

Ceremony and sentient ecology

Myfany Turpin^{1*}, Maya Ward^{2**}

¹ *Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, Australia*

² *Australia*

*myfany.turpin@sydney.edu.au **mayawarby@gmail.com

Abstract Many cultures use songs to influence the world around them (e.g. Levin 2006, Feld 1982). In Australian Aboriginal societies, song can be a tool to influence one's environment. Such practices can affect the physical world—people, animals, plants— and the non-physical world, where spirit beings reside, a realm referred to as the Altyerre in Arandic languages of central Australia (Dobson 2007, Turner 2010, Wallace & Lovell 2009, Green 2012). Like the Tuvan people of Siberia who use singing and other verbal practices “to coexist peacefully with these spirit-masters and gain access to the resources under their control” (Levin 2006:28), many Indigenous Australians engage in ceremonial and other vocal practices to influence their world. In this article we explore song as a means to experience sentient ecology in two contrasting Aboriginal Australian contexts. In doing so, this contribution invites us to consider more broadly the role of humanly created sound in society.

Acknowledgements

This work would not have been possible without the collaboration and support of other people. Turpin wishes to thank the many Kaytetye people with whom she has worked—in particular, Alison N. Ross†, Tommy Thompson†, Amy Ngamperle†, and translators Phillip Janima, Michael Hayes and Anna Pope. This research builds on the documentation of Kaytetye by linguist Harold Koch, who I thank for sharing his field recordings, transcriptions and knowledge. Funding for this research was provided by the Australian Research Council (FT140100783, DP220100241). Ward wishes to acknowledge Thais Sansom, Jacquie Dreessens and Ian Hunter, co-founders of Kingfisher Festival.

Introduction

In Australian Aboriginal culture, ceremonial performance is understood to affect the physical world—the people, animals and plants as well as wind and rain—through its ability to tap into the non-visible world, where ancestors and other spirit beings reside. Other vocal practices and the sound-making of other species can also have agentive power. This article considers such practices with the aim of enriching understandings of the nature of musical power and human–non-human relations (DeNora 2000:x). We do this through considering musical performance in two different areas of Australia.

Underlying this article is the belief that solutions to environmental crises lie not only in the hard sciences, but also in the arts and humanities (Allen & Dawe 2016:10–11). By presenting other ways that humans relate to the ‘natural world’, as evidenced in the use and philosophy of music, we hope to inspire thinking and spur change. Salmón (2000:1327) argues that “life in any environment is viable only when humans view their surroundings as kin”. For Indigenous cultures, such ‘kincentric ecology’ is the result of living in a place for thousands of years. In such cultures, humans may communicate and share identities and obligations with non-humans, such as plants, animals, rain, wind, ancestral beings and places. In turn, these non-humans respond to and provide for humans and one another (e.g. McNivon 2013). Kinship “holds life together and determines the habit of everyday existence”, as Kearney et al. (2019:327) note. This world view has been termed “sentient ecology” (Simonett 2016:102); and is akin to what Australian ethnographers such as Strehlow referred to as totemic landscape (1970). In more recent scholarship, this concept has been referred to as ‘Country’ (see Barwick & Ford this volume, Rose 2024).

Across Indigenous Australia, issues affecting land (e.g., mining and feral species management) affect ancestral beings and their human descendants, whose identity is based on a shared place of spiritual, social and geographical origin.¹ Linguist David Wilkins observes how:

discussions of land management, conservation, and ecological knowledge cannot possibly be delinked from discussions of social affiliations and kin relations on the one hand, and discussions of Dreamtime totemic ancestors and the continuing social and religious significance of their actions on the other (1993:71).

In many Indigenous cultures, music is pivotal in building a particular relationship with place and a worldview of sentient ecology (i.e. Country).² Aboriginal people engage in ceremonial performance to instantiate a complex network of Country, kinship and the religious-cosmological system known in English as the Dreaming, but which we refer to as *Altyerre*, as it is called in various central Australian languages.³ Musicologist Linda Barwick describes this concept as a creative period:

[...] belonging to a 'deep present', in that ancestral power continues to reside in and activate the experiential world. Through ceremonial embodiment of the activities and words of totemic ancestors passed on via previous generations, performers create multi-layered stories emplaced in country, from which contemporary identities emerge (Barwick 2023:93).

In many other cultures, including those of the authors, which we term 'European' (for want of a better word), music also plays a role in identity and influences people. DeNora (2000:x) describes music "as a dynamic material, a medium for making, sustaining and changing social worlds and social activities." Consider the function of music in advertising, national and sports team anthems, religious services and the many study or sleep playlists. These uses rest on a belief that music is not just enjoyable but can influence people's cognitive and emotional states as well as their values and behaviour, including the formation of relationships with other people and socio-cultural constructs (e.g. team, nation, religion). In many Indigenous cultures, music additionally builds relationships with local ecologies, as humans are not separate from their environment (Allen 2019).⁴ There is a significant cultural contact zone between Indigenous and non-Indigenous musicians, producers and promoters; where art, activism and audience engagement create an emergent zone that responds to the ongoing legacy of colonisation, and offers a broad range of responses, from hopeful to cynical, to reconciliation with the broader culture (Barney 2022, Jahudka, 2021). Prominent musical examples include 'Treaty' (1991) by Yothu Yindi, 'From Little Thing, Big Things Grow' (1991) by Kev Carmody and Paul Kelly, '26 January' (2016) by A.B. Original, 'Native Tongue' (2019) by Mo'Ju. Aboriginal cultural beliefs, as well as social issues impacting Indigenous people, have also influenced non-Indigenous Australian musicians. Examples include Midnight Oil's *Beds are Burning* (1987) and Xavier Rudd's 'Spirit Bird' (2012).

Shaped by this contact zone is the Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival in Melbourne. By exploring how song is a means of influencing the world, the account that follows of a particular performance documents the shift from song in the context of activism/allegiance (cultural change) with Indigenous culture, to that of an experience of an agential connection between song and sentient ecology. In central Australia, Aboriginal performance traditions are understood as part of a reciprocal relationship with ancestors, as each other's actions impact both the realm of the living and that of the ever-present ancestors. While many ceremonies are no longer part of everyday life in parts of central Australia, they are highly valued as symbols of identity and Aboriginal lore/law. Performance of male maturity ceremonies remain an annual event; and where the local songs cannot be sustained (e.g. lack of knowledgeable singers), recruitment of a neighbouring group and their songs occurs, and thus the ontology of song's agency remains. By looking at contemporary contexts where one region is undergoing loss of musical traditions and another where musical traditions are being revitalised in collaboration with non-Indigenous musicians, we hope to reveal how loss is not necessarily permanent; culture is dynamic and supported by the mysterious agency of sentient ecology.

The first part of this article draws on Turpin's 28 years of linguistic and musicological fieldwork with Kaytetye-speaking people and neighbouring groups, to show how songs are understood as a tool to influence the world. The second part draws on writer Maya Ward's work as a multi-disciplinary artist, musician and community development worker with the Melbourne based Kingfisher festival, taking an auto-ethnographic approach. Our intention is to bring multiple disciplinary approaches, applied to two different contexts, to illustrate how performance can be agentive, and deepen understanding and connection to people, local ecologies and place. We, both non-Indigenous authors, met 33 years ago as young musicians in the same folk band. Our band was passionately engaged in environmental issues and sought to create music that expressed and celebrated the beauty of Australia's forests, in the hope that this would help preserve them. While the authors have travelled different disciplinary pathways, we have regularly explored ideas and shared our experiences from different ways of knowing over many years.



Figure 1. Kaytetye Country of Central Australia (N.T.) and Wurundjeri Country (Victoria) where the Sacred Kingfisher Festival is held. Map: Brenda Thornley.

Central Australia

In the first half of this Chapter I (Turpin) argue that singing and certain other vocal practices are a means by which central Australian Aboriginal people enact responsibilities to ancestors, who in turn ensure the health of the social and ecological world, once essential for physical survival. Ceremonial performance is the prototypical context for music throughout Central Australia, and the voice is the primary musical instrument (Barwick 2000). Ceremonies also involve dancing, and the painting of symbolic designs. In this sense the traditions resemble the Ancient Greek *mousikē*, which encompasses music, dance, and text (Allen & Dawe 2016:8). Specific genres of performance are named in Kaytetye, yet there is no word for performance, music, dance or art, as is common in many Indigenous languages.

Most ceremonial genres have the potential to influence one's surroundings, as ancestral beings, both human and non-human, linked through the kinship system, are evoked in ceremony (Barwick 2000:329, Payne 1992, Morais 1992:131, Salmón 2000). Tuhiwai Smith (2021:192–3) argues that the quality of human-ancestor relationships can wither or thrive, motivating humans to care for other beings, who in turn reciprocate by ensuring rain and a healthy ecology that provides for people. In Indigenous Australia, ceremonial performance (singing, dancing, painting) is one of a number of actions that can bring about “change as well as continuity” enacting “the flow of responsibility back and forth between kin” (Kearney et al. 2019:330), both human and non-human. This chapter examines Kaytetye vocal practices considered agentive, such as singing, and contrasts these with non-human actions likened to performance yet are not considered agentive.

Kaytetye Country lies some 300 kms north of Alice Springs in Central Australia (see Figure 1). It is flanked by two other languages of the Arandic subgroup, Alyawarr and Anmatyerr,⁵ as well as Warlpiri and Warumungu which belong to two different linguistic subgroups (see map). A history of the region is provided in Koch & Koch (1993). In 2022 Kaytetye was documented as having 100 speakers (ABS 2022), and for many more people it is a heritage language, as today most Kaytetye people speak a different Aboriginal language or a variety of English as their first language. Kaytetye people have been severely affected by colonisation and globalization, yet kinship, language and connections to land are still highly valued.

Singing and other vocal behaviours as agentive action

Across central Australia, songs are used to do things with; to maintain the supply of particular species of foods, to bring about rain, heal the sick, ensure the healthy growth of a baby, turn a boy into a man, attract a lover, change the path of an approaching whirly-wind, calm cattle when droving, win in a fight or football and to deter the implementation of unwanted government policies.⁶ The agentive nature of singing is highlighted in the well-known Aboriginal English expression ‘Singing up country’ (Muecke & Roe 1984) which Rigney describes as to ‘keep the material-spiritual life of country coming up strongly’ (Rigby 2019:7).

In Kaytetye, to ‘sing’—aylenke—is primarily a human activity. The verb is transitive (Green & Turpin 2025), which means that one must sing *something*. Typically, one sings a person or totem with the intention of influencing them in some way; or one sings an implement or substance that is then used in a ceremonial or other ritual context to influence people or bring about a particular outcome. Estate-based ceremonial genres require the participation of senior people who have a particular kinship relationship to the estate and its songs (e.g. Gallagher et al. 2017).

In Kaytetye, only two non-human species are known to sing, both of which bring about the availability of anatyne (‘bush potato’ *Ipomea costata*), a significant food in the region. These are paripe (legless lizard *Lialis burtonis*) and anatyaylewene, literally ‘yam singers’, which refers to various species of long-horn beetles. The various sounds made by other non-humans, including birds, are typically referred to as ‘talk’, ‘cry’ or ‘hum’ (Green & Turpin 2025). Kaytetye people also engage in other vocal practices to influence their social and ecological environment that are not regarded as aylenke ‘singing’. For example, to help make children fall asleep, adults engage in a vocal practice involving short bursts of a descending melody sung to particular syllables, a practise called arrarrarrenke.⁷ A different vocal behaviour is employed when hunting a goanna: when a goanna has been sighted and it stops moving, the hunter makes a repeated ‘beep’ call (pipiparrenke), which is said to have the effect of keeping the goanna stationary, as it listens to the ‘beep’ rather than that of the hunter’s footsteps. The onomatopoeic word for this vocal action is pipiparrenke.

Another vocal practice Kaytetye people engage in is the deliberate avoidance of saying the names of particular people, estates and food species. Such avoidance is a way of showing respect for ancestors. Ancestors, who reside in the ever-present Altyerre and are sometimes referred to as ‘the invisible people’ in Aboriginal English, have the power to withhold or provide things (e.g. foods, rain and cause harm or good health to one’s next of kin). Many central Australian languages have a suite of replacement vocabulary used under certain social and ecological conditions. Following the death of a loved one or in the presence of one’s-in-laws a whole suite of replacement vocabulary is used (Turpin & Green 2011), including words that replace a proper noun or any other word that sounds like the proper noun. For example, kwe-

mentyaye ‘no-name’ (Nash & Simpson 1981) for the deceased person’s name and ahilenge ‘no-name’ for a place name associated with the deceased.

Less known are the ecological conditions where avoidance of words is required. For example, Kaytetye people traditionally do not say the word for the highly prized fruit ahakeye (‘native currant’ *psydrax latifolia*) after dark during the season when the fruits were ripening on the tree, for risk that the fruit would fall or spoil before ripening. Instead, a special respect term is used, amile, or people refer to it indirectly. For example, by using the generic word enye ‘food’. There are also restrictions on non-vocal behaviours during this time; for instance, the hunting of the rrepwerle (black-headed python *Aspidites melanocephalus*) and atywetnpe (perentie *Varanus giganteus*) is forbidden due to the risk of spoiling native currants.

Avoidance also occurs in song texts. Ceremonial songs rarely, if ever, refer directly to the totems they celebrate in mundane language. Instead, the totem is learnt separately; or sometimes the totem is referred to with special poetic vocabulary, or through circumlocution. Songs are received from ancestral beings who inhabit the Altyerre and have their own language, which is different to that spoken by the living, and poetic language is evidence of their presence. The song-giving being is typically a totem of the person’s estate, and being on country is where one might be able to get song. For example, the late Kaytetye woman Daisy Kemarre received one such song from a bullant while napping on her estate, Arnerre. The bullant (*Myrmecia nigriceps*) is a totem of Arnerre.

The avoidance of everyday words for recently deceased kin and for biota during their ripening, as well as the language of ceremonial songs, are examples of what is known in linguistics as speech decorum. Fox (2005) describes how speech decorum requires that the words used must be suitable for the subject matter (deceased people and totems), the audience being addressed (sentient beings, i.e. the living and their ancestors), the occasion (mourning, ceremony, ripening/growth of the totem) and the person who utters the words (a person in relationship with the deceased or totems; and who stands to benefit from maintaining these relationships).

To summarise, in the Arandic world singing is prototypically a human activity which draws on ancestral presence to influence the social *and* ecological world. Other human vocal practices targeted at babies or important food sources, attest to the fact that beings are attentive to sound and words.

I turn now to consider performance related behaviours of non-humans to show the contrast between agentive singing and what could be described as solely social, non-agentive performance.

Performance by non-humans

The agency of singing in comparison with talking and humming in Arandic languages has been shown elsewhere (Turpin & Green 2025). Very few species other than humans ayleneke ('sing') in Arandic languages, and this appears to be the case in other central Australian languages. In Kaytetye some birds are said to engage in human-like performance in which dancing is at the fore. Unlike the verb 'sing', the verb 'dance' —*etnhenke*— is intransitive in Kaytetye, and so there is no requirement to dance *something*.⁸ The crested pigeon's (*Ocyphaps lophotes*) mating display, which involves sound and movement of the tail, is described as "dancing for its aunt". Although the significance of its aunt here is uncertain, it should be noted that a man's aunt (father's sister) is a kinship category in which sexual relations are strictly forbidden (Turpin & Ross 2012: 532).⁹

Pelkere, arwelepe re anteyane. Nhartepe re, wenheye 'u, u, u.' Re etnhel-tnhel-arrerrantye kwakelewe. Arrerrantye wenheye atnepe wantepe kantyepe, aymperr-arrerr-arrerr-enyerrane. Arlwar-anteyane rtame re, kantyepe. (Alec Kapetye 1976)¹⁰

Crested pigeons live in trees. The male makes an 'u, u, u' sound and dances as it moves for his aunt. It fans its tail, spreading it out as it moves along. Its tail looks bigger (when courting a female).

The arwengerrpe ('bush turkey' *ardeotis australis*), a highly prized meat, is said to perform *ltharte* 'corroborees', the performance genre described in the beginning of Part 1 as entertainment, in contrast to serious ceremonies, which are agentive. While Western scientists describe the incredible visual display performed by these birds as a mating ritual, the late Kaytetye elder Tommy Thompson describes this behaviour as this bird's *ltharte* 'corroboree':

'Erweee' arrerrane atherre apeke, althe rtame etnherrane atanthe ayclerantye. [...] Tyetheyarte ilpantharle ahernelelke. Erkwethepe ilparne ahernele etnherrane re. Arwengerrpe erlkwe, him dancing. Atnkwarengele. Perlaynele. Ltharte ame etnherrane ayclerantye re. Etnherrane re. Makwerle layeke kwere arle alantye anteyane ame arwengerrpe kngwere amerne alantye anteyane kwere arerrantye. Arerrantyeuwe kwere rarle etnherrane altharte, corroboree. Kalty-

interantye, teachem-aylerantye. Kaltyinterantye party time (Thompson 2013).¹¹

Two or more turkeys make a deep ‘uuraa’ sound dancing and singing their corroboree. After that their crop gets big and it hangs down to the ground as it dances. That’s the dance of a senior bush turkey. It happens at nighttime on the plains. They dance and sing their corroboree. They dance. Lots of other bush turkeys sit down and watch them dance. The older ones teach them, it’s a social gathering for entertainment.

Kaytetye understandings of these two bird behaviours reflect the cosmological idea of ‘perspectivism’ (Viveiros de Castro, in Seeger 2016:92), where the behaviours of other species are, from the animal’s perspective, human-like. The term has come from work with Indigenous societies of South America, and Lima’s description of the Yudjá (from Brazil) resonates with the descriptions by Kaytetye people, such as the two given above.

From their own perspective the peccaries [wild pigs] play flutes, which for humans are simply coconuts (emptied of their meat, the food of this animal) which the peccaries nuzzle, causing the emission of a sound reminiscent of whistling to human hearing, but whose musicality, to peccary ears, is as rich as that of the flutes. (Lima 1996:31, cited in Seeger 2016:93)

In this section I have identified nuances in the human/non-human divide. The humanness of animals can be seen in their ‘talk’, which communicates but does not directly influence the behaviour of biota and the abiotic world. Certain birds are said to have their own dance and corroborees, a perspective that ascribes a status and respect equivalent to that of human culture. The non-humanness of animals and the abiotic world can also be seen in their relative lack of ability to affect the world through singing, and absence of kinship and speech taboos. A whirly-wind that ignores people singing it to go the other way is said to be without decorum (nyerre, “shame”), ignoring the text that states, ‘Beware your mother-in-law is here’ (Koch & Turpin 2008:12). Katyetye woman, the late A. Ngamperle, demonstrates singing a whirly wind away in the example below. This also illustrates the use of kwe-mentyaye ‘no-name’ discussed above.



Full audio file also is available as part of the web version of this publication

Audio 1. A Ngamperle demonstrates singing a whirly wind away. Told to Kaytetye students and elders at Ti Tree School, recorded by M. Turpin 14 October 2008 (edited excerpt). Translated by Bronwyn Young, Hilda Ngamperle, Selma Thompson and M. Turpin. Reproduced with permission for the family.

[Link to audio file](#)

Kaytetye

Atye alele artntwenke, ayenge
angkenke, atye ampilewethe,
rarre.

Apenkerne re, kngerrake theye.

Nyarte aynanthe arrertame
anke, elpathenke. Elpewatnenke
kwere,

Arrile ape, arrile ape

Mwerengke ketye (repeats)

Arrilaylenke re apenke, twaltye
ketye.

Apenke re arril-arrile.

Rarre rarte nharte. Lterre
therre, kwenelatheke rtame
akepe kwereyenge.

Renharte ilerl-ilerlarrerantye,
ahernepe akwethintel-intelar-
rerantye, alkenhelk-alkenhelke.

Alkenhelke re apeye. Rarre repe
kwementyapeye.

Nyape re apenkerne mwernar-
tame, iterrke rtame.

Awerrkenkernayepe atnawerre
rtame, rarrelepe.

English

OK, I'm going to tell you a story about
'the wind' (i.e. whirly wind, dust devil).

It comes from the east.

It hears people off in the distance and
listens to the song, which goes:

Go around, go around

Because of your mother-in-law
here!(repeats)

This makes the wind avoid his mother-
in-law.

It goes off to the side, past them.

Its legs point upwards and its head
points downwards.

It gathers up rubbish and dirt in its path
and gets bigger.

This is the big wind we call 'no-name'
(The word werantyerrnge 'dust devil' is
taboo as a relative with that name
recently passed away and so the speaker
calls it Kwementyaye 'no-name')

But if it comes towards people we say it
is 'a wart', that is, it shows no respect.
[People get warts if they say the name of
their taboo relative, twaltye 'man's
mother-in-law / woman's son-in-law']

The wind comes straight towards them
scattering things.

Renharte entyerrwenenke iterrtye inengepe, tyetepayne apekepe re eletnhelp-etnheye.	People run off in all directions, as it can throw sheets of iron.
Ape re eletnhenke wantakerre- tye. Blanket-tyampe ilelp-ileye wantakerrertetye, mattresses akerre eletnhelp-etnheye. Iter- rke rtame kngwerepe apenkerne.	As well as blankets, mattresses and all sorts of things. This is a wind that shows no respect.
Shiftem-aylelp-ayleye, art- nperr-artnperrayteye aterepe. Rarre kngwerepe, iterrke rtame.	People run away scared of a disrespect- ful wind (it has no decorum).
Apertame re apenkerne pwethele. Mpelarte.	It sometimes comes straight after the other wind (that listened to the song and skirted around them).
Nyarte atye artntwerantye rarre kwerartepe, mpelarte.	This is what I am telling you about the wind.

Singing is part of a distinction –or, more accurately, a constellation—in terms of being serious (and agentive) with a focus on text (‘ceremony’), or fun (and social) where dance is at the fore (‘corroboree’). The latter is all-inclusive, and the audience may come and go and engage in outbursts of joy and laughter while the former requires performance by particular people (e.g. kin, gender) whose actions and words embody the Altyerre, as well as a quiet audience that are present until the end. While particular songs and genres are typically considered either serious or fun, this can change over time and space, as songs are shared there are performance contexts where this is flipped, or there is a mixture of both. This is particularly apparent in non-traditional contexts, such as controlling cattle with corroboree songs, and at public events such as at launches and openings where ceremonies can be used without the agency that comes from performance in a restricted context.

By looking at how Kaytetye people use vocal sounds and performance, we can see a world view where sound plays a vital role in how people influence their social and ecological world through a communicative relationship with ancestors and that performance and vocal practices can affect their behaviour: ecology is sentient. In the next part of this article we consider an urban setting where a collaboration between a primarily non-Indigenous group and an Aboriginal Elder to create a new ceremony in a festival con-

text, led to experiencing the agency of performance and something akin to sentient ecology.

The Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival

On the banks of the Merri Creek in inner-city Melbourne is a place called CERES (Centre for Education and Research in Environmental Strategies), named also for the Greek goddess of agriculture. CERES is a park, a venue, and a schools education centre, beloved by the community as a place to gather and celebrate, and host to many memorable performances by bands, including many well-known Aboriginal musicians.

Within their calendar of community events lay an important ritual that drew thousands of people. The Return of the Sacred Kingfisher Festival (1994–2006) celebrated both the sacred kingfisher's (*todiramphus sanctus*) annual return in spring, and the historical return to what was an industrial part of Melbourne. In traditional lore, this small white and sky-blue bird had lived forever by what is known in Woiwurrung as the Merri Merri (Merri Creek), for half of each year, returning to 'sky-country' in the cool time, taking with them the spirits of those who had died that year. This lore sits alongside the narrative of a migratory bird who returns south each spring to nest and breed. The sacred kingfisher vanished for decades when the creek's ecologies collapsed due to land clearing, pollution and industrialisation. But when local residents began to clean up and replant, the renewed ecosystems could once again support the species, and the birds returned. Every year, the story of the return of the sacred kingfishers became a ritual enacted, danced and sung.

This story of hope is analogous to the story of CERES itself. That land was cleared, quarried, relegated to a rubbish dump then eventually rehabilitated to become a park that featured a working organic farm and 'and for wildlife sites. Uncle Ian Hunter, Wurundjeri elder, CERES educator and co-founder of the festival, initiated the event to celebrate the annual return of this exquisite bird, but the ritual was also emblematic of the combination of natural renewal and grass-roots efforts that made CERES possible (Mathews 2005, Ward 2011, Yunkaporta 2023).

The heart of the festival was the involvement of children. Many local schools took part, and every child learned the Kingfisher Boogie, a dance that mimicked the bird's movements: their hunting, preening, diving. The children acted within the pageant, learned Wurundjeri lore and natural history, and how their actions could positively impact their futures. But the core experience was the ritual's enchantment. To walk along the revegetated creek at dusk to the sounds of flutes and drums, to light a candle for the ancestors, to dance the Kingfisher's dance around the fire beside the giant Mother Kingfisher puppet; these experiences blended beauty with meaning. They became, in some small way, initiatory, awakening the participants to the power of a positive vision for harmony and communion with our natural world.

Uncle Ian Hunter worked closely with us, the group of artist activists he named the Dreaming Team. Together we wove traditional Wurundjeri knowledge within the tellings of kingfisher's return. One year, we included a re-enactment of the ancient story of Waa (Raven) and Bunjil (wedge-tailed eagle) and Branbeal (rainbow). He told us the tale of Bunjil who made the earth and all her creatures. Once he was done creating the world, Bunjil directed Waa, raven, to make a whirlwind to lift him into the sky. From Bunjil's vantage point, he saw that the world was not finished. It had no colour. That was the role for his wife, Branbeal, the rainbow.

Feeling responsible for these stories, recruiting volunteers, promoting and fundraising for the festival for months of every year, no day was more important, meaningful, or sacred than the day of Kingfisher's celebration. It wasn't just me. There was significant meaning in the kingfisher's story to many changemakers. The biggest meanings, in fact. That we could save what we love. That we could repair. That we could recover lost things. That we could belong.

Sentient Ecology as Experience

I stood in a small circle in the centre of the Stamping Ground with the Dreaming team. Hundreds of pacific ducks, water rats, rainbow lorikeets and pobblebonk frogs were perched around us on the grassy clearing by Merri Creek. Hand-made costumes clad the child performers who were struggling

to keep quiet, energised at finally being together, in position and about to begin.

Dressed in my raven outfit of raggedy blacks, my role included leading a group of amateur actors, the Waas, in their role of narrating the story. Thousands would assemble the next day, and we wanted to make sure an understanding of the story got through. But first we had to get through this, the dress rehearsal.

Or did we?

I was flying with the Waas, wings outstretched, sprinting around the performance ground, making the whirlwind. Our raven-made wind lifted Bunjil, and the Waas dropped to the ground. As I lay there panting, the choir began to sing the song to call in Branbeal the rainbow. A slow chant, a rising melody, to humbly request she colour the black and white world. This song had been written anew, for if there were ever such a song, it was lost long ago.

And while the song was sung, the clouds, gathering in the west, thickened and darkened above us. The song ended. The wind stopped. And into that silence came the storm. The rain began. Hard rain, fat and pelting drops. Loud rain, drumming into us, into earth. Within seconds all of us were utterly wet. Everyone got to their feet and fled, adults hurried children away, musicians covered instruments, artists draped their bodies across their rainbow-painted props and ran for cover. From underneath my sodden hat, water leaking through my feathers, I watched our rehearsal turn to ruins.

Gathering what I could from the wreckage, I dashed with the dozen or so other organisers back up the hill to the gates of CERES. In the five minutes it took to get to the Village Green, the large open space at the centre of the park, the rain ceased. From torrent to absolutely nothing. But there, arcing above the Village Green, shone Branbeal: the brightest, most vivid double rainbow anyone had ever seen.

Re-making of Myth

For a long time, I have avoided looking deeper into the story of the day Branbeal came, due to the difficulty of sense-making around such a mysterious event. I have been content to keep it as a precious memory, separate from almost everything else I have known. But it is time to explore something of the making, the breaking, the re-making of myth.

When I was four years old, a wedge-tailed eagle came to live close to my home in inner Melbourne. Grandest of all birds, a wingspan more than two metres wide, eagle sightings in the city were extremely rare, let alone the wonder that one would choose to reside in an inner-city park. I remember a school outing to visit the eagle, peering up through hot sunlight into the sparse, silhouetted branches of the large pine where he perched. The community dubbed him Sam, and for five years he soared above the suburb, becoming something of a neighbourhood mascot. For the children of our school, he was special, magnificent. There was magic in his existence, thriving in the city. But he wasn't Bunjil.

As a child, many of my favourite books were Aboriginal stories and mythologies. These stories were of the spirit powers of the earth, sometimes benevolent, other times menacing. I was the first generation of white Australians to have access to picture books such as these, Aboriginal stories illustrated by Aboriginal people. Pouring over their pages, absorbing the feeling and sensing meaning, they contributed something of a sacred framework to my secular upbringing, a private attachment to untamed and beautiful places and the mysterious possibilities of those places. Landing into meaning, with community, that would not happen for many years. But it did come, when I started work as events coordinator at CERES.

One of my roles in the performance itself was to lead the flock of Ravens. They were known by their Woiwurrung name: the Waas, a gang of trickster clowns. Waa's role, common to many trickster figures, was as an intermediary between humans and the divine, and our divine was Bunjil, the Eagle, and of course Kingfisher, the beautiful, gracious, silent star of the show. The Waas gave commentary, they were cheeky and rude, they sometimes stole food from the audience's pre-show picnics. They strutted around the park, poked their shiny cardboard beaks into bins, called to each other in harsh, gargling caws. Dressed in old black boas, tuxedos and tattered satin frocks, their dignity came forth when they ran as a flock, arms outstretched.

Eagle and raven species live throughout the world, and everywhere they are significant to people (Sherman 2008). Their particular and vivid characteristics had, I suspect, a profound influence on what we tend to think of as human. The powerful eagle, the clever raven, these beings are archetypes (Hannah 2013), with distinct qualities that inspire emulation.

In Wurundjeri Country, eagle and raven were the two moieties, a division of clan members into two groups for purposes of marriage and other ceremonies. Every person was either an eagle or raven person. As such, it was poignant to play the role of Waa over the years, to wonder at the old ways in this Country, for those who knew, all their life, that they belonged to Waa.

To experience a mystical state in nature with no deep context or knowledge is very different to the experience of one immersed within their deeply storied place. A place with stories that are ancient and essential to survival. Stories that you live all your life long, without the distraction of abstraction. No abstraction because one was never not on country: known, loved, listening and speaking earth.

In traditional Aboriginal culture, every family is an integral part of the web of knowledge keeping, which includes land tending, as well as singing and dancing the lore. Certain individuals perhaps refined such capacities further than others, but the subtle and complex skill of perceiving earth's animacies and how they interact with humans was required of everyone (Rose 1996:26). This subtle perception is a survival skill. Aboriginal people thrived in challenging terrains for tens of thousands of years (Rose 1996:51) through deep listening, to achieve accurate perception, and then acting, collectively, from what they learned (Ungunmerr 2002).

The deep meaning that came with the appearance of Branbeal was a precious thing, profoundly transformative for me and my community of some Aboriginal but primarily non-Aboriginal people. But deep meaning is not the same thing as bone-deep knowledge of country. It is not long, hard-won symbiosis with country, where ancient and inherited understanding fuses with initiatory and body knowing to create an intimacy with place impossible to fathom for a modern. An intimacy where the notion of human loses meaning, to be replaced, perhaps, with country acting through, with, as human. Add to this the knowing that one was always, also, eagle, or raven. What then is the self? What is country? Who is telling the story?

Why did this instance of synchronicity affect us so profoundly? My sense is that it is a remembering of true communication, true communion with country. For all of human evolution, our survival depended on this communion – the intense pleasure this knowing gave us was a sign, I believe, of its importance to our flourishing. I suspect we must find this pleasure again.

Before we are a person of particular ancestry, before, indeed, we are a person, we are an animal. Like all animals, we seek to survive, to thrive in our terrain. Multidimensional, open, liminal, relational and contextual states of awareness are skills animals—which we are—evolved for survival. These states are, in my experience, somatically deeply pleasurable and have potency beyond their evolutionary emergence in an animal attuning to plants, to animals as predator or prey (Levine 2010). That is because it is an awareness most attuned to vivid aliveness, to ecological entanglement. The animist vision could well be the most vital awareness for everyone to be cultivating at this time in history (Schrei 2023). Aboriginal teachers I have learned from have expressed this, asking us to attach less strongly to our human identity, and learn what wisdom may come from expanding our awareness into other realms. As Uncle Max Harrison, Yuin elder, used to say; ‘all of us must reconcile with the earth.’

Under the aegis of Ian Hunter, CERES initiated the first education program dedicated to teaching Wurundjeri knowledge. Ian’s stance is that if you are born here in Melbourne, you are native to this place, which means you have responsibilities to Country. Kingfisher Festival was a contemporary ceremony, a fusion of Western music and dance with Woiwurrung Wurundjeri story and words. Our role as the Dreaming Team was to get people down to the creek each spring, to dance Kingfisher’s dance at dusk to the music of the drums at the Stamping Ground, to wake their bodies to an ancient way of knowing. When I began working on the festival, I thought the most important thing was education, to transmit the story to the audience as best as we could. I didn’t understand why Ian and my colleagues asserted that there was something more important. But with the experience of the rainbow appearing after the singing, my understanding changed; song shifted from pedagogical to agentic. This challenged my worldview, yet the experience was powerful enough to rearrange my presumptions.

Ian, along with other Wurundjeri, is influencing a new mythic substrate in the minds of children, who, he reminds us, have responsibilities to care for Country. And so culture inevitably changes, as young people grow up in a different world than the one I was born into. And so my four-year-old nephew tells me, as we walk to his inner-city home, his hand in mine, about Bunjil, ‘the crater’, because he learned Wurundjeri lore that day at child-care. ‘The what? Oh! The Creator, darling, Bunjil the Creator. He’s the wedge-

tailed eagle. We see Bunjil at my place in the bush. But you never know, you may one day see Bunjil in your sky here. That can happen...'

Just one generation, and Eagle has returned to myth. Do we make myth, or does myth make us? As Arrernte woman the late M. K. Turner might say, "it goes all ways":

...it's land that reveals things so that people can remember what it is that they've forgotten. Land teaches you. And Land memorises you. *Itelarentye mpwarerle*, it makes you remember. The Land is the real teacher. The Story is the Land, and the Land is the Story. The Story holds the people, and the people live inside the Story. The Story lives inside the people, and the Land lives inside the people also. It goes all ways to hold the Land (Turner 2010:47).

That late afternoon long ago, after the rain, under the rainbow, we went 'wild'.¹² A group of humans, together in our home, within our dream of healing and hoping and striving for the world to change, we were in a changing world, and we were changed. We ran around the Green, hooting and hugging, we sang the rainbow's song, and we danced under the rainbow. The striving in the long months of planning, the tensions of the last weeks, the stresses of the day, all these lifted into the luminous air. They vanished, to be replaced with the knowing that all was held in the vast and beautiful hands of something far greater than us.

Humans, wild together. Humans, being more-than-human, together (Abram 1997). Together, dancing and singing place, becoming story, becoming other, expanding self, enacting their enlarged belonging. Everywhere in the world, for tens of thousands of years, this was done (Martin 1999:8, Snyder 2010:54).

Yet in Europe, not much more than a few centuries ago, much changed. As power consolidated in kingdoms and nation-states, the project of building wealth required that communal celebration be suppressed (Ehrenreich 2006:97). The expanding colonial armies demanded disciplined soldiers; the emerging industrialism called for a sober, compliant, punctual workforce. The dominant religion was reshaped to enable a populace aligned to these needs. Whole cultures internalised the values of hard work, efficiency, loyalty to the powerful. These became 'Christian values', enshrined as the Protestant work ethic (Weber 1930). The collective expression of the ecstatic was considered dangerous, and demonised. Celebration and seasonal festivities were quashed throughout Europe, and then everywhere else as the colonisers spread their values throughout the world.

Sometimes the well of decolonisation seems bottomless. Years ago, when I got my head around the effect of the enclosures of the commons, the stealing of lands from peasant peoples and the subsequent loss of cultures of place, I thought I had most of the picture (Marx 1954:668). But they didn't just steal the land. They also stole the dance (Roth 1998:26).

The dance is the body with agency to express the music, the body alive to be itself, itself which, in ceremony, is also other, the expression of that communication and communion and co-becoming with place, with bird, with wind or fire or water.¹³ To be their archetypal expression: their eternal beingness figured as deity and experienced as wonder and power. Power-with, not power-over. The dance, the music, that was power-with, a communal knowing of wonder. It was something all our ancestors practiced regularly. Sometimes, I'm sure, the world joined in.

Whether one experiences sentience as residing within the self, or within ecology, perhaps need not matter. For I am not presuming a direct causal link between song and rainbow (although neither am I ruling this out). Rather, I seek to reveal how mysterious events of profound connection create an attitude of humility, gratitude and reverence, qualities that may assist in enabling creative responses to the desperate problems caused, in part, by the overarching anthropocentrism of colonial-derived worldviews dominant in Australian culture.

That evening at CERES, Branbeal appearing on the Village Green, was a remembrance of ancestral ways, pouring forth in joy. Yet behind that joy lay grief. The horrors of what happened here in this land are finally coming towards the heart of culture, as they must, and must be felt in their entirety. But perhaps this feeling will not go deep enough for significant cultural change unless there is a turning inward, by everyone, to their own First Peoples, brutalised long ago but ghosting our bodies with shame and pains (van der Kolk 2014:152). Inside every one of us are broken-hearted dancers, waiting to be freed. Waiting to dance with the whole alive world, after the rain, and under the rainbow.

Conclusion

In this article we have considered performance in two different Australian cultures where music is founded on a world view of sentient ecology, where humans are in communicative relationships with non-humans. In Part 1 we considered an Aboriginal central Australian world view through the lens of language to show how singing and other vocal practices enact responsibilities to ancestors, who in turn ensure the health of the physical world. These practices, including songs, are 'being disappeared' by complex and global forces as we write. Juxtaposing this with a collaboration with an Aboriginal Elder to create a new ceremony in an urban, primarily non-Indigenous population, in Part 2 we showed how the community of CERES sought to create culture change to enact environmental responsibilities. At the Kingfisher festival in 2000 the agency of performance may not have been at the fore, yet something like sentient ecology was experienced, and something akin to cultural renewal occurred. Emotional responses to music are mediated through "complex systems of thought and behaviour concerning what music means, what it is for, how it is to be perceived, and what might be appropriate kinds of expressive responses" (Becker 2010:129). Kingfisher Festival, already dense with layers of meaning, was infused with extraordinary excitement and profundity at the sense of the music's engagement with a sentient ecology.

Music, with its profound emotional resonance, is a site where human agency and ecology's sentience meet. In Kaytetye, singing and other human vocal practices described here are used to influence other sentient beings. Some performance genres are considered agentive while others fun ('nothing serious', in the words of the late Nyiyaparli elder David Stock)¹⁴, although there are contexts where this is more nuanced. This is particularly apparent in non-traditional contexts, where the dynamism of culture is particularly apparent due to colonising forces. All this sits within a context of rapid and significant loss, where both cultural and ecological phenomena are 'being disappeared' (Seeger 2008, cited in Schippers & Grant 2016:2). Yet, as demonstrated in Part 2 of this article, renewal of both are, to some extent, possible. The practice of 'singing up' country is a poignant and potent world-view being offered by First Nations people to settler cultures in creative con-

texts where artists of diverse backgrounds share intentions to halt or reverse that which is “being disappeared”.

We have explored the power of music to influence culture and acknowledge the capacity of Aboriginal people to influence Australian settler society in this regard. We acknowledge the potency and relevancy of the world view of sentient ecology, which is manifest in many Indigenous cultures throughout the world, and are grateful for the generosity of Aboriginal people in sharing this knowledge and offering creative, immersive and appropriate ways to engage with this world view.

References

Abram, David

1997 *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-than-Human World*. New York: Vintage Books.

Allen, Aaron & Kevin Dawe

2016 “Ecomusicologies.” In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*. Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, eds. New York: Routledge, 1–15.

Allen, Aaron

2012 “Ecomusicology: Bridging the Sciences, Arts, and Humanities.” In *Environmental Leadership: A Reference Handbook*, Deborah Rigling Gallagher, ed. Sage Publications, 373–381.

Barney, Katelyn ed.

2022 *Musical Collaboration Between Indigenous and Non-indigenous People in Australia: Exchanges in the Third Space*. Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003288572>

Barwick, Linda

2023 “Songs and the Deep Present.” In *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History*, McGrath, Ann, Laura Rademaker and Jakelin Troy, eds. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press and the American Philosophical Society, 93–122.

2000 “Song as Indigenous art.” In *Oxford Companion to Aboriginal Art and culture*, Kleinert, Sylvia and Margo Neale, eds. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 328–335.

Barwick, Linda & Linda Ford

2025 “Country, family and performance traditions: Global challenges and local responses from Kurrindju and the Garfagnana.” *the world of music (new series)* 14(2). <https://doi.org/10.59998/2025-14-2-2579>

Barwick, Linda & Myfany Turpin

2016 “Central Australian Women’s Traditional Songs: Keeping Yawulyu/Awelye Strong.” In *Sustainable Futures for Music Cultures: An Ecological Perspective*, Huib Schippers and Catherine Grant eds. New York: Oxford University Press, 111–145.

Becker, Judith

2010 “Exploring the Habitus of Listening: Anthropological Perspectives.” In *Handbook of Music and Emotion: Theory, Research, Applications*, Patrik N. Juslin and John A. Sloboda, eds. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 127–157.

Breen, Gavin

2001 “The wonders of Arandic phonology.” In *Forty years on: Ken Hale and Australian languages (Pacific Linguistics 512)* J Simpson et al. eds. Canberra: Australian National University, 45–69.

DeNora, Tia

2000 *Music in Everyday Life*. Port Chester: Cambridge University Press.

Dobson, Veronica

2007 *Arelhe-kenhe merrethene: Arrernte traditional healing*. Alice Springs, NT: IAD Press.

Ehrenreich, Barbara

2006 *Dancing in the Streets: A History of Collective Joy*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Fox, James J.

2005 “Ritual languages, special registers and speech decorum in Austronesian languages.” In *The Austronesian languages of Asia and Madagascar*, Adelaar, Alexander and Nikolaus Himmelmann, eds. London: Routledge, 87–109.

Gay’wu Group of Women

2019 *Songspirals: Sharing women’s wisdom of Country through songlines*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.

Green, Jennifer

2012 “The Altyerre Story—Suffering Badly by Translation.” *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* 23(2): 158–178.

Green, Jennifer & Myfany Turpin

2024 “Agents of song: Exploring the cultural meanings of Arandic verbs of vocal production.” In *Keeping Time. Dialogues on music and archives in honour of Linda Barwick*, Thieberger, Nicholas, Amanda Harris, Sally Treloyn and Myfany Turpin, eds, Sydney University Press: Sydney, 145–166.

Guyette, Margaret & Jennifer Post

2015 “Ecomusicology, Ethnomusicology, and Soundscape Ecology Scientific and Musical Responses to Sound Study.” In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology*, Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe, eds. New York: Routledge, 40–56.

Hannah, Barbara

2013 *The Archetypal Symbolism of Animals*. Asheville: Chiron Publications.

Hercus, Luise and Grace Koch

2017 “Lone singers: the others have all gone.” In *Recirculating Songs. Revitalising the singing practices of Indigenous Australia*, Jim Wafer and Myfany Turpin, eds. Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 102–118.

Jahudka, Ines

2021 Aboriginal 'Cultural Renaissance' of the 1980s and Australia's view of Indigenous music. <https://chariotjournal.wordpress.com/2021/05/31/baker-boy-and-beyond/>

Kearney, Amanda, John Bradley, & Liam M Brady

2019 "Kincentric Ecology, Species Maintenance and the Relational Power of Place in Northern Australia." *Oceania* 89(3): 316–335.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ocea.5232>

Koch, Grace

2013 We have the song, so we have the land: Song and ceremony as proof of ownership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land claims. AIATSIS Research Publications. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Koch, Grace & Harold Koch

1993 *Kaytetye Country: An Aboriginal History of the Barrow Creek Area*. Alice Springs, N.T.: Institute for Aboriginal Development.

Koch, Grace & Myfany Turpin

2008 "The language of Aboriginal songs." In *Morphology and Language History*, Bower, Clair, Beth Evans and Luise Miceli, eds. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 167–183.

Koch, Harold

2004 "The Arandic subgroup of Australian languages." In *Australian Languages. Classification and the comparative method*. Current issues in linguistic theory 249, Bower, Clair and Harold Koch, eds. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins, 143–168.

Levin, Theodore

2006 *Where rivers and mountains sing. Sound, Music and Nomadism in Tuva and beyond*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Levine, Peter

2010 *In An Unspoken Voice, How the Body Releases Trauma and Restores Goodness*. Berkeley: North Atlantic.

Martin, Calvin

1999 *The Way of the Human Being*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Mathews, Freya

2005 *Reinhabiting Reality: Towards a Recovery of Culture*. New York: SUNY Press.

Marx, Karl

1954 [1887] 'The So - Called Primitive Accumulation', in *Capital*, Volume 1, Part VIII, Lawrence and Wishart: London.

Rigby, Catherine

2019 "Weaving the environmental humanities: Australian strands, configurations, and provocations." *Green Letters* 23(1):5–18.

Rose, Deborah Bird

2024 *Dreaming Ecology: Nomadics and Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Victoria River, Northern Australia*. Edited by Darrel Lewis and Margaret Jolly. Canberra: ANU Press.

1996 *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness*. Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission.

Roth, Gabrielle

1998 *Maps to Ecstasy: A Healing Journey for the Untamed Spirit*. Novato: New World Library.

Salmón, Enrique

2000 "Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship." *Ecological Applications* 10(5): 1327–1332.

Schrei, Joshua

2023 *Animism is Normative Consciousness*.
<https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/>

animism-is-normative-consciousness-re-mixed-re-musicked/
id1465445746?i=1000612412252

Seeger Anthony

2016 "Natural Species, Sounds, and Humans in Lowland South America: The Kĩsêdjê/Suyá, Their World, and the Nature of Their Musical Experience." In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, Aaron S. Allen & Kevin Dawe, eds. New York: Routledge, 99–108.

Sherman, Josepha

2008 *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*. New York: Sharpe Reference.

Simonett, Helena

2016 "Of Human and Non-human Birds: Indigenous Music Making and Sentient Ecology in Northwestern Mexico." In *Current Directions in Ecomusicology: Music, Culture, Nature*, Aaron S. Allen and Kevin Dawe Eds. New York: Routledge, 89–98.

Snyder, Gary

2010 *The Practice of the Wild*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press.

Stanner, William Edward Hanley

1979 *White man got no dreaming: Essays 1938–1973*. Canberra: Australian National University Press.

Strehlow, Theodor George Henry

1970 "Geography and the Totemic landscape in Central Australia: a functional study." In *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology: modern studies in the social anthropology of the Australian Aborigines*. Ronald Berndt, ed. Nedlands, WA: University of Western Australia Press, 93–140.

Turner, Margaret Kemarre

2010 *Iwenhe tyerrtye: What it means to be an Aboriginal person*. Alice Springs, N.T.: IAD Press.

Turpin, Myfany

2025 “The Moon Travels East.” In *Projecting Voices: Studies in language and linguistics in honour of Jane Simpson*. Carmel O’Shannessy, James Gray and Denise Angelo, eds. Canberra: ANU Press, TBC.

Turpin, Myfany & Alison Ross

2012. *Kaytetye to English Dictionary*. Alice Springs: NT.: IAD Press.

Turpin, Myfany & Jennifer Green

2011 “Trading in terms: alternate registers and linguistic affiliation in Arandic languages.” In *Indigenous Language and Social Identity: Papers in Honour of Michael Walsh*. Ilana Mushin, Brett Baker, Rod Gardner and Mark Harvey, eds. Canberra; Pacific Linguistics, 323–347.

Turpin, Myfany, Jennifer Green & Jason Gibson

2016 “Mustering up a song: an Anmatyerr Cattle Truck Song.” In *Language, Land and Song*, Austin, Peter, Jane Simpson and Harold Koch, eds. London: EL Publishing, 450–465.

Turpin, Myfany, Richard Moyle & Eileen Bonney

2017 “Alyawarr women’s rain songs” In *A distinctive voice in the antipodes: essays in honour of Stephen A. Wild*, Gillespie, Kirsty, Sally Treloyn and Don Niles, eds. Canberra: ANU E-press, 117–145.

Ungunmerr, Miriam-Rose

2002 Inner Deep Listening and Quiet Still Awareness

<https://www.miriamrosefoundation.org.au/dadirri/> (accessed 12/12/2023)

van der Kolk, Bessel

2014 *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*. New York: Penguin.

Wallace, Kathleen & Judy Lovell

2009 *Listen deeply, let these stories in*. Alice Springs. N.T.: IAD Press.

Ward, Maya

2011 *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage*. Transit Lounge, Yarraville.

Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu (with Georgia Curran)

2017 *Yurntumu-Wardingki Juju-Ngaliya-Kurlangu Yawulyu: Warlpiri Women's Songs from Yuendumu*. Darwin, NT: Batchelor Press.

Wilkins, David

1993 "Linguistic Evidence in Support of a Holistic Approach to Traditional Ecological Knowledge." In *Traditional Ecological Knowledge: Wisdom for Sustainable Development*, Nancy Williams and Graham Baines, eds, 71–92. Canberra: Centre for resource and environmental studies, Australian National University.

Weber, Max

1905. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. London & Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Notes

1. In central Australia, the English word 'Country' is typically used to refer to the hereditary system of land tenure that includes the totems, songs and Creation stories associated with that land (Barwick & Turpin 2016, Koch 2013, Moyle 1983). However, to avoid confusion with the now common use of 'Country' for sentient ecology, we use the word 'estate' for the system of land tenure.
2. See for example Guyette & Post 2016:42.
3. Altyerre is the word used in Kaytetye, Arrernte, Alyawarr and Eastern Anmatyerr, although its spellings differ in some of these languages. In translation, the concept has been called 'Dreaming', 'Everywhen' (Stanner 1979) 'Creation time (Dobson 2007) and 'Dreamtime'. See Green 2012 for an in-depth discussion.
4. As such, Indigenous languages rarely have a word meaning 'nature', 'environment' or 'wilderness'; that is, something that contrasts with the land humans occupy.
5. For a discussion of the languages in the Arandic linguistic subgroup see Breen 2001, Koch 2004.
6. Many of these reasons are well-cited in the scholarly literature, e.g. Hercus & Koch 2017:105, Kearney et al. 2019:323, Turpin et al. 2017:130, Turpin 2011:16, Gallagher et al. 2017:4, Koch & Turpin 2008:12, McGrath 1987, however the latter are based on my own fieldwork in central Australia.
7. This onomatopoeic verb also describes the vocal call of women used at a particular stage following their dancing during public stage of initiation ceremonies. See Rose 2024:301 for a description of a similar, if not identical practice in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory.
8. In Kaytetye there are two verbs for dance, both intransitive. Etnhenke describes the action by men, ert-nwenke describes the action by women. The word here is that done by men, which may also be the word used, for example, if the gender is not known. This verb is also used to describe the movement of butterflies, and certain birds that hover, such as the Australian kestrel (*Falco cenchroides*).

9. This unlawful liaison is evoked in other Creation stories where it implies 'non-human' behaviour (Koch 1993:5).
10. Recorded and transcribed by Harold Koch, the translation presented here is a modification of the original.
11. Recorded and transcribed by Myfany Turpin, translated with the assistance of Phillip Janima, Michael Hayes and Anna Pope.
12. By "wild" I refer to meanings including free, uninhibited, uncivilised, undomesticated, enthusiastic, and raucous. While the word 'uncivilised' often has a pejorative ring, the etymology – "not of the city" is what I am referring to. "Wild" is a word currently undergoing cultural transformation. For instance, the term re-wilding, referring to the practice of returning apex predators into degraded ecologies to rebalance ecosystems, has become appropriated to mean bringing back nature connection in urban contexts to help shift late capitalism into dialoguing with all it has dismissed under negative connotations of "wild". (I also note that my use does not accord with the description of "wild country" by Rose (1996:19) meaning, according to her Aboriginal informant, uncared-for land.)
13. For a deeper exploration of 'co-becoming' see Burarrwaja et al. (2019; xxii). "Country is the way humans and non-humans co-become, the way we emerge together, have always emerged together and will always emerge together."
14. Interviewed 2018, audio 20180730DS-01; <https://catalog.paradisec.org.au/repository/MMT1/20180730DS>

About the authors

Myfany Turpin is an ethnomusicologist and linguist at Sydney Conservatorium of Music, the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on relationship between language and music, ethnobiology, lexicography, language and music documentation, archiving and repatriation. Geographically, her research focuses on central Australia. She has co-authored numerous multimedia publications on Aboriginal song-poetry, including the radio program *Song with No Boss*; and has written a dictionary, learner's guide and scholarly articles on the Aboriginal language Kaytetye. She has a commitment to research that supports Indigenous people in their efforts to maintain and revive their languages and performance traditions.

Maya Ward is a teacher, writer and artist whose works foster intimate and ethical connection to an animate earth. Her memoir *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage* detailed her long walk from the sea to the source of the Yarra following an ancient Wurundjeri Songline. Her PhD in Creative Writing on shamanistic and somatic metaphysics in Western and Indigenous philosophical traditions explored the role of embodiment in facilitating ecological and spiritual renewal. She is a guest lecturer and teacher in creative writing; and her creative writing method that imparts somatic, intuitive and intellectual understandings of interdependency.