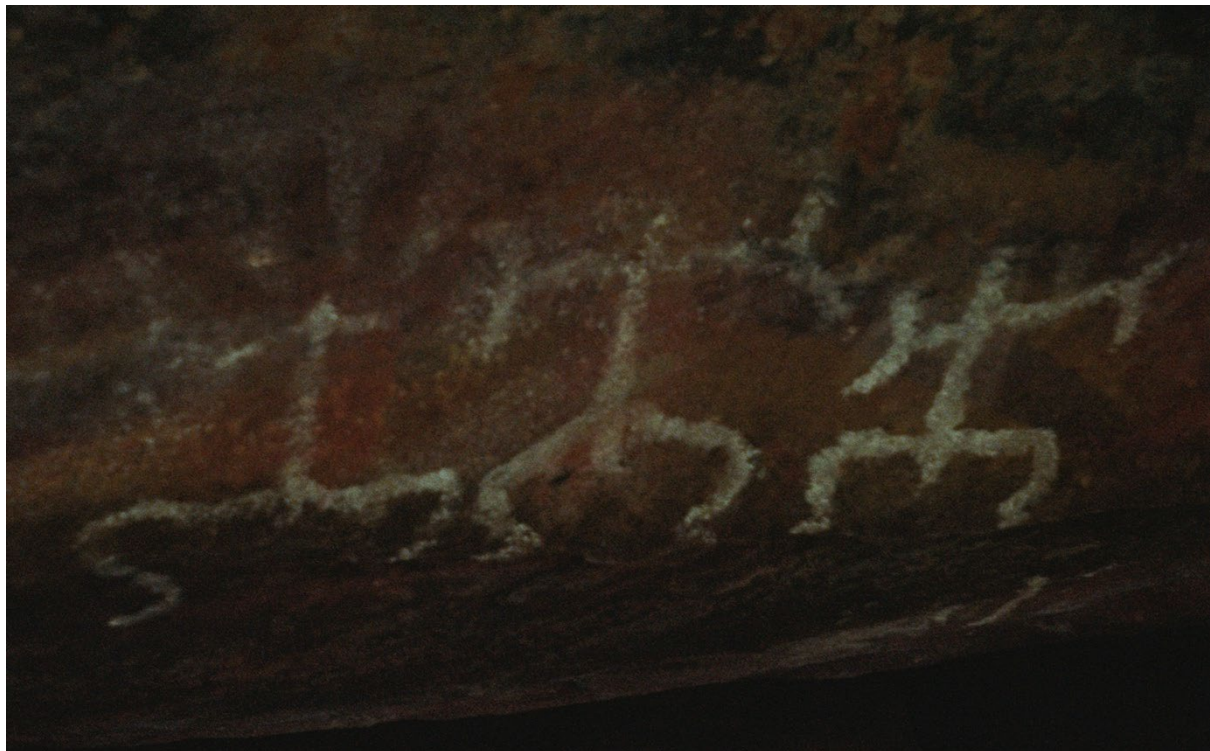
WAYNE:
In between Ford Bridge and Engonia. There's three or four dialects. Gurnu Barkindji – we start from Bourke and Louth, and we go right up to in between Ford Bridge and Engonia, far as Tarcoona. And from the Darling, from Louth up to the dry Bogan, which is situated on the Bre' Road.

PAUL C:
You've been a long time in the gathering of that knowledge of the land and the river, Wayne. So good to have you on this project. You're now our family's knowledge-holder, eh?

Paul, any final comments in your wrap-up of this Bourke experience? How are you feeling, my brother?

PAUL M:
I feel like none of it is final.

PAUL C:
Nothing is final. You know what a boomerang dream is? You know what the purpose of that dream is?



PAUL M:
I dreamt of a boomerang last night, actually.

PAUL C:

What did the boomerang dream of you?

PAUL M:

There was something about “Can I have a boomerang for a hat?” It was a bit confusing.

PAUL C:

I think that boomerang is in Canberra, that hat, with a heart in it.

Paul, it’s really wonderful having you with me to see Barkindji country in its full glory. In this magnificent Spring weather. It won’t stay Spring for long.

I remember growing up here, and in my honours work, that year you taught me, in *Summer of the Ghost Birds*, I said that Spring would never last long in Bourke. A few showers and then the hot sun couldn’t wait to burn my black curls to a cinder.

Jen, there’s certainly a strong returning for you. You’ve heard in the poem words like “Wanaaring” and “Menindee”, and you’re starting to see those signs, and to get a sense of the geography. Are these things becoming familiar to you?

JEN:

Each time I’m here, I see a little bit more of the shape of things.

The last time I saw the river, it was completely dry, this time it’s completely in flood. We’re staying out in North Bourke and looking out over those flood waters.



This morning, I was trying to figure out what the so-called normal path of that river is. Where does it sit when it's not bone dry, and not in flood?

Those sorts of things are a work in progress.

PAUL C:

Beautifully said. Thank you, Jen, it's so lovely to have you here. I wouldn't have come up this time if you didn't come.

Wayne, I heard a woman talk about her love for somebody once. Not for you. But this woman – I'll have to leave her unnamed at this stage – she was an American, this young woman, and she communicated by letter to a man in Australia. She said, "It's only my body that's here, 'cause my heart is with you."

You're living out of town at the moment?

WAYNE:

Yeah.

PAUL C:

Are you ever away from home?

WAYNE:

I'm still here, but I'm living away.



DENIS:

Where are you living, mate?

WAYNE:

Narromine.

DENIS:

Oh, you're in Narromine now.

WAYNE:

Yeah.

DENIS:

Oh, okay.

WAYNE:

Denis, have you heard anything about what's going on with the mine out at—

DENIS:

Don't know.

PAUL C:

Don't know, won't say?

DENIS:

Don't know, mate, don't know. I don't know nothing.

WAYNE:

See, I know. And I live away.



DENIS:

No, I don't know what's happening with that at the moment, no.

WAYNE:

The blokes that got robbed the other night, they're actually up here working out at Tarcoona on the gold mine.

DENIS:

Yeah. They were Asians, weren't they?

WAYNE:

Yeah.

DENIS:

It's terrible that, eh?

WAYNE:

It's bad.

DENIS:

Yeah, that's what you get—

You know what? I actually just came back from Europe. And travelling the world, I carried all my gear with me, my cameras, my computer and all that stuff – I carried it with me around the world because it was safer with me than it was leaving it in Bourke.

PAUL C:

Bourke's the most policed town in the country, mate. Surely you'd be—

DENIS:

No, but these kids get around in the middle of the bloody night.

PAUL C:

Well, they're not going to get around in the middle of the day. It's too hot in the day, mate, walking around.

DENIS:

They're nocturnal.

PAUL C:

Nocturnal. I think they're left out, that's the problem.

[Pause.]

Thank you again, Denis, it's so wonderful to see you.

We have some other guests arriving later this afternoon.



DENIS:

Yeah? Guess what?

I'll be in bed asleep.

PAUL C:

Yes, but I'm saying that probably Friday, Thursday or Friday, we might come back and introduce our friends from Japan.

DENIS:

Oh yeah. They're Japanese or—



PAUL C:

Yes. Both professors. And their young daughter. All coming here.

DENIS:

For sure.

PAUL C:

Rina is a poet, and one of the topics that she came to Australia to explore was poetry on water. Water is sacred to the Japanese.

DENIS:

I was in Japan once.

PAUL C:

日本人ですか

DENIS:

Eh?

PAUL C:

日本人ですか

DENIS:

Nein. Ich bin nicht.

NTRO Statement by Paul Magee

“2CUZ-FM” engages with a series of challenges from both First Nations and European intellectuals to take on board the polyvocal nature of genuine knowledge production (Bakhtin 1981; Dodd and McKinnon 2019; Gadamer 2004; Neale and Kelly 2023; Yunkaporta 2020). For even though the university is itself first and foremost a dialogic space for oral exchange – witness the importance of question time at seminars and conferences, the significance placed upon meetings, the rush to embrace new, orality-preserving technologies like Zoom during Covid – those features are invisibilised in the formal knowledge report, which is resolutely monologic and accrues most prestige when in print (Jakobson and Pomorska, 1983). The barriers to access this presents for First Nations knowledges are acute (Yunkaporta 2020). This has, however, led to a remarkable range of works attempting to find ways to simultaneously perform and represent the work of oral knowledge creation and transmission in print. In the Australian context, the use of transcribed dialogue in quasi-scriptwriting form has featured prominently (Muecke, Benterrak and Roe 1984; Neidge and Taylor 1989; Roe 2016). Where our work departs from and adds to this tradition is in its insistence on bringing our scholarly discussions right into the dialogic space the work stages. Underlining Egbert Bakker’s provocative riposte – “We all speak in ‘an oral style’” (1997, p. 43) – to the idea that the diffusion of writing radically rearranges consciousness away from oral modes of thought, our discussions in this transcribed radio conversation with Wayne Knight (Barkindji) and white radio announcer, Denis Holyoake, are informed by our university work throughout, and in the later part of the dialogue, they directly comment upon it. They come clean, that is to say, about the fact that our monographs, journal articles and creative writings all derive from acts of speaking.

In the second half of the dialogue, Jen Crawford and Paul Collis discuss the traditional innovations we have tried to bring to the Creative Writing Classroom via the ongoing *Story Ground* project, which centres upon Speaking and Writing on Country. *Story Ground* has received support from a 2017-18 *Indigenous Language and Arts* (ILA) grant from the Australian Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts; a 2022-2024 *Imagining Futures through (Un)archived Pasts* network grant (the network’s funding comes from UK Research and Innovation (UKRI) and the Global Challenges Relief Fund (GCRF)); and the Centre of Creative and Cultural Research (CCCR), in the Faculty of Arts and Design at the University of Canberra. This chapter forms one of its outputs, a form of writing that comes from speaking, on Aboriginal lands.

Discussing creative and pedagogical work through intercultural dialogue, the chapter simultaneously brings the speech protocols of a whole other conversational medium – live

outback community radio – to the printed page, expanding the sense of just what forms Creative Writing research might take. The radio talk format is simultaneously a reminder of the prominence of orality in Australian society, black and white alike, however pervaded by writing aspects of each might appear.

“2CUZ-FM” is significant because it raises possibilities for alternate modes of accessing and exercising tertiary-level knowledge protocols.

NTRO Statement by Emma Phillips

The images contained here operate in a two-fold way. They at once illustrate some of the people, places and objects of the text, in conventional photographic form; and they also, at times, challenge and contradict the text, acting not just as documents, but as vital primary sources that can deepen other forms of dialogue. What happens, for example, to a reader’s understanding of these stories from Bourke, when they encounter the multiplicitous nature of the images presented? Is a new reading or narrative formed when the story-lines of a weary face are magnified on the page? How does a viewer meet the representations of ancient art on rock alongside fresh graffiti on metal? What kinds of meanings are made, and conversations stirred, by an image which appears as a reprise or the one which is situated as a visual block, monolithically butting into the text? These are visual testaments of Bourke, its surrounds and some of its people, which help animate a kind of living dialogue – between author and subject, author and viewer, viewer and subject and critically, of course, between image and text. At the same time, the radio show format that is the basis of the text brings its own influence to bear. As a kind of sound track to the images, it prompts them to take on a filmic quality. Some scenes shape narrative and build characters; some jolt the viewer; while others simply establish place. Others yet are a form of reprise – visual repetitions which produce a narrative circularity, a return to earlier motifs that provoke, perhaps, a re-consideration of – or a reacquaintance with – ground already traversed. They come across like the ‘structured’ meanderings of a radio talk show, and feel like they are in a sort of dialogue with it. Being prompted to think of photographs as dialogue with other photos, and with other media, might enable us, as Azoulay (2024) suggests, to imagine the relationships that helped to form these images, and to encounter images actively – beyond mere spectatorship. In this vein, the photographs here seek to move away from rigid narrative frameworks towards more inclusive, collective and open forms of storytelling, where dialogue-in-photography is valued ‘as a potential for exchange, for movement in feeling, position or understanding, however small’ (Fairey & Orton 2019).

Notes

[1] 2CUZ-FM is an Indigenous community radio station, set up in Bourke, New South Wales, Australia, by the Muda Aboriginal Corporation in 1999. The station broadcasts to Bourke, Lightning Ridge, Walgett, Brewarrina, Goodooga and Wellmoringle. Denis Holyoake is a white man from Bourke and he presents interviews and music each morning. Paul Collis, who is Barkindji man, also from Bourke, gave Denis a call the morning of the broadcast to ask if he, Wayne Knight (Barkindji/Kunya), Paul Magee and Jen Crawford could come on air and inform the community about the work they were doing, speaking/writing *A Book that Opens*, during their visit to Bourke, Brewarrina and surrounds.

[2] *A Book that Opens* is in 11 chapters and comprises a series of dialogues on Indigenous intellectual practice and care for Country, beginning in the national capital, Canberra, and driving out to a range of Baarka river locations in Bourke and Brewarrina, and out on Country in Toorale and Gundabooka National Parks. Our interlocutors are Barkindji, Nyempha, Murrawarri and

Kunya elders and knowledge-holders and the aim in publishing is to represent their speech in as present a manner as possible, capturing each word said and allowing it to resonate on the page, as if you were there in the actual moment. Other chapters have been published in *Cordite Poetry Review*, *Meanjin* and *Imagining Futures Collected Works and Reception: Texts, Readers, Audiences, History*. A book publication will result. The work is being generated with funding from the UK. Research and Innovation (UKRI) and Global Challenges Relief Fund (GCRF)'s 2020–2024 Imagining Futures Through (Un)Archived Pasts research network, with additional support from the Centre for Creative and Cultural Research (CCCR), in the Faculty of Arts and Design, at the University of Canberra.

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