

Anthropology, Philosophy and a Little Aboriginal Community on the Edge of the Desert



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Certificate of Authorship/Originality

I certify that the work in this thesis has not been previously submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in the research work and preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

This thesis explores a rethinking of community, one without identity. This thinking became possible and necessary because I lived in a little Aboriginal community in south central Western Australia, called Ululla.

The Jackman family have made Ululla *a* home (a home among others, this changes over time), not as a kind of ideal place that would stabilise and centre an identity, but as a place one leaves and returns to, where family gathers and stays for awhile – a number of years or a few months – depending on other forces going on in the region and with kin. What I gained a sense of, was that the claim of another – their work – forces one's sense of responsibility outward, towards other gatherings across time and space; an extension that does not rest, stay put, *but that moves*. Extensive relatedness puts a community in motion, forces a thought of community without notions of bounded identity. A community at 'loose ends' perhaps, where differences, discontinuities and multiplicity do not become One (Miami Theory Collective 1991).

Anthropologists have noted that what Aboriginal people emphasise is regional relatedness and extensive social ties rather than exclusive or restricted groupings (Myers 1986). There is no centring as such, rather relations are pivotal, turning one towards another without rest. As a result, and drawing broadly from Jean-Luc Nancy's work on community, I think of community as movement and imperative – an outward extension – rather than a retreat or consolidation – an inward concentration. Here, community is not to be controlled or managed or unified (centred, bound-as-one) but something to go with, to feel happening as an imperative or inclination; a kind of event where one gets ready to respond to the call of others from elsewhere. Following Nancy, I think of community as something that is happening – an event, a call, an inclination – rather than an object of description (Nancy 1990).

My thesis draws upon a critique of anthropology and a use of Nancy's philosophy (Levinas and Lyotard are also important at times) to say something about Ululla. The problem with anthropology, as I argue here, is that it works to secure the identity of a people through uncovering an underlying unity that is supposed to order and sustain the group (Norris 2000); the anthropologist works to centre an identity in order to speak of the group itself. I imagine a different possibility here, one that would reflect Aboriginal social practices of community.

The thesis is structured in a non-linear way and is organised around 'gatherings' 'breakaways' 'articulations' and 'spacings/rhythms'. This organisation means that the form and shape of the community, it's rhythm if you like, is reflected in the structure of writing itself. Events happen, one is taken away, breakaways and gatherings take place across space.

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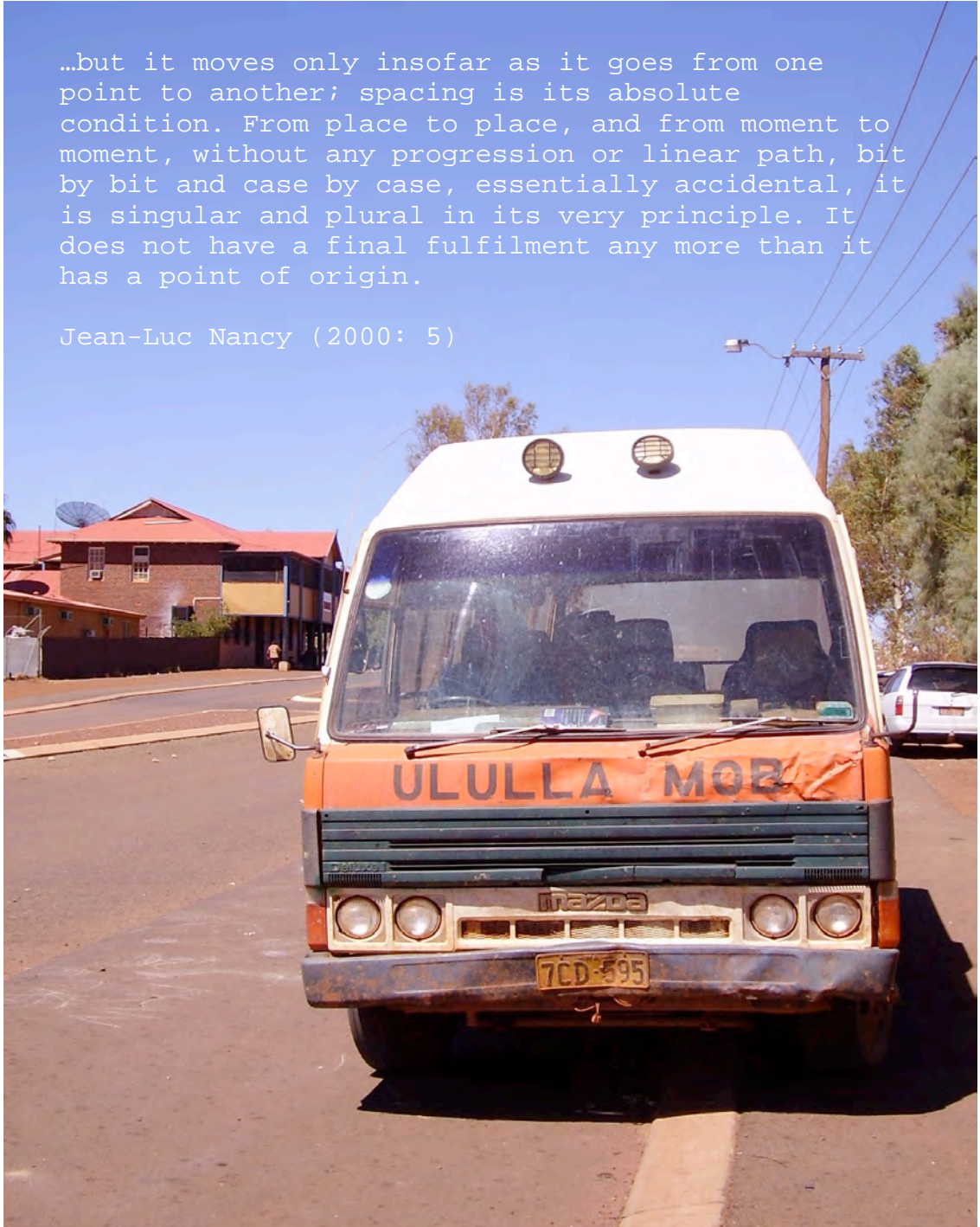
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...but it moves only insofar as it goes from one point to another; spacing is its absolute condition. From place to place, and from moment to moment, without any progression or linear path, bit by bit and case by case, essentially accidental, it is singular and plural in its very principle. It does not have a final fulfilment any more than it has a point of origin.

Jean-Luc Nancy (2000: 5)



Foreword: beginnings and ends

This thesis is not a discussion of community but an argument towards a particular conception of community. There is no surveying of the literature on community here. What I consider is a conception of community developed by the French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy that bears a strange and strong resemblance to the notions of ‘community’ I was exposed to in Ululla, a little Aboriginal community in south central Western Australia. We could easily reverse this and say that it was being at Ululla, being exposed to the specific forces and rhythms of the relations experienced there, that made way for Nancy’s thoughts: a specific experience of community forced the sense of another thought of community into view. These two forces intertwine here and I use them to say something about anthropology, Ululla and philosophy. Each ‘part’ (anthropology, philosophy, Ululla) – could it be called a phrasing, or a spacing, a unique turning to the world? – says something in relation to, and about, the others. I move between them as a way to create and sustain openings. I try to force another way to think of ‘community’ in the process.

I initially lived in Ululla (a small community of less than 20 people, basically one family group – the Jackmans, 70km out of Wiluna) for 18 months in 2002-03. Whilst there I was not working in a research role, and I fitted in wherever I was useful: driver, ‘School of the Air’ home tutor, station worker, bureaucrat, Centerlink negotiator, tea maker, bread baker, car tow driver, shop keeper, seed picker. I later returned to Melbourne to begin a badly thought out thesis at Monash University. After the ensuing crisis – that comes from things that are poorly thought out – I left Monash, had time off, re-thought the project, and was saved from thesis oblivion by Stephen Muecke and UTS’s Transforming Cultures Centre. The fact that I was initially not in a research role at Ululla has created various insights and problems along the way. Firstly, not being in a research role and having no research focus meant that I was able to let things happen. A sense of the place unfolded slowly. In a careful way I could say that I was ‘freed’ – at least in writing – from the

pressure to develop explanation and meaning. Tentatively, I could say that perhaps something else becomes possible when you let things happen and withhold determinations; and I definitely explore that idea at points in this thesis (especially in the ‘event gathering’). But of course I was always thinking. I quote from a letter I sent to a friend early on:

It has been a soul-enlivening experience being intimately and intrinsically tied to the mood of a place, your emotional energy dependent on the vibe, on the infinite contact between bodies and place, your disposition and sensibility buoyant on its themes. This of course can be good and bad, but always goes to show the dependency one has on the community and on place.

And this idea of how we respond to the force and sense of community resonates strongly in this thesis. Here, the question is not so much *what community means*, but *what does the experience of community make possible*, what does it force one to see? What disposition happens in community; what kind of buoyancy is there? How does the work of others force another sense of the world into view?

However, not initially being in a research role has created its own set of ‘problems’. I began writing at Monash without ‘field notes’ and without points of research focus at Ululla. This quickly created a rather confused mess and as a result a kind of hyper-deconstructive focus on the impossibility of representation. It was by returning to Ululla in 2005, 2007 (for six week research trips) and numerous times in 2008 (I moved, with my young family, to Geraldton – the closest regional town), that made it possible to respond productively to the things that were going on at Ululla and with the Ululla mob. The change in my relationship from initially just ‘being there’ to being there as a researcher has created new sets of negotiations, responsibilities and obligations that have deepened relationships.

In hindsight it seems so obvious that the community has a force that makes you see its imperatives, sometimes you have to stay with the things that happen.

It is at this point, that I would like to thank people at Ululla for their work, patience and openness to my questions. I would especially like to thank Sheila, Sadie, Rita, Molly, Gail and GB, Don and Helen (thanks for the photos), as well as Gidgee, Joanne, DJ, Stumpy, Kupsie, DD, and Sniper. You made Ululla a great place to live, you made things happen, there and elsewhere; you gave me a sense of a life and community power that enveloped us and impelled us onwards towards others, a community in motion that extends without limit. I would also like to thank Stephen Muecke for his guidance and inspiration throughout this process. He has the confidence to let others find their feet in their own way, he has helped me, crucially at times, to do this, and the work here is reflective of this, big thanks.

My supervisors at Monash, Liz Reed and Stephen Pritchard, provided keen insights in the early development of this thesis. Lynette Russell was particularly helpful when things fell apart.

Mark Galliford, fellow thesis traveller, deserves special mention for his proof reading and suggestions on the final draft of the thesis. I first met Mark when he rolled up unannounced at Ululla one day in his Datsun 120Y station wagon. We not only shared a deep respect for the Datsun 120Y (my first car), but for Deleuze and philosophy as well. We sat under a tree and talked about the aforementioned; strange connections moving across the ground. I would also like to thank Barbara Brooks for her comments on a section of this thesis, and Steve Tan for design and layout work.

And lastly, I would like to thank Cath and Dusty. Nancy writes that, ‘When the infant appears, it has already compeared¹. It does not complete the love, it shares it again, making it pass again into communication and exposing it again to community’ (1991: 40). Dusty is not the end result of love and commitment to each other but

¹ Nancy’s uses the neologism *com-parait* (Nancy 1991: 28-29), to draw attention to co-appearance, that is, that we emerge coextensively with others. As will become clear, he wants to avoid a sense of ‘comparison’, as this places emphasis on the similarity or the likeness between things. *Com-parait* is translated into an obsolete English equivalence of ‘compearance’: literally an appearing together, but also the sense of appearing before ‘the law’ (of community). *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (Fifth edition), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002. All subsequent references will be cited in text as (SOED).

the presence that shows that we can never be done with love. We can never love enough, and that this, as strange as it sounds, is what is good enough about love: its truth is that we cannot ‘attain’ it nor can we ‘free ourselves from it’ (Nancy 1991: 90). But it happens, it takes place, it is going on: we are kept afloat by this going towards another without completion. Cath and I come home, put Dusty to bed, get out photo albums and look at pictures of her and wonder how this can be. This being said, each of you have only known me with thesis in tow, you have as a result seen the best and worst of me over the years in a way that only a thesis can do. So, with this in mind (and with the hope that I have done enough to satisfy this other love, for now, at least) I look forward to the future that extends and will at times trouble, but for the most part will excite and give multiple points of articulation and sharing anew.

A note on structure

Firstly, I use two different methods for indicating direct quotations. Quotations that are verbatim (recorded at the time) are indicated conventionally with quotation marks. My recollection of conversations (written down after the event) are noted in *italics* without quotation marks.

Secondly, In order to say something we must have a workable structure, and this is why I have chosen not to organise what follows into the common structure of chapters/sections/ conclusions. The conventional thesis structure gave far too much sense of a linear progression. I feel that life with others is never like that. The conventional structure did not reflect what I was trying to do. As Serres says: ‘You have to invent a localised method for a localised problem’ (1995: 92). What there is instead are ‘gatherings’² (like sections) that contain ‘spacings/rhythms’ (chapters) and ‘breakaways’ (just to make sure you get the point that there are no conclusions here!). Between the ‘gatherings’ we have ‘articulations’.

² These are not gatherings of unity and stability, but rather gatherings that happen, that persist for a time, and then get taken off by something else. A kind of moment when forces (conceptual forces, the force of events, for example) come together and can be articulated but only insofar as this gets us somewhere else, moves us towards another ecstatic gathering.

‘Articulations’ work as meeting points/points of difference between the gatherings – kind of ‘lines of flight’ that join/differentiate the ‘node’ like structure of the gatherings, to borrow from Deleuze. If you were to draw three circles on a page and draw dotted lines connecting each circle to the others then this would be a picture of ‘gathering’ (circles) and ‘articulations’ (faint interrupted dotted lines). The ‘spacings/rhythms’ would show that the circles are made up only of parts; always of parts that move on, and with, the others. The ‘breakaways’ would be moments of rupture or diffusion when another relation would come along, interrupt, transform and move things off again, giving another sense of things; like a permeable cell wall that ruptures on contact with something other.

What you may have on the page in front of you could well be a mess. But I cling to the thought that the risk that any writer takes can also be a productive and worthwhile one, especially if we try and do something other than the conventional. Being exposed to others, to their work and force, extends us, as if beyond ourselves towards other gathering sites of intensity, to take this as the work. To try and write this.

Portions of some of the work in this thesis have been published. An earlier version of the first ‘articulation’ appeared as ‘So let’s now get back there to this present’, *Cultural Studies Review*, 11(2): 171-178, 2005. Parts of the ‘ethics gathering’ appeared in ‘Representation, photography and the performativity of the pose’, *New Talents 21C*, 7: 119-128, 2007. A combination of ‘spacing/rhythm’ one and two, entitled ‘Anthropology, a science of the non-event?’, has been accepted by *Cultural Studies Review* (forthcoming).



opening.

Community, 'an experience that makes us be'³

What I try to do here is to think 'community' without notions of 'identity'. Thinking community as identity is a process of reification or as Nancy says, 'hypostatisation' where a common figure, essence or ideal is presented as the embodiment of the community itself. This thinking not only rejects what is different to this vision, but puts community to work as a process of purification or clarification of the 'common identity'. This thinking is common enough in nationalistic or neo-liberal models of community. These models are premised on the notion that we somehow share a common essence, a kind of 'common being' that is figured through 'the digger', 'the battler' 'the average Australian,' and now, with the change of government, 'the working family'. These figures constitute not only a kind of unquestioned ethical Good, but are presented as the life-blood – the ideal archetype, the true identity, the proper subjects – of the community: the essential building block that will enable the completion of 'common' projects and ideals. 'Shared values' and a 'common ethos' can be promoted by appealing to these figures. Political leaders appeal to these figures in order to legitimise (as unquestionably good) their policies and models for the future (and indeed the past, hence, the recent 'history wars');⁴ they work to exalt this essence in order to speak of the true, or deep essence of the people. What this thinking of community does is

³ Jean-Luc Nancy (1991: 26).

⁴ The 'history wars' was a series of rather vitriolic debates that took place in Australian newspapers, at public forums and in academic journals, through the late 90s and early 00s by predominantly white Australians. The chief concern of the controversy was Prime Minister John Howard's conservative revision of the past, which began when he took office in 1996. Howard believed that history had been appropriated by left 'elites' and 'navel gazers' (Macintyre & Clark 2003: 4) who had attempted to problematise and question the legitimacy of the Australian State. He appropriated conservative historian Geoffrey Blayney's metaphor of a 'black-armband view of history' (1993, quoted in Macintyre and Clarke 2003: 2) – a supposed over emphasises on conflict, violence and injustice – in order to promote a history we could be 'relaxed and comfortable with'. The left named this the 'white-blindfold' view of history. At stake here was Howard's attempt to speak for the 'average Australian', the 'Aussie battler', in order to recover a past that would supposedly repair the (modern) threat of difference and conflict. He claimed to speak the proper history for the true (relaxed and comfortable) Australian. See also Attwood (2005) and Healy (2008).

present an ideal ‘subject’ – a reified identity – as the past and future of the community. Political leaders put this subject to work in-order to build a better (because more unified) community.

This project is not a political one, but one that tries to respond to a force of thinking, an experience of community, that happened at Ululla; an experience of community that spoke not of a ‘common identity’ together but an exposure to sharing difference-in-common.

The Jackman family have made Ululla *a* home (among others), not as an ideal place that would hold and centre an identity, but rather as a place one leaves and returns to, stays for awhile, goes, and then comes back again. Because of this practice, a notion of community became possible, and necessary to think, without identity, ‘beyond instrumental control’ (Dallmayr 1997: 177): there is no occasion to consolidate the community together-as-One. Rather, what I gained a sense of was that one’s sense of responsibility is forced outwards towards other gathering across time and space – leaving and returning without rest as a condition of being. Extensive relatedness puts a community in motion, forces a thought of community without notions of bounded identity.

There was no ideal, figure, body or essence that would stand for the work of the community itself. People there were not keen to objectify ‘the community’ or present ‘higher level’ structures (shared destiny, immutable values) as a transcendental realm beyond the contingent and changing forces and relations that give the community its rhythm, its spacing – that sense of community which happens when you sit down and share a place to live with others; working our difference – that different sense of the world – as our point in common. People emphasised their relation with others at all points, relationships that look outwards to where others gather rather than inwards around a grouping or place. The relation is pivotal; it turns us towards others and to things in the world.

Anthropologists have commented on this pivotal nature of relationships throughout the Central and Western desert (see, for example, Myers 1986, Dussart 2000 & Poirier 2005). Within these accounts the term ‘community’ is rejected. Dussart (2000) in her book *The Politics of Ritual in an Aboriginal Settlement*, states that ‘even the notion of Yuendumu itself as a “community” might best be avoided’ (40). The thinking here is that Aboriginal forms of sociality (in the Central and Western Desert) are not organised around a bounded place that would hold and centre a group identity. What people emphasise is regional relatedness and extensive social ties rather than exclusive or restricted groupings (Myers 1986). So, since Aboriginal forms do not express this notion of ‘community’ (normally conceived in boundedness), it is rejected. In response to this I want to say two things. Firstly, why is ‘community’ necessarily aligned with a bounded and exclusive group that shares some ideal place for the expression of group identity? An identity, moreover, that everyone would centre around as the condition of being with others. Can we think ‘community’ without aligning it to an ‘idyllic society bound by a shared history, identity and fate’ (Lyer 2006: 52)? Secondly, what I want to do in response to this, is to think of community in a way that reflects Aboriginal social practices. Thus, what I want to do in this thesis, following the work of Nancy and the things that happen at Ululla, is to think of community *without* these notion of boundedness, exclusivity, common identity, immutable essence, and so on.

As a result, I think of community as movement and imperative rather than a retreat or consolidation. A community that does not defend against difference and individual autonomy, but works the place for its persistent articulation, what Nancy calls ‘letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself’ (1991: 41). Community, in this sense, is not something to control or manage in the hope of unification, but rather something to go with, to feel happening; an imperative or inclination rather than an object that could be described and centred. A kind of event where one gets ready to respond to the call of others from elsewhere. Community as something that is happening – an event, a call, a buoyancy perhaps (Nancy 1990): a readiness-at-hand to be taken away, interrupted, to respond to the claims of others; to not be able to avoid or retreat from this as the condition for

being-in-common-with-others. A *being-in-common*, which implies a relation and thus a difference, rather than a *common-being*, which implies a single/universal figure of identity upon which ‘the people’ could be centred. This will be analysed extensively in ‘gathering three: community.’

This kind of approach forces one to rethink the anthropological project. What I want to argue is that the anthropological project rests on the clarification or revelation of the common-being or common-identity that is seen to sustain and order the group (Norris 2000). Thus, the anthropologist’s job is to gain the voice of the people (and as we will see ‘the proper subject’), and thus speak in the name of the (true) community.

The clarification of the group’s identity is achieved by not only gaining the ‘insider perspective’, but by transcending this in order to secure authority (Clifford 1983). In other words, the insider perspective enables the anthropologists to speak with authority about the group in general. In still other words, the anthropologist gains the voice of the proper subject that would present and stand for the community itself, would be the figure of its proper identity. Hence, the common use of a pseudo-subject (‘the Pintupi’, ‘the Martu’ and so on) that is writ large in the name of the community. By conceiving of the anthropological project as a demand to determine and bring out the true essence of a people, anthropologists put themselves in a position of ‘cross situational objectivity’ (Hage 2006: 6), this is a central theme of ‘gathering one: event’. This tends to lead to the transcendence of relations with others in order to describe otherness itself (‘gathering two: ethics’), which produces and legitimates the kind of masterly position that anthropologists take in regards to others (‘gathering three: community’). There may be nothing ultimately wrong with this. *Aside from the fact that the experience of community is never like that.* What if community is not an ‘object’ for analysis, ‘*but an experience that makes us be*’, as Nancy so evocatively puts it (1991: 26, original emphasis)?

It my job here to prove the truth of this exposition, this is what unfolds ahead.

When Fred Myers talks of his work with the Pintupi, he emphasises the relation to others as primary, extensive and imperative. He argues that what is valued above all in Pintupi thought, is overall regional relatedness; relatedness that extends beyond any finite grouping, identity or category around patri-lines, subsections or country (1986: 294). The ethical, in this sense, is imperative; there is no place from which exclusionary categories could be sustained. The ethical – the primacy of one’s relatedness to others – cuts across, cuts through, interrupts categories of closure and determination. Myers writes that, ‘Pintupi maintain that society, as they see it, is potentially boundary-less, that individual networks and ritual links extend beyond any definable group’ (1986: 79). A community that extends outward, a community that does not centre around a place, or territory, is not turned inward; a community where boundaries are flexible, contingent and negotiated at each turn; where a point of difference is also a coming together (Rose 1992: 55) – a kind of sharing of difference-in-common. This notion of community, this is what we are beginning to see, requires another thought of community, one that would respond to the sense of community that is ‘without identity’. A community in movement, that does not retreat, but which extends. A notion of community that works to resist, or as we will see through Blanchot, ‘unworks’ forms of representation that gather the community together as One.

This would seem to pose a few problems for anthropological thinking that views the true and proper work of anthropology as revealing a common essence or underlying unity that would organise and sustain the group. What I want to show is that all we have is being-in-common and this is what makes anthropological work possible and interesting. This thought became possible and necessary because of being at Ululla.

Ululla

Ululla started 20 years ago when Don Miller, a whitefella from Melbourne, bought a sheep station with the idea of setting up an Aboriginal community. Don is an Anglican minister who worked in Leinster (a mining town half-way between Wiluna and Kalgoorlie) before buying the lease to Ululla. His ministry at Ululla is not about

holding church services but is an attempt to meet the issues of life that confront the local Aboriginal people. He does this as part of the local Anglican diocese and receives some financial support from them.⁵ Originally Ululla (in the mid 1980s) provided a place for teenagers from Meekatharra and Wiluna to do their community hours instead of serving prison sentences (or as a condition of bail). Slowly, over a number of years, the Jackman family started to make Ululla their home. Ululla is not the traditional home of the Jackman family, as their traditional country is about 1000km northeast of Wiluna. The Jackman family do not know the ‘traditional’ stories of the country on which Ululla is located, although there are certain places that they avoid, because they recognise the markers of someone else’s sacred place. There are ‘old people’ (this is what people say, we might say ‘elders’) in town who definitely know the stories; their traditional country was close to, but did not include ‘Ululla’. These conditions of community; a place to do ‘community hours’, the fact that it is not the Jackman’s country, that it has become a compromised place to create a home, and that Don has worked the space for community, have created a certain type of community.

I asked Sheila Jackman, ‘Does it matter that Ululla is not your traditional country?’

She replied, ‘It’s a bit funny, I think, to stay in someone else’s place.’

‘Is it?’ I ask.

‘Mmm, for me. They growl you know, when you stay in some else’s place,’ says Sheila.

‘Whose place, is it?’

‘Oh, Ululla, it belongs to the Ashwins, a bit out from Ululla. Ululla right, good, belong to that side, old people been there with that lot, Ashie, belongs to them. In one windmill Judy [Ashwin] born, that’s why she growl us.’

⁵ There is no preaching at Ululla, there are no religious obligations put on the people who stay at Ululla. However, Don’s strong Christian ethic and ideal of looking out for others without judgment nor prescription, informs his role at Ululla (the radical figure of Christ – a real anti-institutionalist – would be the model here). There is no sense of Ululla being ‘a mission’, no one refers to it, nor thinks of it as such. Don interacts with people as people and not with other aims in mind. It could be said that Ululla began because of a kind of disillusionment with the prescriptive and authoritative institutional structure of the Anglican church. I think Don was trying to work the space for something different at Ululla – for things to happen without prescription or management: a kind of radical Christian ethic of being-together without judgment nor condition. A being-with beyond institutional grounds, perhaps. It may be important to add that I am agnostic.

‘Does she?’

‘Yes, before – when we come from Ululla, when Don had the bus, no, no, no, he had that ute, we all come into town, she growls. She says, “It’s not you fellas’ camp, it’s my camp,” she says like that, you know. That’s her country, it’s not our country. But Ululla its alright we stay, good. Oh yeah that’s a good place, town no good. We like it in the bush.’



Ululla then is a bit funny, not quite the proper place, but it is a site for community nonetheless. So you may sense that we have to take a different approach to thinking community, an approach that would think of community without a proper place, without a bounded territory that would return and unite the identity of a people.⁶ Relationships, ties and obligations extend without containment, without being

⁶ Francesca Merlan’s (1998) *Caging the Rainbow: Place Politics and Aborigines in a North Australian Town*, problematises any static identification of people and territory. She works to show the ‘diversity of Aboriginal orientation[s] to the town’ (4); orientations that are routinely made more complex by personal, social and historical processes (44). Katherine is not a ‘bounded community’ but a kind of meeting place (45), where differing ‘networks of kinship and connection extend outward from all camps to other locales’ (43). She questions traditional anthropological approaches that emphasise territoriality in restrictive ways.

reducible to a single place. The place in fact happens because it is one nexus point (among others) for multiple and different relations that come together, not as One, but as a site for being-in-common where what is shared is precisely this difference.

The Jackmans are also one of the most under-privileged families in the broader Wiluna community. They have limited ‘traditional’ and ‘modern’ authority in the broader community. They have fewer motor cars and less access to money, education and jobs, than other families. The family is widely dispersed across Western Australia. The family is disadvantaged and discriminated against both by the broader Aboriginal community due to their social location and by government institutions such as health, education and general access to resources. This is in part due to the geographical location of Ululla, 70km from Wiluna, as well as the effect of pre-existing mechanisms of discrimination that Aboriginal people face simply because they are different, because they have a different vision of what is important. The community receives no government funding apart from social security entitlements (that individuals receive), and although recognised as a community in the broader Wiluna community and surrounding area, it is not recognised (or really known about) by broader government bodies beyond the immediate area. Ululla, and this is a direct result of Don’s role in the community, resists government intervention or control and thus has developed independently. This has perhaps marginalised the community in significant ways,⁷ contributing to disadvantage, but it has also made the chance to do something different, to imagine a different kind of community, one not conditioned on the mediation of white Australian institutions, that is, health, housing and education. These institutions are perhaps, and this is a very simplistic analysis, designed to reproduce the same. Or in other words the kind of model of community built around stability, immobile structures and authoritative institutional centres; an inward looking community that seeks certainty in stability, that seeks to secure the orderly functioning of institutions. A model that would perceive extensive regional social ties that demand movement (and the resulting lack

⁷ It must be asserted that it is people’s choice to be there, that people move constantly from Ululla to other towns, and that people come to Ululla to get out of town and away from white institutions and structures and from the grog. For reference to this, please refer to narratives that follow.

of a stable centre) as something to manage and control in order to create a ‘proper’ community. Our ‘functional’ community, to their ‘dysfunctional’ one.

If Don could be seen as an exemplar of a white male authoritative role in the community, it is a role that rejects communitarian visions and prescriptive relations to community. What is worked at Ululla, as the condition of its possibility, is a sharing of difference-in-common (this term is explained shortly), a kind of ‘ethic’ that tries to resist conditions of management. (My limited experience and knowledge of other communities in the region would suggest, however, that Martu people work against prescriptive management and assimilation to sameness as the condition of being ‘Martu’). These forces have played a highly significant part in forming ‘Ululla’ as a community; and these forces have made possible and necessary a certain type of response here.

Thus, this thesis engages very little in what we could call ‘traditional’ western anthropological cultural description; it does not describe traditional practices, rituals, social organisation or dreaming stories. This is as much my own doing, as I never wanted to write a ‘traditional’ ethnography and did not see it as my position to do so, as the Jackmans reluctance to talk about such matters. This reluctance stems from a history of white people’s surveillance, as the elder Jackman family members grew up in Wiluna’s mission and the Seven Day Adventist mission ‘Karlundi’ in Meekatharra. Because of this very significant and violent cultural dislocation, holding onto this knowledge as one’s own, as not to be shared, is vitally important here. I suppose Ululla, being what it is, necessitated another kind of focus, a focus on community as something that is not only negotiated, compromised, ‘non-natural’, a kind of ‘community at loose ends’ (Miami Theory collective, 1991), an ‘unworked community’ (Blanchot 1988) an ‘inoperative community’ (Nancy 1991), an ‘impossible community’ (Derrida & Caputo 1997) that works and binds people together because of dispersal, disruption and fragmentation and because the Jackman family have had to make do and compromise so much. But, and this is what remains vital, the Jackmans have also worked a space for community; have worked community against such total and persistent odds. I also think this says

something about Aboriginal notions of ‘community’ in general (though I would want to signal my resistance to such generalisation) – working the space for difference as the condition for being together. An ‘activity of interrelation’ (Secomb 2000) that unworks and loosens, resists and makes inoperative, the good models that are designed to make ‘them’ proper. Maintaining an ethics of relatedness that keeps a community in motion rather than a politics of identity that wants them to stay put. Or again, survival and sustenance through looking outwards, rather than looking inwards.

Community

The term community denies codification precisely because every singular existence has some sense, some experience of its hold, its touch, and thus there are multiple, and infinite ways of expressing and desiring and calling upon this term. Vared Amit and Nigel Rapport, in *The Trouble With Community: Anthropological Reflections on Movement, Identity and Collectivity*, argue that it is because there is no agreement on what community means that it remains an important collective signifier (2002: 13). The ‘ambiguousness’ of community ‘helps to ensure the persistence of notions of community’ (13). Community ‘evokes a thick assortment of meanings, presumptions and images’ that cannot be agreed upon in general terms (13). Anthony Cohen, in *The Symbolic Construction of Community*, views community as a ‘symbolic boundary’ that cannot be reified or reduced to a singular (thus, universal), or ‘common’ meaning. This is because the term ‘community’ provides a space for everyone to share in its (diversity of) meanings. Here, ‘community’ is thought of as a shared symbolic concept that is ‘part of a “common” meaning and signification’ and that orientates an individual’s experience of the social, but that ‘allows...[individuals] to attach their own meanings to it’ (1985: 15). Yet, as Cohen argues, ‘their meanings are not shared in the same way. Each is mediated by the idiosyncratic experience of the individual’ (14). Community thus works as a symbolically crucial term, because it provides a space for an appeal to the common, while securing the individual’s distinctiveness; mapping out the social while producing the possibility of agency. We share *in* and are shared *by* the social (Nancy

uses the term *partage* (1991: 25), which means ‘to share’ and ‘to divide’ in order to illustrate this). To experience community is to experience an opening up of a possibility; an experience that is unique and singular as well as being in-common with others experiences and possibilities.⁸ A possibility shared in difference and in common with others.

Community is an important term for the western imaginary precisely because everyone can claim, and has, a stake in its meaning. Because of this, Linda Singer is able to argue that community is not a ‘referential sign’, not ‘some objective reference’, but rather it is an appeal that ‘aims at response, a calling back. The call of community initiates a conversation, prompts exchanges in writing, disseminates, desires the proliferation of discourse’ (1991: 125). It is ‘elastic’ and meaningful because it demands response, and because others resist, through their work, agency and difference, a stable and unified notion of ‘community’. But it does so only because it speaks to an experience that remains difficult, if not impossible, to think ‘properly’, definitively and exhaustively.

Nancy’s radical move here begins by taking ‘community’ not as a concept but something that is happening to us (1990, 1991). This shifts the discussion from working out what community means (even if this meaning is indeterminable) to trying to gain a sense of what happens to us by being in community with others. We move, with Nancy, from a capturing of meaning, to a sense of community as force, imperative, momentum. As Nancy suggests:

I am trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience – not, perhaps, an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be*. To say that community has not yet been thought is to say that it tries our thinking, and

⁸ Judith Butler thinks this condition through a relation to power. She writes that ‘If the terms by which “existence” is formulated, sustained, and withdrawn are the active and productive vocabulary of power, then to persist in one’s being means to be given over from the start to social terms that are never fully one’s own’ (Butler 1997: 28). Hence what is common is never singularly so, what is singular is always marked by broader relations that precede, interpolate and ‘subject’ (as a generative term) the individual. In a sense, to be in common is the site of emergence of the subject, but this emergence is one that would *work against* the presentation of any ‘common-being’ or universal representation that would gather finite individual into a bonded whole. (I am not suggesting that Butler’s work does this).

that it is not an object for it. And perhaps it does not have to become one.
(1991: 26, original emphasis)

This is one of the challenges that I take up here, to try and stay with community as an experience, rather than object for analysis. This is what Nancy wants to think, what he calls the ‘possibly still unheard demand’ of thinking community, of considering community ‘beyond communitarian models or remodelings’ (1993, 1991: 22). Community happens, or is happening (1990), and is thus radically worldly and perhaps even mundane. Here, the question is what it means ‘to be in common, or to be with each other, or to be together’ (ibid: 159); a question that ‘takes place’ and happens because we are in the world with others in a truly everyday sense (ibid: 161). This question is surely common, but it only happens because it is shared out and exposed in infinite kinds of ways. Community may be ‘bare’ – in the sense that no figure can come to represent the community itself – ‘but it is imperative’ (2000: 35-36), in that it happens to us in ways beyond choice. We are buoyant on the ebb and flow of others.

The in-common, in-difference of community

If we are to talk of being, then we have to also think of how beings are distinct from one another as well as how ‘they’ are connected. We need to think of the ontic-ontological, in fact, we need to concentrate on that hyphen which joins the two terms. For that is where we find a relationship, a movement between, back and forth, that stretches and differentiates as it connects and joins. Individual beings emerge through being-in-common with others. This is where we find the singular (the ontic) plural (the ontological) event of being.⁹ But back to that point of difference that binds and unbinds separate beings. Bataille writes that:

Between one being and another, there is a gulf, a discontinuity. This gulf exists, for instance, between you, listening to me, and me, speaking to you.

⁹ Graham Harman puts it simply: ‘The ontological is what pertains to being [often differentiated as ‘Being’], while the ontic is what relates to specific individual beings’ (2007: 33).

We are attempting to communicate, but no communication between us can abolish our fundamental difference. If you die, it is not my death. You and I are *discontinuous* beings. (2001: 12, original emphasis)

This is what Nancy calls the ‘shared finitude’ of being. This lack of continuity or completion (in another) makes and remakes community itself. We share difference in common with others, ‘where truly to share is to share only a “lack of identity”’ (Rajan 2005: 4, Nancy 1991:xxxviii). If beings were to become ‘one’ – one-with-one-another in community – then there would be no sense or possibility of communication. There would be no way of speaking to others if they were all the same, undifferentiated: there would be no discontinuity across which we communicate. If there was no ‘gap’ there would be no space that would connect as it differentiates, we’d be hemmed in with no room to move or articulate: in fact, what would be the sense of communicating? If one is one with another, that is transparent and continuous, the same-as or self-transparent-to, then there would be no gap, no communication or sharing across a gap – a gap that makes *sense* itself.¹⁰ It is in fact because ‘communion’ or ‘absolute identity’ cannot take place that enables and energises – like a ‘streaming of electricity’ (Bataille 1988: 94) – communication with others. Community ‘furnishes’ this relation (Nancy 1991). Community, being-with-others, is the spacing of the singular plural relation that makes this happen.

The whole point of the mythic and political claims of community normally conceived (bounded unit, oneness, common-being, universal identity) is that these models attempt, or appeal, to overcome this fundamental ‘finitude’. These models

¹⁰ This is differently conceived than a Hegelian ethics of community. What sustain community for Hegel, writes Gandhi, is ‘reciprocal recognition, such that I can only enter into inter-subjective or communal alliance with another to whom I recognise as myself’ (2003: 15). In this way, a Hegelian notion of community would seek to over-come or resolve the fundamental finitude that, for Nancy (and Bataille), is the possibility of existence. Mutual self-recognition in the self-other relation obliterates the fundamental finitude that spaces relations. For Hegel, the ‘negative term’ is what is overcome by a more ‘absolute idealism’ (Gasché 1986: 24) – a *a priori* totality that grounds separation between positive and negative elements (27). Hegel sought to bridge the gap (25), to overcome difference in identity and semblance. Caputo also makes this point, in reference to Derrida. Caputo writes: ‘For Hegel’s idea of unity-in-difference is archeo-teleological all the way down...Hegel is thinking of some “organic ensemble,” as Derrida says in the “Roundtable,” mediating itself into an ever higher and higher, self-spiralling unity...trumping difference with a more originary and powerful, a more gathering unity’ (Derrida & Caputo 1997: 117).

see the social vessel as fragmented and disorderly: the community needs the hold of common-values or projects, it needs this to be set right, to fulfil its destiny. By putting a common-being to work (Norris 2000), the underlying unity (that supposedly underlies the group) can be restored to order (ibid: 221). The problem, though, is that to lose incompleteness, to lose the *'in* of being-*in*-common, the *with* of being-*with*' (Nancy 2000: 31) that spaces relations, is to invite domination and totality, in other words, such a thinking reduces the community to a universal thing, to an object, to a semblance of identity. Community, under this model, becomes an object to manage, to decipher, to reduce to an underlying essence that would repair or overcome (by totalising) that fundamental finitude. It is in this way that one could speak of the community itself, could work out and work over the relations that make an experience of community possible. Contrary to this, Nancy highlights movement between one and another as such, he wants to think the relation as *pivotal*. In this way, community is not something we produce, 'we do not make it happen', as Secomb writes, rather 'it enables our becoming' (Secomb 2000: 140) by turning us outwards towards others.

With these kinds of questions in mind Christopher Fynsk (1991) writes in his foreword to Nancy's *The Inoperative Community* that:

...for the purpose of these initial remarks on Nancy's philosophical practice, let it suffice to say that community names a relation that cannot be thought as a subsistent ground or common measure for a "being-in-common."

While a singular being may come to its existence as a subject only in this relation (and it is crucial, in a political perspective, to note that Nancy thus starts from the *relation* and not from the solitary individual), this community "ground" or condition of existence is an unoblatable differential relation that "is" only in and by its multiple singular articulation (though it is always irreducible to these) and thus differs constantly from itself. (x)

To think existence is necessarily to think the relation, as Nancy suggests, 'a singular being...only through its extension...only by exposing it to an outside. This outside

is in its turn nothing other than the exposition of another...singularity' (1991: 29). In other words, an individual comes to exist, or is co-present with others; one cannot exist in isolation or beyond the relation with (many) others.¹¹ Thus, when Nancy states that: 'The relation is contemporaneous with the singularities' (1997: 71), what he means, is that, there is not a community that pre-exists and dolls out relationships, rather community happens as the movement, or singularisation, of relationships as such. One has already emerged co-existentially with others. Thus existence is *ex*-istence (Blanchot 1988: 6), and the 'inner experience' (of being) is also and already a movement to others, to the outside of 'self'.¹² 'We happen', Nancy writes, 'as the opening itself, the dangerous fault line of a rupture' (2000: xii). Existence happens in this movement (what Nancy, following Bataille, calls an 'ecstatic' sharing) towards an outside. On the edge of ourselves we become; this is what is pivotal about community. The relation with another is this movement, this movement that sets us into motion; it is thus a relation without self-retreat or enclosure. (Hence, a community without a solidifying identity, a community without a common-being, but rather, *being-in-common*.) This relation is 'excessive,' 'ecstatic,'

¹¹ Judith Butler (2005) has argued something similar in her recent book *Giving an Account of Oneself*. She argues that, 'the "I" has no story of its own that is not also the story of a relation – or a set of relations – to a set of norms...The "I" is always to some extent dispossessed [of its singularity] by the social conditions of its emergence' (8). The conditions for the emergence of the subject is a relation to what is properly not one's own but that exist in relation to others. We can also hear in this thought the echo of Bourdieu. The subject (the site of the *habitus*), emerges because one's dispositions, habits and expectations are determined by and in relation to an objective field of relations. This field of relations are in turn adjusted to the demands and work of the *habitus* (Bourdieu 1977, 1990). I cite this to show that this question of the relation between the individual/subject/singular/habitus and the common/social/general/field, is a consistent area of concern for western thought.

¹² Nancy here is drawing on Bataille's work. The full quote is: 'This is why the "inner experience" of which Bataille speaks', writes Nancy, 'is in no way "interior" or "subjective," but is indissociable from the experience of this relation to an incommensurable outside. 'Only community', continues Nancy, 'furnishes this relation its spacing, its rhythm' (1991: 18). Bataille is an important thinker for both Blanchot in *The Unavowable Community* and Nancy in *The Inoperative Community*. One of the key notions both thinkers draw from Bataille is that community happens, or is opened up, by an exposure to death (Nancy 1991: 14-18). Bataille informs us, as Nancy quotes him, that: 'If it sees its fellow-being die, a living being can subsist only *outside itself*...Each one of us is then driven out of the confines of his person and loses himself as much as possible in the community of his fellow creatures.' (Bataille 1970: 245-46, quoted in Nancy (1991: 15-16). The death of the other exposes the limit of being; death exposes the discontinuity or 'separateness' between singular beings. The other's death is not my own and it is this that exposes us to separateness (that is, the other is different to me); we cannot share in the other's death in an immanent nor absolute way, thus exposing our own, and the other's, finitude. There is no 'communion' between the living and the dead and this opens the space of community – we lose ourselves in others because death exposes us to too much. Thus, community spaces the relations that connect 'discontinuous beings' (Bataille 2001: 12), or as Nancy puts it: 'community is the presentation of its members of their mortal truth...It is the presentation of the finitude and the irredeemable excess that make up finite being: its death, but also its birth, and only the community can present me my birth, and with it the impossibility of my reliving it, as well as the impossibility of my crossing over into my death' (Nancy 1991: 15).

and ‘incommensurable’, in that, the others’ work extends beyond ‘my’ comprehension, there is no place to find myself alone (1997:71). As Nancy indicates, in a move reminiscent of Levinas, existence emerges because “‘my’ face [is] always exposed to others, always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing myself’ (1991: xxxvii).

In place of a thought of community as the presentation of an essence (something that could be centred and put to work in the name of ‘the people’), we have a going towards another, a sharing of a lack of essence together. There is only this opening and exposure of a difficult limit, of a lack of a common ideal and of communicating this absence in-common with others (1991: xxxviii).

So here, what works and agitates community is a paradoxical, to use Blanchot (1988) term, ‘*unworking*’: in that community takes as its work the ‘*unworking*’ of a total, unified, or absolute presentation (we could think here of a subject or an ideal). Community works because of this absence of communion. Community works to keep the *in-common* exposed to difference, *unworking* totality: working difference as the basis for being in common. It is this rather awkward and difficult place that marks one way to think about the possibility of being-in-common with others, of thinking community. Community as the working of difference-in-common. In a simple way we could say that community works against all becoming the same: it keeps difference working as the condition of being-in-common.

Something like being on an accidental bus (kangaroos, a cow one night on the way to Mt Newman, a woman at pay-back time on ‘the flat’¹³ wielding a stick) that moves from place to place, from moment to moment, opening connections and vistas and whose name is creased and folded and bent towards singular and plural expositions.

From the general to the particular

¹³ The place where traditional business takes place at Bondini (the old mission, 5km from Wiluna).

Something becomes possible in a community because one (an individual) is shared by and shares in the community (Nancy 1991: 26). The opening of anthropology in general and ethnography in particular begins here in this sharing of community; of being called into existence and recognition by the work of others, of sharing something common and something different with others. It seems that the only possibility of doing anthropological work is being in community with others, and of taking this possibility *as its work*. Anthropology is not ‘self-sufficient’, but actively seeks exposure to the work of others as the condition of its work. *Anthropology takes as its work, the exposure to the work of others*. Anthropology turns towards others, this is its mode of activity. Yet, if this is so, anthropological work must also partake in the difficulty of this work of being-in-community, the difficulty of responding to what it means to be in relation to others without calling upon an ideal or essential identity to found and represent this process. Could we, in fact, frame the whole history of anthropology as responding and grappling with this question of what it means to be in relation to others? Levi-Strauss’ (1963) anthropology as ‘a general theory of relations’. But, again the general is threatening to obliterate the particular, and so we must return to a specific example.

The introductory pages of many ethnographies begin with a response to community. For example, Deborah Bird Rose writes that:

Within a few months of arriving in Australia [from North America] I was in an Aboriginal community, and I would stay in that region, the Victoria River District, for years, returning regularly. Aboriginal people took me into their homes, taught me about country, sites, Dreamings, history and kinship with nature and with humans. As a new Australian, I was socialised into the country, the history, and the culture by Aboriginal people in the first instance. Their teachings have remained primary for me, not only a matter of fidelity but equally a matter of sequence. (Rose 2004: 2)

This primary sociality – taking the relation as pivotal to the work itself – has been one of the reasons why Rose has made important ethically-oriented contributions to

Australian ethnography (I explore this in detail in the ‘ethics gathering’.) Similarly, Fred Myers begins his *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, with:

My field research with the Pintupi has always been both joyous and exhausting – and for the same reason, namely that the Pintupi have expected me to take on the obligations appropriate to community membership. This has been true from the beginning. (1986: 7)

We could take a radical, if somewhat flippant, stance here, and say that the question of community is the question that all ethnography begins with – that it must engage with at a primary level. It is the question of how to respond to the work of others that is both exhausting and joyous at once. Anthropology begins and continues to be possible, because one becomes part, however minimally, of a community – its sharing, its spacing and rhythm: one shares in and is shared by the community.

But there is also something else going on. Pintupi people, people at Yarralin (where Rose does her work), are *working* on Myers and Rose. What kind of work are they doing? What kind of *insistence, imperative, exposure*, is going on? I consider this in detail (referring to Rose) in the ‘ethics gathering’ and (drawing upon Myers) in the ‘community gathering’. For now, it just remains a thought, a questioning, a kind of appeal, or agitation. Exhaustion. Why exhaustion? Could it be that one is stretched, extended perhaps, beyond the retreat of an enclosed positioning, or a self-centred identity? Tuned and turned again to the outside, to another without rest? Unable to find a position ‘that would no longer be exposed’ to the work of others (Nancy 1991: xxxviii)? Is anthropology this work, this lack of retreat, a sharing of this with others? Of not being able to stand back, as if from afar; of being moved by others without rest?

From the particular to the general

In attempting to characterise what constitutes postmodern anthropological work, George Marcus has identified ‘three key features’. The first he identifies as the problem of ‘cultural translation’, that is, that ‘ethnography never fully assimilates difference’ there is always a ‘surplus of difference’ that cannot be accounted for, nor exhaustively explained. (1995: 5-6) The second premise of postmodernist anthropology is that there is ‘no possibility of fixed, final, or monologically authoritative meaning’ within ethnography (6). And lastly, that, ‘The postmodern object of study is ultimately mobile and multiply situated’ (6-7). Marcus’s definitions are useful and perceptive, however it is not my intention to evaluate the relative importance of these definitions nor do I want to consider what constitutes postmodern anthropological work. What I want to focus on is the first condition for postmodernist anthropological work, and I want to focus particularly on something that Marcus identifies below (and on which I place emphasis). He writes that:

In any attempt to interpret or explain another cultural subject, a surplus of difference always remains, *partly created by the process of ethnographic communication itself.* (6)

What I think is interesting here is that ethnographic communication is opened up by an exposure to difference that cannot be unified (this follows my argument about community). The basis, then, for postmodern anthropological work is a kind of fragmentation of a unitarian meaning, a resistance to totality, to an objective relation to others. Of course this is not the failure of anthropology as a rigorous discipline, but perhaps it could be said, drawing on deconstructive language, that it is a constitutive condition of its possibility; an engagement with difference that cannot exhaustively be accounted for. In the absence of a communion or sameness between subject/object, self/other, the western/non-western, there is work, there is communication, there is the opening of difference. A kind of sharing of difference-in-common that cannot be totalised, that cannot be represented without a productive outside creating a surplus as the work of anthropology itself.

What I want to draw attention to, is that there is a resistance, or an *unworking* of totality (a total representation conceived in identity) as the condition of contemporary ethnographic communication. Others force an exposure to this limit; the work of being in community with others forces and resists presentation of total(ising) accounts. It could be said following Nancy that this loss of communion marks and makes anthropology itself as an exposure to community with others.

The postmodern turn of anthropology, and the postmodern turn of the humanities in general, has been how to provide the productive space for the articulation of difference beyond totality (hence, gaps, fragmentation, liminal zones, border crossings, partiality, discontinuities). In light of this, the experience of postmodern anthropology is not something to be *worked out*, managed and totalised, but rather, is an opening towards that which resists the harmonisation of differences. The postmodern experience is about working the disruptive effects of being in relation with others without ‘solidifying a logic of sameness’ (Singer 1991: 124). And this implies that ethnographic work would take place through an *articulation* between, amongst, together with a relation to others that cannot be properly incorporated, rendered, captured or written into an account. That to be exposed-to-community-as-the-work-of-anthropology is to be exposed to the work of others’ resistance or reduction to essentialist signifiers. Anthropology as an exposure to community – an exposure to the work of others – would work over and deny the possibility of any standing back as if in a total relation to others.

What is at stake here is that (ethnographic) communication is possible and vital (in the full sense of this word) *because it interrupts* the myth of a continuity, transparency or translation between things (world and concept, self and other, individual and community, here and there). What is possible in place of this is *an exposure*, a touching and a coupling between things. What we have instead of communion is *communication* where one *shares up* what one knows of the goings on of the world, sharing this with others, of touching upon and being touched by the world (Nancy 1997: 10). An exposure to the sense of things worked out in-common, in-difference-together-with-others, ‘comparing’, sharing in, being shared by (Nancy

1991: 26) this work of community. A kind of restless, exhaustive work beyond absolute determination, where others, and the world, interrupts a self-secure presentation. The exhaustion, the joy, of ethnographic work. This seems highly relevant to anthropological theory. Could we take this *unworking* as the work of anthropology, an exposure to others in community, working this as the work? Nancy evokes this coupling between things (self/other, individual/social, world/concept) through playing on the meaning of *articulation*¹⁴:

By itself articulation is only a juncture, or more exactly the play of the juncture: what takes place where different pieces touch each other without fusing together, where they slide, pivot, or tumble over one another, one at the limit of the other – exactly at its limit – where these singular and distinct pieces fold or stiffen, flex or tense themselves together and through one another, unto one another, without this mutual *play* – which always remains, at the same time, a play *between* them - ever forming into the substance of the higher power of a Whole. (1991: 76)

Anthropology is in a unique position to articulate this, in that it actively seeks out the work of others in order to do its work, it pivots on this work. The problem though would be how to keep the hinge, the linkage point of the relation between two things working without fusing, without the relation becoming ossified; in short, how to keep the relation working, resisting, *unworking* totality. The problem, then, that this thesis turns, slides, and tumbles upon is: how to stay with the relation. How to stay with the work others do to expose other turnings, other rhythms of the world as the condition of the work. A work that must necessarily resist codification, management and objective descriptions of others, must in fact, necessarily work against these things as its work.

¹⁴ The notion of ‘articulation’ has a strong presence in British cultural studies and in Stuart Hall’s thinking. James Clifford described the use of ‘articulation’ in this tradition well: ‘Articulation is the political connecting and disconnecting, the hooking and unhooking of elements – the sense that any socio-cultural ensemble that presents itself to us as whole is actually a set of historical connections and disconnections. A set of elements have been combined to make a cultural body, which is also a process of disconnection, through actively sustained antagonisms. Articulations and disarticulations are constant processes in the making and remaking of cultures’ (2003: 45). This is the sense of ‘articulation’ that I am using here, but is it one I get from Nancy.

“Community” as rethinking the work of anthropology

Gupta and Ferguson, in their important article ‘Beyond “Culture”: Space, Identity and the Politics of Difference’ raise a number of keen insights into the nature of anthropological work. Drawing upon post-colonial theory, most notably Bhabha’s (1994) idea of the ‘cutting edge of the inter-cultural’ as the site of the inscription of difference, Gupta and Ferguson seek to problematise ‘spatialized understandings of cultural difference’ (1992: 13) that ‘incarcerates’ the other (ibid: 14, see Appadurai 1988) in discrete and isolated sites of difference. What they propose instead of ‘incarceration’,

is a willingness to interrogate, politically and historically, the apparent “given” of a world in the first place divided into “ourselves” and “others.” A first step on this road is to move beyond naturalized conceptions of spatialized “cultures” and to explore instead the production of difference within common, shared and connected spaces... (1992: 16)

This is a movement away from trying to think difference ‘itself’, which has characterised earlier anthropological approaches (that is, the community bound in-itself that the anthropologist ‘works out’ and presents), to thinking about how difference is produced through interconnection, through a relationship with others and with broader (global) economic, historical and social processes that enmesh and inscribe the world. In fact, it may be this interconnection, rather than a logic of separation and distance that makes anthropological work possible and meaningful. What could be said here, is that there is (and has always been) an exposure and communication beyond community boundaries; there is no specific community in-itself (the !Kung, the Balinese, the Trobriand Islanders) without relation to other communities or to relations of interconnection.¹⁵ Post-colonial theory provides

¹⁵ This point is made by Aijaz Ahmed (1995) in his article ‘The Politics of Literary Postcoloniality’ published in *Race and Class*. Here, among other things he wants to question the postmodern idealisation of hybridity as being a kind of authentic position of access to truth (16). He works to embed the notion of hybridity in a (more) historical frame, and shows that ‘hybridization’ is not something purely postmodern, nor ultimately

crucial ways to theorise this interconnection for it sees difference, not as something ‘found’ in a bounded community – not as something pre-given – but something that is generated through discourse, representation, knowledge and through ‘shared’ (shared in difference) historical and social processes that have compressed time, space and social experience. This temporal and localised process has dynamically permeated and dissolved, as well as produced, ‘borders’. Anthropological work has of course been enmeshed in this ‘coupling’.

What could be said is that the ‘home’ site of anthropology is one that is necessarily fragmented, exposed to, and in communication with other sites. It is this touching on exterior surfaces, this articulation between points that-do-not-commune but that produce further sites of differentiation that make it difficult, as Gupta and Ferguson note, to see ‘cultural difference as the correlate of a world of “peoples” whose separate histories wait to be bridged by the anthropologist’ (16). What is called for instead is, ‘seeing it [cultural difference] as a product of a shared historical process that differentiates the world as it connects it’ (16). In this way, Gupta and Ferguson are able to provide useful ways to think about difference as something that exists in the world only insofar as it is a site of connection and communication. They are not interested in working through difference in some appeal to a common humanity or sameness, but to keeping difference working (and in the world) as a site of communication and connection; as a site, it could be said, of community without essence, without a ‘proper’ self-grounding site beyond the site of inter-connection

‘mediated by colonialism’ (18). He writes, that the ‘cross-fertilization of cultures has always been endemic to all movements of people...and all such movements in history have involved the travel, contact, transmutation, hybridization of ideas, values and behavioural norms...Far from being specifically postmodern, physical mobilities and cross-cultural fertilisation are woven into the dynamics of historical time itself, in an unending dialectic of persistence and change, so that communities and individuals are neither mere representations of the past nor free to refashion themselves, *sui generis*, out of any clay that comes to hand.’ (1995: 18). This has been a signifying feature of postcolonial and postmodernist responses – to focus on the creative and local responses to broader trans-cultural forces; theorists have shown that cultures are intrinsically ‘hybrid’ and that this is not only a ‘modern’ phenomenon but one that pre-existed colonialism. Levi-Strauss puts it like this in a conversation gathered in *Assessing Anthropology*: ‘The term [monocultural] is meaningless, because there never has been such a society. All cultures are the result of a mishmash, borrowing, mixtures that have occurred, though at different rates, ever since the beginning of time. Because of the way it is formed, each society is multicultural and over the centuries has arrived at its own original synthesis. Each will hold more or less rigidity to this mixture that forms its culture at a given moment.’ Levi-Strauss (1994: 424).

and communication, of sharing a lack of (absolute) identity together, and sharing this as the ground of community, communication and of anthropology.

Abandoning objectivity

Gupta and Ferguson's work also exists in relation to an anthropological community; their work interrupts, returns and departs from the earlier work of the 'writing culture school'.¹⁶ What the writing culture school made 'us' think about was not only 'the situated nature of other peoples realities and social worlds' but that 'we must finally reject any professional claim to being the purveyors of unmediated accounts of objective "truths"' (Dawson et al 1997b: 5). To abandon objectivity is not to abandon the project of anthropology, it merely changes its condition of possibility. One-way of thinking this condition after 'writing culture' is to say that anthropology (following Marcus) is possible and vital precisely because it cannot return, cannot be written, without exposure to a surplus of difference. A surplus of difference moreover, that cannot be wholly accounted for, as Marcus illustrated before. I would argue that this movement in theory, this change in the way anthropologists think about what they do, was made possible and necessary because of a reflection on the dynamics of being exposed to community. A kind of sentience to the ethics and politics of what it means to be exposed to the work of others – of how to respond to this responsibly.

To 'lose' objectivity, and the will to reveal an 'inner logic' that reveals a total system, is to open anthropology to an exposure of community through the interruption of the mythic (anthropological) claims of a community-bound-up-in-itself. The work of anthropology, after writing culture, is no longer the overcoming or repairing of differences, but working difference as a site of connection and communication in the sense that Gupta and Ferguson developed.

¹⁶ This is an awkward term for describing the unique contributions of each author who contributed to the books *Writing Culture* (Clifford & Marcus 1986) and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique* (Marcus and Fischer 1986). This being said, I will be using the shorthand 'writing culture' as a way to signal the radical break that came with this work. The impact of these works and the impact these authors have had on anthropology theory has been marked.

‘Writing culture’ showed us that to do anthropology is to be exposed to a difference that resists and exceeds representation. This is an exposure to difference that interrupts an account that would gather ‘the Trobrianders,’ ‘the Nuer,’ ‘the Martu’ into an objective, detached, ideal account: it puts the grounding of experience (of community) and the difficulty of ‘translating’ this back into anthropological work. As Clifford explains:

By representing the Nuer, the Trobrianders, or the Balinese as whole subjects, sources of meaningful intention, the ethnographer transforms the research situation’s ambiguities and diversity of meaning into an integrated portrait...The dialogical, situational aspect of ethnographic interpretation tend to be banished from the final representative text. (1983: 132)

What is ultimately banished, this is what I am trying to say, is an experience of community, a primary exposure and responsibility to, and because of, the work of others. The resolved text banishes community. The writing process becomes one of repairing or overcoming, better still transcending, finitude. This repair work replaces the experience of community (situational, finite, diverse, discontinuous) with the description of the community itself (bounded, whole, same). The experience of community – dialogic, situational, contingent on the work and unique voices and affect of others – is banished, is in fact *worked out*. A foundational figure ‘the Nuer, the Trobrianders’ is found and clarified in order to reveal the underlying unity of the group. This is something that Kathleen Stewart calls a ‘disciplinary amnesia that replaces real space and time with a classificatory, tabular space’ (1996: 71). The result Stewart argues, drawing upon Fabian (1983), is ‘a radically taxonomic model of culture that sees it as a process of selection and classification rather than a mode of creation and production’ (1996: 71). What is involved here, is not only a banishing of the experience of community but also a yearning and a nostalgia for an ‘archaic’ ‘native’ community; a community that could be harmonised into a common substance that could be transparent to itself, that could gather and render finite individuals into an undifferentiated whole; a community that is totalised and managed as one thing (see ‘gathering three: community’).

Perhaps these two moves, the banishing/the yearning, are one and the same? It is by banishing the experience of community that makes possible a kind of nostalgic relation to representing cultures (villages as well as nations) as wholes, essences, as self-grounding points of gathering-together-without-difference. A process that replaces the real space time sharing of community with classification, nostalgia and taxonomic models. It replaces the assignation and agitation of community with a will for management and totalisation.¹⁷ Community as something to overcome, rather than to stay with and let happen.

The first move of the ‘writing culture school’ was to ground the possibility of ethnographic work in an experience of community. The radical move however, was how not to reduce or replace the experience of community with a total representation *of the community itself*. (A kind of being-thrown into heterogeneity where finite existences are ‘coextensive’ (Nancy 1991: xxxvii), being exposed to the work of singularities; taking this as the (postmodern) work.) Experience (of community) became the possibility of communicating difference and resisting totalisation, working over ‘objective’ relations to others: ethnographic work became fragmentary, partial, it worked over a narrative of the same. It worked a place for a thought of difference as the site of being-in-common. This is discussed further in ‘gathering one: event’.

This is why the kind of thinking presented in this opening is important. What I believe it does is respond to, and attempt to articulate, a troubling, an agitation and a difficulty that cannot be resolved or ‘worked out’, nor be ‘properly’ responded to, but is, *because of this*, the site of interconnection, communication, and, this is what I am trying to say, community. It is a chance, a possibility, a demand for thinking. I am attempting to give some sense of what it means to be in relation to others and what it would mean to think ‘community’ as the condition of ethnographic work. I

¹⁷ I draw the sense of ‘management and totalisation’ from Fred Dallmayr’s excellent article ‘An Inoperative Global Community’ (1997: 178).

believe, therefore, that there is a chance here to say something significant about community, anthropology, Ululla and being in Australia.

With this in mind it is time to try to follow the force of what others make possible; the force, the questioning, the agitation that made this work possible.

Gaining a sense of community

How does a sense of community take hold? Cliffy Cutter, one of the first of the Jackman family (Cliffy's mother is a Jackman) to come to stay at Ululla in the early 1980s, talks about something like this below. When I spoke to him he was in prison. He would ring Ululla up every few days for a chat:

'I like Ululla, it's a good place. I started from Meeka (Meekatharra – a town 170km away) long time ago, Helen and Brett still a child (Don's two children), twelve or thirteen bit younger, you know, I's living and working out there. Don ended up askin' if all my family could come out, so we did, made it a home. I like the place. I got used to the place when I first started. Lot's of good hunting. I got to know Don really well. Got a lot of respect for Don, Helen, Brett, all the people that stay out there. You, Nicki – all that mob. Jackmans came a bit later – made it their home. It's good to get away from Wiluna, or Cue, Meeka [Meekatharra]. Always Ululla there, you see, everyone happy living together. No problems out there, everyone gets along, is good to another.'

I ask, 'Do you miss it when in prison?'

'Yeah, all the time, a lot. That's why I always ask Helen about the weather, or what's been happening, who's around, who's out bush. I miss hunting, and nice warm fires, a cup of tea, telling stories with family – I miss that. Think about it all the time.'

He reflects that, 'When I go back to Cue, Ululla still a home, first place, I like Ululla, there – I hope you get something out of ten minutes. Lot's of memories, nana, aunties we lost – still good to go out there. Bit of history, lots of memory out there, like a home.'

‘Ngarru (sorry). Yeah it’s a sad place as well,’ I say.

I ask, ‘What about all the white fellas that come here?’

‘It’s good to meet people (white fellas), that come out, that know Don and Helen, like when you came out, got used to the place and all the people there. That’s really a good thing. Lot better if more and more people come and learn about that place, whitefellas and that.’

‘Do you think of Ululla as home?’

‘I might be in jail, living somewhere else, Cue, but I still think of Ululla as *a* home – its always there for me. Alright I better go and get a feed, I hope it was useful, gave you something, see ya.’

I don’t think I’m being bold or original or romantic in saying that it is place that works because of a kind of ‘sovereignty of sharing’ (Nancy 1991:25), not because of a closure or exclusion but through a kind of exposure to others that resists fusion into a bounded identity. It works because of constant return and departure, that *is* because of this movement and openness to an outside (this point cannot be downplayed), ‘it is always there for me’, even though ‘I might be...living somewhere else.’ Community as the kind of place that calls you back and on again because family is there. ‘Always Ululla there, you see...’ But Ululla is not *the* community itself, it is simply a node in a network, where singular relations come into contact, for a long time, for a short time, depending on the things going on with the individuals at Ululla and elsewhere. Sharing, spacing, one’s relations to others (Nancy 1991:26).

Gail Jackman suggests something similar:

‘Do you miss it when you are away?’ I ask.

‘I miss Ululla, come back home badly. I used to come and go. Come home, have a month and then go. But Ululla still draws you back home. Family’s here. Yeah.’

‘When did you come back after your first time here?’

‘I come back when Helen now, this big in the photo (using her hand as a height marker), she half grew up here. Lot’s of kids grew up here. Dukka, you know

Dukka, he half grew up here too, with Helen. (Dukka is Gail's cousin). I went to Geraldton and Northhampton, Broome, Fitzroy, Headland, Newman, all over, but I get sick of it and I want to come home. I still want to come home. I miss home. I want to eat bush-tucker, I miss all that, going out hunting, looking for emu eggs, eating good meat, you know all that.'

Memory worked, bought back because of the remembering of a photo, community remembered – 'I miss Ululla come back home badly' – because of movement, departure, being-elsewhere; community vital and affective because of this dispersal and separation and duration between Helen 'this big in a photo' and Helen now.¹⁸ Between Ululla that you always leave but always return, that draws you back home, that makes you still want to come home. A place that you're never done with, that never satisfies, is never exhausted, but that communicates, affects, calls you over and back and then on again, that this happens because family is there. It touches and nudges and agitates, enables one to move again. Even against the odds, rejoining Gail and now with Irene:

'Never mind we got no proper house.'

Irene adds, 'It doesn't matter, they all right. We still stay here.'

Gail continues, 'It gets flood sometimes, comes right up here, it drains quick, never mind we still come home. Boggy road, no matter, still come home. When you are in another town, you tell people stories, what you've been doing there. People want to know where Ululla is. But they still get lost if they try and get here.' (Irene and Gail laughing).

What are the chances, the risks, the negotiations, *the exposure*, of deciding to make country that is not one's own the home site of community? What are the dynamics of trying to work a space for community in a place started up by a whitefella? What makes that possible, necessary, workable? How not to get bogged down in

¹⁸ Helen was living at Ululla during the time of this research (2005). She works as an artist and was living at Ululla after living in Edinburgh for two years. She now runs the art space/gallery in town (Wiluna). Helen grew up mostly in Meekatharra (small town 170km away), where she lived with her mother, and Ululla where she lived with her father, Don.

communitarian vision or plans of management, control and prescription? How to live in a place that's 'got no proper house,' that 'gets flood sometimes'. How to travel on the roads that leave and take away, and that connect and separate Ululla from other places and sites for being-in-common with others? And if exposed to this kind of place and this site of community what then becomes possible in terms of response? If one is released from 'traditional' responses to community – community as relation between blood and soil, bounded togetherness, 'an essence that is shared out like a particular ingredient' (Nancy 1991: 33) as 'total system' 'inner logic' and 'deeper structure' – what kind of writing and orientation could then work an opening into community?

One such possibility is a *community exposed writing*, a writing that touches, and encounters and fragments; that withdraws and interrupts. A writing that leaves and departs as much as it returns home. A writing that stays open and works a space for the 'innumerable other things that are happening, that remain unrecognised and ungathered by the concepts' as Stewart evocatively put it (2003b: 1). A writing that is a *clinamen* – an inclination 'one towards an other' (Nancy 1991: 3): writing as a coextensive spacing and rhythm open to the world and to the work of others. A writing that encounters things and spaces and experiences, as the fact of community. As Cliffy said before: 'I miss hunting, and nice warm fires, a cup of tea, telling stories with family – I miss that.' The fire has force to gather; it proliferates stories, sharing, memory. Stories have force to create little fires and to gather people around, so does hunting, so does a billy¹⁹ of tea. If writing is to respond to this force of community, then it must be written as a relation and as a going towards these gatherings of people and things and forces – tuned to the outside and to the other things going on. What there is in a community exposed writing is a primacy of relation between people, things and affects. There is only a relation and never a narrative that could bind and consolidate these forces into one unitary thing. What this writing (in this thesis) must do is trace, show the affect of the relation, of what inclines people towards each other and towards things and little events, cups of tea,

¹⁹ A pot, or can used to boil water on a fire.

hunting trips, boggy roads, to 'looking for emu eggs, eating good meat, you know all that.' That kind of work of community.

An emu egg trip gathers people on the back of the station ute²⁰ along with blankets and mattresses, digging sticks, a billy, dogs, a box of matches. There is a travelling on the little station tracks, then a stopping. Everyone breaks into little groups, leaving the ute, and walking into the country where it is good for emu eggs. People find emu tracks that sometimes lead to eggs, are chased by an emu (sometimes), are dispersed for a moment, rejoin and walk back to the ute, their tracks converging from all that vast sandplain country, at this site. There will be a fire, a sharing, a cup of tea. People on blankets and reclining on mattresses, around little stacks of emu eggs. Kids claiming and organising the eggs as their own: *This mine's one. Shame on you! That's not yours.* Things will be gathered together again, hauled onto the flat bed back of the ute, a travelling again back on the road that converges with others at Ululla; people's arms and legs, bodies, touching and merging with the bumps and turns of the road, thrown together and then apart, the billy and digging sticks clattering on the floor. Community, this is what I am arguing, is made because of these little events that gather people and things – there is a dispersal, finding things, encountering surprises, a coming back together, a sharing, a constant departure and return from Ululla. Stories, events and a place proliferate because of such things. Is it needless to say that this is a writing that does not look to tie things down? But to keep things, bodies, ideas, experiences, rattling and rolling as if on the back of an old ute, forming and articulating on/with forces and contingencies that are encountered.

Thus, an orientation, a *clinamen* towards community, comes through infinite networks of extensions and connections across time and space; there is no one point, or ground, or instance, or body, that could be isolated, made into an essence, made to represent its own immanent self-sufficient unity. There is always this moving between, of not finding solace or sustenance in what there is. There is instead an 'incompletion of sharing' (Nancy 1991: 35) that works over the possibility

²⁰ A pick-up truck.

of staying put for good, a kind of weaving in-between and ‘through the gaps and strands of culture’ as Paul Carter says (2004: 15). Fleshing out little encounters and meetings that are the stuff of communities: this constant orientation towards where others’ gather. ‘Orientation,’ Serres writes, ‘can thus be said to be originary, invariable, irreducible, so constantly physical that it becomes metaphysical’ (2000: 15). And community happens because of this physical/metaphysical orientation. It is a spacing, a rhythm, a coextensive mode of being that works over a settled site of unity or oneness, weaving in and out and between, producing sites of intensity, life, moving people on, and together, at once towards fires and stories and a place to sit down and have a cup of tea; a place to share something of one’s experience of the world. There is something like an experience of community in this, a kind of force, or perhaps a sense – something that happens to us beyond absolute tying down. Indeed, Nancy talks here of community not as something we have, but as an experience that makes us be (1991: 26).

This is what I want to say: that there is no clear space for a narrative that could be in-itself not exposed to the work of others, and objects and spaces and feelings, (orienting itself constantly through a *clinamen*). It rejects a demand for ‘clear, unambiguous expression’ because this is what, as Levine writes, ‘advances our capabilities for gaining cognitive [and operational] mastery of the world’; this is what writing community must write against and resist at all points, it must be creative and affective (Levine 1985: 39, quoted in Carter 2004: 9-10). If writing is to respond to the world, to experience and to the work of others, it must space itself, condition itself, take its time in relation to that which it is exposed and to that which it works. Namely being-in-common and exposed to others, to being oriented through the positions that others take, as a physics and as a metaphysics. And this entails a duration of writing across and between time(s) and space(s); between little events and everyday rituals that interrupt, intersect, rejoin and produce the community, the writing; a writing ‘only in so far as it goes from one point to another...’ (Nancy 2000: 5). This is to think of writing ‘as if the writing were itself a form of life’ (Stewart 2005: 1016). What is involved is an interruption of a clear and unambiguous and safe narrative, an interruption that works openings and releases

thoughts, much like the lawless and mutinous screeching of the cockatoos, interrupting and working an opening.

Coming back from a walk around ‘the block,’ Shelia sang out to me. She was sitting down with Irene, waiting for the rest of the family to come back from hunting. *Might get some kuka* (meat, food), *marlu* (kangaroo), she said. I said, as a rather lame attempt at a joke, *that there weren’t much marlu around now, you might have to start eating those cockies*, pointing to the old windmill that gathered a flock of cockatoos every sunset. *That one alright*, replied Shelia. Irene said that as kids they used to use nets to catch spinifex pigeons at Karalundi. Karalundi is a Seventh Day Adventist mission that Shelia and Irene had been taken to as kids. It is just out of Meekatharra, about 200km away. Being a Seventh Day Adventist mission, no one was allowed to eat meat. Then Shelia and Irene told me, for a good half an hour, about all the bush tucker they used to get in order to balance out their diet. They told me of the old truck that used to come looking for hungry little kids who had escaped the mission’s boundaries. They told stories *of getting biggest mob of bunka* (goanna) and how they’d hide and cook it out bush. They told me of times that their parents would come and sneak them little bits of meat (kangaroo), wrapped up in bits of canvas or cloth. They remembered all the porkeypine (echidna), lungi (witchetty grubs), bimba (tree sap), honey ants and yams that they used to find. They told me of themselves as kids hiding and cooking in the bush. I thought of that ominous truck driving around. ‘*Kulo* (wait),’ said Shelia. The three of us pricked our ears to the west, to the setting sun. *That’s them now*, it was the old ute coming back, it rattled and chuckled and creaked up to the camp. There was a marlu and a bunka on the back. People got to work, got the fire ready, got the kangaroo ready, prepared the bunka to cook in the ground. The cockatoos, the event for this little story, squawked away, bobbed up and down, exposed their brilliant pink chests riotously against the setting sky.



If we are to write community then I think we have to respond to *what it is like to be in community, which is something that one feels and is exposed to and that positions one in relation to others, to forces and at times to cockatoos*, that are almost always seen in flocks and gatherings, little communities that announce their presence to all those around, move on elsewhere, return some other time to ravish and to be ecstatic.

Community is not an objective realm above the level of practices, community is not a concept, but something that happen, that is happening. Community is not something that one can describe in isolation from the other things going on, things that interrupt and produce, that produces by interrupting, riotously at times, the possibility of encounter, conversation, sharing a meal. The old ute, a gun and a dead aim take their role in producing those ecstatic moments of community sharing and generosity as much as discourse, conversation, a warm fire. The site of gathering and sharing - an old metal drum, rescued from the tip, cut in half holding the hearth, that glows red against the night, rusted like the earth, heating an old fruit tin with-a-fencing-wire-handle, holding a rolling-black-boil-of-water-and-tea – cannot

be rejected in favour of a clear and transparent narrative without the role of things and spaces and objects gathering people together and sharing what is gathered; talk, tea, marlu, bunka, warmth, light, feeling connected to others, all rolling and stewing together. We gather around these things because they share out our being in common-together, if just for a moment.

And what is glimpsed in the fading echo of the story, or the speaker's voice that rejoins the silent arrangement of objects – chairs, fire, moonlight or a little gathering under the shade of the tree – is the residue of community, its trace, and affect, it lingers on, envelopes the listeners and produces the possibility for future moments of connection. If we are to write this then one must write with encounters, interruption, suspension and little stories that find their place in the meeting places of community.²¹ It must follow, weave, knot around these gathering strands.

The work to come

What I am attempting to do is to respond to what it means to be in community, to a gain a sense of this as a kind of orientation to transform anthropology (a thesis has to have its bold gestures). Within each 'gathering' there are ethnographic events; the writing surrounds and heads for these moment. This writing is informed and interrupted by the event, an event of 'community', that produces possibilities, forces opening and gaps, makes theory accountable to a particular social and temporal location. I try to sense the force of the relation as a kind of event that moves and transforms thought. A kind of unheard insistence that happens whenever people gather around and share up what they know of the goings on of the world.

This thesis follows and envelops these moments through a writing exposed to 'community' – to the work of others – that works a space to touch the outer limits of what it may mean to be in community with others in contemporary Australia. This is what the people at Ululla so powerfully made clear: an experience of

²¹ Nancy writes that if we are to write community then this entails a writing that 'encounters interruption, fragmentation and suspension' (Nancy 1991: 31).

community and a thought of community that works against objective characterisation. An insistence to stay with conjunctive relations (James 1976), with the things that happen, to go with this.

All the time what is working and producing, working-over and forming the thesis is a consistent relation to: a) things that happen with the 'Ululla mob', b) Nancy and philosophy in general, c) and anthropological theory. There is thus a kind of general and persistent shifting between as a way to read each with, and transform, the other. I see this as the responsible way to say something about Ululla, philosophy and anthropology.

articulation.

So let's now get back there to this present

For now what I want to do is to tell a story. It's a story about getting to Ululla. It tries to be open to the lateral, it interrupts itself, it moves back and forth, it experiments with the chance to write what Stephen Muecke calls 'the fragmentary structures of the "now" that the investigating subject inhabits' (2004a: 208), where no stable or unmediated position is possible – where one is thrown towards contact, touching, befalling, towards, this is what I am arguing, community. Community as a place of contact, exposure: a rhythm and spacing of the relation, a structure of the 'now'. What we must do (as writers, as people who engage with others) is trace those contingent lines of flight that enable an experience of community. A particularly human experience that takes place in human time and that affects one's relation to others – it implodes horizons by opening them up. Effects are produced and perceptions are transformed.

I want to think of community as the place of interruption: to-be-with-others is to be taken off, shown something else. Another shares up a unique turning of the world. This is what I mean by community: an exposure to unique turnings of the world that others give light to trace, a kind of sentience to the work of another, a listening and being-with the rhythms that happen in community. As Alphonso Lingis imagines, in his recent book *First Person Singular*, 'When we walk, we set up a certain gait according to the intensity of our energy or languor, but our stride or amble takes up the rhythm of the rocky or sandy ground and that of the waves against the beach. It catches on to the pace of a companion' (2007: 13). Community as a kind of place where we catch on to the pace of a another; that happening, that hurries us along or pulls us up, that kind of interruption and spacing and energy.

So I'm driving to Ululla, it's about two and a half hours from Meekatharra, I'm following Don's truck, or more particularly the dust storm that cyclones behind him. I can smell the dust as I write this, feel the road's bumps, the sway of my car. The road is wet in parts, and every now and again we come across huge puddles in the road, we slow down and churn through the mud. The country must have looked great, it always looked great after rain. But this is something I came to appreciate much later on, once I had a more intimate understanding, a keener set of eyes to focus on the delicate manifestations of semi-desert flora. I remember stopping on the side of the road. The place we stopped at was halfway between Meekatharra and Ululla, a place we would often stop at on future journeys, though of course I didn't know that then.

Don had some lunch, which he shared with me. He offered me a cup of coffee, it was warm and weak, so much so that it startled me, but that's how he had it. 'It was so weak it was helpless', but that was something my grandfather used to say, or so my Dad recalls that I recalled both then and now, once uttered out aloud but never spoken by me at that moment. Someone else's statement recalled; a startling reflex that takes me off, then and now, to other places, to other voices. And now anytime I have warm and weak coffee it reminds me of Don, and now because of writing this I am reminded that the relationship between signifier and signified is never guaranteed, is arbitrary, makes no implicit sense just like a cup of coffee standing in for Don, his place in my memory reaffirmed, produced, called to action by a thousand imperfect signifiers. Signifiers that take one away towards others; towards other communal sites that gather meaning and sense in layers of density. A strange non-event this warm cup of coffee.

Where we had stopped was the flat, smooth space before the abrupt rim of a plateau. Where we had stopped was the top of a 'breakaway' or a 'jump up', which the road went directly over. 'Breakaway' country is where a rock strata forms a band, interrupts a line, unsettles a plateau in a moment of intensity. It's hard to discern if there are many plateaus or just one plateau. Perhaps the 'breakaways' are the strata that interrupt a vast single plateau, or perhaps they are the intense

signifiers of the becoming of a thousand plateaus. It was from this place that Don first showed me Ululla. You get a good view from this intense moment that we were standing on. You can see for miles, and you can see plains and plateaus and other breakaways, joining, dissolving, beginning, endlessly to the horizon. It was from here that Don showed me the community. He waved his arm at the horizon, gestured to some hills to the south and east, and said: *Over there beyond those hills is Ululla*. What could I think, I could only imagine. We got back into the warm milieu of our machinic assemblages and drove on towards Ululla.

I have been a little sidetracked by this break, this event for coffee, on the side of the road halfway between Meekatharra and Ululla. It would seem that I have, by way of a break, an event, moved beyond and before this present of my first trip to Ululla. So let's, now, get back there to this present.

The overwhelming memory that I have of this first trip is that I wanted the right song to be playing on my cassette player when I rolled into Ululla. Looking back, this seems like such an absurd memory. I think it was Gillian Welch's album *Time: The Revelator* playing, and I was wishing that a particular favourite would accompany my arrival to Ululla through some combination of provenance and good management. I can't even remember if my plan happened, and it really doesn't matter now, or it matters for a different reason. But at the time I wanted to commemorate and symbolise, create a cogent link between a favourite tune and an inaugural event; I wanted to be prepared for the event, to have the contingencies under control. Above all I wanted my arrival to be memorable, eventful perhaps. I wanted a song to remember it by, to make it special, to symbolise my presence, both in the present of my arrival and for the future memory of it. A kind of soundtrack to my arrival, and an anthem for future melancholy.

But now, I don't even remember which song was playing, or even who was playing. Maybe I turned the cassette player off, too confused by the present and future and past, by event and commemoration, all those contingencies of thought contacting and slipping on one another. Yet, this overwhelming desire to represent my first

arrival is one of the strongest memories I have of first getting to Ululla. The actual remembering has been forgotten. What has been remembered was the desire to make it memorable. The actual event of arrival (the first dog barks as we rolled into Ululla? maybe that imagined glimpse from on top of the 'breakaways' an hour before was the arrival? maybe the turning off of our machines? or maybe once the dogs were silent? when do you arrive?) has been swallowed up by the commemorative and symbolic events that may have never actually taken place. All I remember now is this desire to make it memorable and it is this ritual, both now and then, that overwhelms and consumes any event of arrival.

Another event was memorable, and I remember the act rather than the commemorative desire, and it happened on the first day I arrived. I went over to what I later knew as 'Sadie mob's camp', or the 'quarters' (the old shearing quarters), to meet some of the Ululla mob—who don't really exist as a defined group, and I'm not sure who represented them at that point. I remember speaking to Daniel, who'd just got home from a day of fencing. He was standing around a fire drum with a huge enamel mug, the size of a billy, full of tea. And I remember Chris giving me an emu egg. He'd blown out the yoke, so it was hollow. He'd given it to me, I'm sure, to diffuse the obvious awkwardness we all felt. However this gift doesn't represent awkwardness, or at least not entirely because it also represents its diffusion and resolution. And now, what I remember most strongly of this first meeting is awkwardness and its diffusion, commemorated and symbolised by an emu egg.

Emu eggs are quite fascinating close up. They are speckled both blue and green, not so much bluey-green or greeny-blue, but both green and blue, depending on which speckle you focus your attention on. It's hard to say what colour they are; they are both at the same time while being only one at the one time. And this speckled memory-event and this writing, both awkward and resolved, neither nor, but both at once. Trying to stay with the happening, suspended between event and narration.

Another interruption of that event of arrival comes along. But, this one is a little more removed and comes years after contact with the community, after time and

affect have done their work. Drawing on the irregular work of Nancy, new connections and contacts becoming apparent.

What if community is a constant kind of encounter between world, between people, between things and forces, machines and trajectories, cassette players and dogs; what if the space of community is constantly interrupted and produced by endless little encounters, moments of gathering and force, just like an egg given to diffuse awkwardness. This is what I want to work as community. A warm and helpless cup of coffee that surprises and takes one off, becomes an event because it is not what one expects; thoughts forming and being formed in the process. The unexpected and the unforeseen erupts in the present, and this is what happens in community. Community as a kind of being-there. Being there to have the time to let things happen, for events to turn and knot and take-off.

Community as the space for things to happen beyond exhaustive closure: humans work this as the condition for being together. And there is a force there. The event of community as that which breaks through but that also re-inscribes lines of communication, a transforming of code, a turning of the world, as Deleuze might say; memory and imagination back and forth in an instant, knotting up and releasing and interlacing evermore stories, the occasions for yet more events. Things happen, prick the skin and agitate the mind in community, these things that follow the force of other openings. There is a force that is released, a kind of beauty and affect in being present, of being exposed to the work of people and things that force a transformation, and a working over, of a self-sufficient relation to the world. Community calls us towards another across the otherwise flat plane of existence, it interrupts other journeys, trajectories and memories; it punches a hole/whole in the smooth space of the thesis and in the ethnographic present. Community jumps out and overthrows a reliable presence and positioning, it cuts through writing. Community as the interruption of a self-sufficient relation to the world: that is community's event, a constant call to the otherwise. But how do you describe community?

In order to begin to describe this community, I want to interrupt, for a moment, that initial journey to Ululla, that journey before I ever got there, and focus on the first 'ethnographic' event – a return to Ululla in 2005, two years after I'd left there, and (now) with the intent of research. So let's now, get back, to the first ethnographic event, which comes after, I know its getting a little tedious, that inaugural driving towards community.

To be here with the explicit aim, want and desire to do research for a thesis makes being at Ululla a rather anxious experience. Any conversation seems to be imminently notable; any conversation threatens to become a cultural artifact. Sheila just got back from town. She was sitting down in Sadie's camp, which is also called 'middle camp'. She called over to me across the flat, in the soft cool evening light as I came back from a walk around the block.

Any video tonight? What sort you got?

Bush Mechanics, I reply.

It's a good one? asks Sheila.

It's mya (good, excellent), you know, it's that one from Yuendumu, when they ride around in old motor-cars and fix them Aboriginal way, I say.

You know Shelia, that one from that Alice Spring mob, says Irene.

Oh yeah, says Sheila. Sheila tells us about what's been happening in town. There was a court, a few of the extended Ululla mob had to front up. Dukka (Shelia's nephew), was there. He'd been nervous about his appearance; they made him sweat it out for longer. As is the way of the justice department out here, most of the cases were deferred until next month – perhaps a decision would be easier then. She told us about GB (Georgina Brown) who is one of the Ululla mob. She's living with a guy who has a deservedly bad reputation, *no good that one*.

We don't want him here, says Sheila.

Irene joins in, asking Sadie: *Where's that wadda (club) you got?*

Sadie replied, *it's there in the room*.

Sheila said she's got one too, and if *he comes out here, I'll knock him on the head*.

We all chuckle at the thought. Sheila told us that when she was coming from town they blew a tyre "half-way" (on the way). With no spare, they came home on the

wheel rim, feeling every bump, going slow and leaving a gouge mark in the dirt, from there, half-way, to here. Sheila said that she saw Rita Cutter (nee Jackman) in town (one of the first of the Ululla mob to come here, 15 years ago). She said that she told Rita I was interested in stories about Ululla.

She's the good one for stories, been here first time, said Shelia.

I'll have to see her before she goes back to Cue (350km away), I thought. And so the conversation flows on between Irene, Sadie, Sheila, myself and Daniel.

Daniel has just got back from work, his hands and back tired, sitting silently absorbed in his cards, playing patience. Laying out the cards into one neat row that falls and rises on the folds of a blanket. He builds up the sequence of cards to 'get out' the pack. Little stacks, falling and rising, on top of the organic ripples of a blanket.

The goat, Helen's goat (an orphaned kid that Helen, Don's daughter had reared), comes up to the camp, and jumps up on a table – everyone yells at it and the dogs get excited enough to chase it away to some pre-defined boundary of the camp. The goat hovers; circling this negotiated line in the sand, heads around the back, crosses the line and joins us at the fire. The dogs don't seem to worry, or are beyond caring; they return their heads to the dirt, their eyes to their lids. We keep a watchful eye on the goat as it keeps a hungry eye on a tin of canned spaghetti bubbling away on the fire.

We'll have to have a word with Helen about that goat, too much it's a nuisance, we don't want him coming around our camp, says Irene. *He bin eat half a pack of Daniel's cigarettes, inni Daniel?*

Daniel acknowledges from amongst his card, *yumva* (yes), linking up another sequence.

He bin arguing with Don, says Sadie, with a laugh.

Daniel asked for a replacement pack of cigarettes, Sadie was telling us, and Don replied: *Your dogs ate all my ducks.* A kind of 'potlatch' of debts, circulating out of control. There used to be twenty or so ducks that Don and I rescued from a station down the road that was packing up. They laid beautiful, big, rich eggs. They also

copulated and shat everywhere; they were a constant source of amusement and disbelief. One day when everyone was in town, they were all killed by Daniel's dogs – Or really his dog called 'Centrelink's' puppies. Centrelink²² would give birth to a litter of 10-12 rosy cheeked puppies every eight months; they'd all survive and then run amuck in a swarming pack of puppies. It was these puppies that grew up to eat the ducks.

It was a bit sad to loose all the ducks; Don came home, everyone else was in town, he found their bodies and feathers mauled and scattered all over the place. Anyway we were all laughing, Daniel as well, at Don's retort. *All right then* said Shelia, she got up, called to her dog: *Wombat*, and walked back to her camp. I did the same.

I'm thinking as I walk off, should I record this stuff - cause this is exactly what Ululla is like, people just quietly, constantly, all the time, talking about the going 'ons' in town and at Ululla. Things from the past, things happening now and the continuity and stories that join them together, a line of thought that builds up and down until its got out, exhausted for now. But, reshuffle the cards, begin again, different every time; the folds and hollows of community holding little sequences of connection, always beginning again. These little connections and sequences that happen by way of being together; the contingencies of being together, little events coalescing but never fusing into a totality, always this movement to another, another gathering takes place and moves again. Community as the space of articulation, a meeting without fusion.

Communities are made of such mundane stuff, are full of such events and contingencies. It is just everyday stuff but somehow it is more real than talking, fairly unsuccessfully as I later found out, about what Ululla 'means' to people. Maybe I was looking for some moment that would reveal the community itself,

²² The name of the national social security service.

some event perhaps that would bind it altogether. Some total fact.²³ Anyway, it was good to be back at Ululla and having little meetings, by chance and by course, by a warming fire, as the sun sank into the horizon, hearing news from town and laughing at the potlatch-like retorts of community. Such is the logic of connection and of feeling at home. And it is these kind of engagements that give Ululla that sense of place, little conversations weaving in and out amongst the community, that happen over time and place, that tie people together, from the past and for future tellings, that connect up places and people. A kind of negotiated line in the sand, or the mark of a wheel rim as it digs into the dirt – a line you can follow all the way home even if you're limping and leaning to one side, wrestling with the steering wheel that threatens to leave the trajectory towards community. Little stories that have nothing more profound than the sharing and articulating of things and experiences in common, that build up and gather density, one on top of another. Density, folds, ripples, texture, this is what I'm trying to think, not foundation, building-block, segment, object. Teasing one another or recalling moments we have shared in the past, some other ecstatic gathering and dispersal takes place. We work our difference as the basis for being-in-common. A call across the flat plane of a self-contained walk. Not the, 'Hey! You,' of the policeman, but the hey! what's been happening, come sit down, tell a story.

As I wrote this 'up' (from notes) a few days later on the verandah, Sheila, Greta (Shelia's older sister) and Ronnel (a woman in her mid-thirties from town) came up.

Too hot, said Shelia. *What that is, story now about Ululla.*

Sort of, I said. *You know that time a couple of days ago when you came back from town and blew a tyre half way, and you were telling Sadie and Irene about what's been happening in town?* I said.

Oh yeah, what I bin say, replies Sheila.

So I read out what Shelia had said. We laughed at the goat, *be too stupid* said Shelia, and at Don's retort. I said *You know how it's like these little stories that make up Ululla?*

Oh yeah, said Shelia, cutting me off at the chase with an imperative: *Any cup of tea?* I

²³ I am getting this sense of a total social fact from Marcel Mauss's (1970) 'The Gift'. Mauss proposes that, firstly, that there are such things as 'gift societies' (which are opposed, rather unconsciously, to 'modern societies') and that secondly that the gift is a 'total social phenomena' (1), upon which the whole society can be described (78). Thomas (1991) in his work *Entangled Objects* takes issue with 'Massian stereotypes of the gift'. Refer to note 52 for reference to Thomas's critique.

made her and the others a cup of tea. As we were sitting down, Greta and Ronnel were laughing. I asked Ronnel what Greta said, she was speaking in Martu wangka, which I cannot speak. Ronnel said that Greta was laughing at the emu's bum. There are two pet emus. Helen (a real humanist, in that she loves animals) had rescued them as chicks, after someone got the father for dinner,²⁴ and grew them up. The poor things had no feathers, and had very weird bums all exposed and rather grotesque, or 'gingy' (fat) as Greta said, pointing, and giving a twinkling smile. Shelia then told us about the emus that used to live here ten years or so ago. There were six of them: *They were no good, too much cheeky fella, that was when a whole lot of Martu (people) were staying here*, she explained and pointed all around saying, *People camping everywhere, all the old people*. She added, rather sternly, turning to Greta: *It's your dogs that been killem* (the emus).

When we'd finished our cup of tea and Shelia and Greta and Ronnel went back to their camps, I tried to weave this into the current discourse on the event of community, of things being joined through the past and the present, and the instant flashback to the past that is possible when people share a place to live; how the unexpected becomes a kind of event for community, it punches through and envelopes people in little gatherings where people offer up their experience of the world. From this emu now, without any feathers, to the six in the past, in an instant, without thought, or expectation, if such a thing could be said. But I missed the poetics of Sheila's little story, when I wrote it down, it had lost all of its vitality and evocative powers; it had lost that power to glimpse preceding weaves of the Ululla fabric, that gathering density. Perhaps all it left was the violence of the dogs, which wasn't really Shelia's or my point. Perhaps, at least, you will get the idea, the residue of an attempt, of all these lines and threads that bring the past and the present together all the time in this place, as a matter of fact, almost without thinking or hesitation. Memory speeding away and gathering up threads as it goes, encountering little events, jogging the memory, proliferating stories. Sitting down sharing, offering up what you know of the world, as a kind of memory, present and future of community. An exposure to this, a sentence brought to bear by others.

²⁴ Male emus look after the chicks.

This interruption may be exhausted for now, but others will come along and take the writing off again. Back to town , to dogs, to cards and goats eating cigarettes; to a little gathering by a warming fire, to dogs returning their eyes to their sleepy lids. Stories build on each other; their force exhausted or taken up by others. Taken off to other exposures and intensities.

With this in mind, let's now, get back there, to the present of that initial trip to Ululla.

Back to the event of getting to the community, the first time. Strange how things get 'caught up in one another', how something happens and how it is transformed, how there is always a dispersal, a fissure, an opening onto something else in events. It's difficult to *stay with* an event in-itself, especially an event of first arrival at community: other contingencies come along and generate evermore connections and points of contact. Just like a road trip from Meekatharra to Ululla. The whole trip my mind was encountering sensory information, the smell of red dust, the sway of my body, the road, the car; my eyes were looking for bumps, potholes, places to slow down and speed up; my body, my mind, my car, being driven by each other. Thoughts were free to proliferate over the bumps and rattles and squeaks. I am trying to predict what is around corners imagining what is over the next hill. Wondering what this country means, how to make sense of it and respond to it in a more meaningful and less mechanical way than by changing the gears and by turning the wheel, by changing speeds and trajectories. I am imagining how I will respond in the future to this country. What it will mean to others, beyond this present of first encounter.

And now recalling this first trip from Meeka to Ululla, I have countless other memories that startle me with their force. Like the kangaroo I hit, that jumped into the window of the truck I was driving, the noise, the look of fear that I can still see in the kangaroos' eyes less than a foot from my own, the smashed window splitting light into tiny fragments, the window crumbling, glaring; I peer with cautious

squinted eyes, as if that would make seeing easier. I drive accordingly, I limp home. Other memories come upon me, from the side of the road out of view, like where I picked up Shelia mob after they had run out of fuel on the way back from Meekatharra. Or I think of where we camped at Easter. Or where Chris mob ran out of fuel, and the lasting signifiers of their camp that give other journeys a reminder, a nod of a head, *a hang on, hang-on, wait, kulo (wait), wait (kulo) ... there!* as we hurtle past on other trips, a casting of thought back to that event, the past's future signifiers marked on the side of the road.

But back to the present memory of this first trip. This new country nothing like I have encountered before. Quite endless possibilities of becoming, of imagination for the future, all these relays forming across the country, across my mind. And all the while this present of the road, my body, my mind, my car; my thoughts like the fluffy clouds hovering over and, because of the landscape, casting shadows drifting. There is no pure memory of this first trip that I wish or can represent, only an intensity of deterritorialisation and reterritorialisation, only ever this becoming, this 'expression that is 'abroad in the world', and in memory—'where the potential is for what may become' (Massumi 2002b: xxi).²⁵ Other memories of other trips of other times affect and displace, disrupt and produce this memory. This memory-event is, by now, or so I am trying to make you think, an encounter. A flow of images and intensities beyond, further on into the future, way past this initial trip, beyond its horizon but released, set into motion, recalled by its terrain. Neither nor but both at once, speckled, flecked with affectivity, this past/present/future of memory set into motion through a life event's recall.

And I remember that the first time I met the Ululla mob at Sadie mob's camp/middle camp/the quarters, the dogs barked, prefaced and terrorised my arrival, my presence. Scolded at, yelled out, name called, the dogs came to heel. I felt embarrassed that my presence was so disruptive, that I required so much warning, caution, name calling. Perhaps this was my arrival at Ululla, the inaugural event that is the occasion for this writing and thinking. This initial awkwardness of

²⁵The original quote is: 'Expression is abroad in the world—where the potential is for what may become.'

presence, if you will remember, was resolved and symbolised in the speckled affectivity of the emu egg, given to me to diffuse, I'm sure, the obvious awkwardness we all felt. This gift, the present, not a moment of resolution but marking the trace of something else, of other energies: community as a kind of interruption where we receive the work of another, giving one a sense of something else that others give light to trace. Could this be a way to think of community? As something that '*happens to us* question, waiting, event, imperative' as Jean-Luc Nancy, says (1991: 11). Not as something to transcend or surpass or resolve on the way to an objective account, but to stay with, as something that happens to us, 'like a current or like a sort of streaming of electricity' as Bataille said (1988: 94). Could this be a way to think of community?



gathering one.

Event



opening.

Staying with the happening of community.

What I am attempting to do here, and this may surprise you, is open up an ethics of writing about community. To experience community is to experience the force of others; others force you to see the world differently. I take this as an ethical insistence. Furthermore, it is the experience of community, as I have argued, that is the condition for being able to do ethnographic work; one can be an ethnographer because one is exposed to the force and work of others. The condition of doing ethnographic work is this exposure. The community has force that tips you into another paradigm: by staying with this, by sustaining this inclination towards others, the force of the relation as an encounter that resists absolute determination can be brought to the forefront of the work. Here, again, the ethical insists.

Yet, this work is not my own. When I would meet members of the Jackman family in Perth, in Meekatharra or in Wiluna, we would talk mostly about other people. We'd talk about all the people we knew in common, people we knew differently in common. We'd find out where people were, how they were going, where they're heading. We'd place ourselves and interact through gaining a sense of where others are. When I was speaking to people about Ululla and about being connected to others, at some point people would say: 'I don't know about that one, go and see Shelia or Sniper, he knows'. I'd go and see Shelia and she would say, 'you should see Rita (her sister), she's the first one that been there' (Ululla). I'd see Rita, and she would say, 'I haven't been there for a long time, I don't know about that one. Shelia was there at the time.' The great thing about research is that people may work over and deny your attempts to flesh out the community in a total fashion; the community extends into other relations, relations that diffuse the possibility of a settled and contained notion of community. There is always a relation that must be

followed, this will lead onto others. People refusing to speak for another, refusing to conceptualise community in such a way that would provide a model, or an experience that would represent all; forcing the relation as a movement towards others into view. This ethic is very strong. But does this say something about an Aboriginal community? About a refusal to transcend the place in which one speaks, refusing to speak for all, refusing to let your experience stand for that of others? If you want to know about that, then you better and go and see that person. I found this every time I spoke to someone. There was a force in this insistence, an ethical force about how knowledge is produced.

Rose (1984,1992, 2004) and Myers (1986) have both shown in their accounts of the people of the Victoria River District and the Pintupi respectively, that ‘open relatedness’ or regional relatedness (Myers 1986: 15-17, 296; Rose 1992: 52-55) is key to understanding Aboriginal sociality. Myers writes, for example, that social ties are extensive rather than bounded; that relations with others extend beyond any finite grouping that, ‘In the Pintupi view’ they “are all family,” and relatedness is achieved not through the integration of units as much as through the relation all to all’ (1986: 296). He writes that Pintupi society needs to be thought of:

not as segmentary units like bands as building blocks, but as an expansive, overlapping set of individual networks of kin. One can go anywhere [and not only in Pintupi county, but to places like Alice Springs and other ‘non-Pintupi’ communities], they say, because “it is all one family.” The Pintupi system emphasises, first, an extensive and wide-ranging relatedness among individuals in a region. As with the concept of “one countryman,” the larger regional system...is built out of egocentric or dyadic links among individuals. (159)

In short, what is going on here is, ‘expansive, overlapping sets of individual networks of kin’ (159). Rose shows that sociality and order is reproduced through keeping difference being the contact point of being-in-common. She explains this through the use of string imagery: ‘Every string [a Yarralin metaphor for the webs

or boundaries of interconnections between dreaming tracks] defines both difference and similarity, and as the tracks cross-cut each other, forming elaborate webs and stories, so people assert their rights and obligations both to differ and to come together (1992: 55). She adds that each country is ‘autonomous’ – that each has its own Law: ‘Each country is, from its own viewpoint, its own boss. There are no “orders from above” because there is no above only interrelated parts’ (55).

Here, ‘autonomy’ (one’s own country) and ‘relatedness’ (the relationships between countries, i.e. points of connection and differentiation) could be thought of as the work of community – community is the spacing of this, a kind of co-appearing of one-with-the-other, that the self (autonomy) co-appears with others (relatedness), as Nancy says. Sylvia Poirier calls this the ‘dividual’ nature of the individual (2005: 13). Drawing on her work with the people from Wirimanu (Balgo) in North central Western Australia, Poirier writes that: ‘Each person is a node within a complex and dynamic network of agencies, social (including territorial and ritual) relationships, and responsibilities’ (2005: 13). Or as Myers indicates, this is a ‘view of kinship as identity with others as part of the self’ (107), or ‘shared identity with others’ (159). The individual is situated in extensive networks of relatedness that expose, and that make one sensitive and vulnerable to, the work and claim of others. Community as a rhythm and spacing of the relation that extends outward dissolving any enclosed centre, an ethics, to borrow from Rose, of ‘interrelated parts’ that interrupt totality. Again, momentum and imperative are happening here, rather than the reinforcement of boundaries and exclusions.

Community works because of an absence of totality, community resists an ‘organic communion’ of one with all. In place of this communion we have communication; that is the work of the relation, of finite existences sharing up what they know of the turnings of the world (which is a difference *and* a coming together). There is ‘no boss’ here, ‘no orders from above’ just the multiplicity of perspectives that makes sense through existing in-common. Sharing this different relation to the world as the basis for being-with others (Nancy 2000). At the risk of repeating myself, community is about being unsettled in oneself – one moves towards another and

then on again – always in relation to a constitutive outside. What there is in community is a beginning of an obligation and a responsibility to trace the movement of a relation. I aim to follow this in this gathering through unpacking the notion of the event.

What is important in thinking the event is a kind of surprise where we are prepared to be moved by others in a way where ‘the risky or accidental’ has a say, and indeed, challenges ‘preconceived ideas’ (Muecke 2004: 203). This is about, as we will shortly see through Lyotard’s notion of the event, trying to stay with the happening rather than the determination of the event (1988b: 18). The event has an energy that moves, it creates questions and perplexities; it forces not an inward certainty but the surety of being compelled outwards towards the otherwise. It creates differences and opens possibilities through contact and proximity.

Community calls one towards another without rest or return to a settled position. This is what people at Ululla exposed me to. So there is a force there, a difference/a *différend* (Lyotard 1988a) a kind of event that breaks through, making something else possible. There is always a relation, another contingency that leads on to another: another story irrupts and takes us off. Just before Cath, Dusty and I left Wiluna to return to Melbourne, Shelia said to me, seeing my notebook in my hand: ‘That’s our story now, he right until next time.’ Neither she nor I were finished with each other. A kind of work with another that does not end, nor is exhausted in writing, but that, because of this, extends and spaces the future.

spacing/rhythm one .

Anthropology, 'a science of the non-event'?

Nancy, in an essay entitled 'The Surprise of the Event', argues that, 'What makes the event an event is not only that it happens, but that it surprises – and maybe even that it surprises itself...' (2000: 157). Through readings of Hegel and Aristotle in particular, Nancy argues that what is at stake in philosophy is precisely how to think 'surprise.' He writes that, 'philosophy is *surprised thought*' (165, original emphasis). This is so because thought exists, because it is taken by surprise; something erupts and moves on thought; there is an agitation, a questioning, something in the world demands to be thought, the surprise at stake at the heart of thought is 'literally interminable' (166). So being surprised, perplexed and awakened by something is what moves thought on, what makes one want to think.

What I want to discuss here is the event and its relation to ethnography and community. I want to explore the possibility of keeping the surprise of the event working over a settled thought. The word surprise comes from the Latin *superprehendere*, literally meaning beyond, above or exceeding grasp (SOED). In this sense surprise is what happens to us before the event (the surprising thing) has been accounted for. Being open to the 'super-prehensile' would seem like an important part of doing ethnographic work as it suspends and thus keeps open the moment of judgment and determination, allowing things to happen, something to take place. Keeping this moment of determination open allows an articulation of how others' force another potential way of seeing and being in this world.

This spacing/rhythm happens in two moves. Firstly, I examine the event and its relation to anthropological theory before considering poststructuralist philosophical notions of the event. Secondly, I use a close reading of an 'ethnographic' event in

Johannes Fabian's work to offer another potential way of responding to events. This enables us to draw out the transformative potential of events.

Anthropologists ground their work in fieldwork. Fieldwork is the condition for producing knowledge (Hastrup & Hervick 1994: 1) Things happen to ethnographers when they are in the 'field', these things that happen are written up and become anthropological texts. I say this, with over-emphasised simplicity, to highlight that there is a process, a tension, and a relation, between an event (the experience of fieldwork) and what could be called the narration of this (the anthropological work – the monograph, article or book). There is a tension (a generative one) between event and narration. This tension was highlighted by the 'writing culture school'.

The writing culture school rejected 'authoritarian, realist and objectivist' approaches to representing other cultures and 'asked us to think of and explore anthropology as an institutionally, historically and politically-situated writing genre' (Dawson et al. 1997b: 1). The force of this thinking highlighted the need to develop more sophisticated understandings of the nature of writing itself as a process that tied field to home, and that produced the nature of ethnographic inquiry itself. One did not simply do fieldwork and then write about it; 'writing culture' showed that this was a densely political and ethical process: fieldwork was in a sense 'an event' for which an exhaustive explanation was not possible.

Writing was no longer reducible to method, 'keeping good field notes, making accurate maps, "writing up results"' (Clifford 1986: 2). On the contrary, the act of writing was seen as an active and contingent process that transformed, altered and produced the named ethnographic site.²⁶ Writing a little over a decade after the publication of *Writing Culture*, Marcus comments: 'we found our roles as fieldworkers and as writers to be inseparably linked' (1999: 23). Writing and the

²⁶ George Marcus (1999), referring to the critical response to the publication of *Writing Culture*, writes: 'One message, then, of the *Writing Culture* critique was not simply to explore more intensively the conventional authorial function of the fieldwork in relation to his or her subjects but to break the bounds of that frame altogether in the effort of constituting different and more complex spaces in which fieldwork/ethnography might occur' (23). Marcus more recent work has explored the possibility of 'multi-sited' ethnography, for example, see (1997).

ethnographer were ‘caught between cultures, implicated in others’ unable to be separated from ‘global power systems’ (Clifford 1988: 11). There was thus no unmediated and objective relation to others or to another ‘culture’: the possibility of that relationship, and thus of writing, was produced, transformed and positioned by concrete cultural artifacts and imperatives, as much ‘at home’ as ‘in the field’. This is not to say that writing became faulty or impossible but simply that fieldwork as a kind of event of contingencies and imperatives forced multiplicity, difference and ‘blind-spots’ into view. The named ethnographic site was no longer the transparent object that the anthropologist could dispassionately observe and translate.

Rather than seeking to resolve or transcend (or just plain ignore) the tension between experience (in the field) and representation (I will be exploring this in the next ‘spacing/rhythm’) that earlier positivist/objectivist methods had developed, the ‘writing culture school’ traced the generative dynamics of this relation. The ‘writing culture school’ stayed with the event of writing, stayed with the tension between here and there, and between event and narration.²⁷

What I want to do is extend the moment of the happening – of the event, of the force that surprises. I want to think of ethnographic work as a kind of event. As an ‘encounter’ that forces the unexpected into view and that takes the ethnographer away from a self-present unified thought. Rather than resisting, or resolving surprise, why not go with it, stay with it?

But enough of all that context, let’s get back to the event

²⁷ I have at this point conflated the tension between experience and writing with event and narration. While I proceed cautiously with this I think that it is a just conflation, if such a thing could be said. One of the consistent features of contemporary anthropology is the tension between experience as, ‘dialogical’, ‘situational’, ‘ambiguous’, and the text as, an ‘integrated portrait’ a coherent text, a bounded ‘corpus’ (Clifford 1988: 38-40 all quotes). The text, Clifford continues, becomes ‘separate from its discursive occasion of production...A textualized ritual or event is no longer closely linked to the production of that event by specific actors. Instead these texts become evidences of an englobing “context”, a “cultural” reality’ (39-40). It should become clear that this is very similar to Lyotard’s notion of the event, which I examine below. The tension between experience and representation has been a hallmark of Clifford’s work, see (1988), especially p. 35-40.

I, along with many others, think of the event as an encounter between forces, an encounter that makes something happen. Ghassan Hage, one of Australia's most engaging and lateral-thinking anthropologists, points out that there is no 'cross-situational objectivity' in an event (2006: 6). What he means by this is that the event produces different effects on different people. There is no *absolute* explanation possible, there is no objective point of view that could contain all possible meanings and effects; the 'eventness' of the event is that it surprises and surpasses exhaustive explanation, breaks with total comprehension. It could be said, then, that the event creates contingencies (the event is a contingency?), the event creates forces that cannot be planned for nor absolutely controlled. Writing on contingency, Stephen Muecke comments that:

Contingency, in its Latin root, is about touching, bordering on, reaching, befalling. It is not therefore about maintaining critical distance, but about tipping over into new paradigms where encounters (with Others for instance) can teach us, not necessarily by direct instruction, but by putting our preconceived ideas in jeopardy. It is about not eliminating the risky or accidental. (2004a: 203)

This is why thinking the event, and the contingencies involved therein, is important to social theorists, because I think it is important to be 'tipped' towards 'new paradigms', it is important to stay with the (sometimes unnameable) things that people show us and teach us. This becomes apparent in events – events are the moments when one is forced to go with the contingent forces that touch, move, befall. There is force and power in this. Sara Ahmed has a slightly different take on 'contingency'. Ahmed writes, "The word 'contingency' has the same root in Latin as the word 'contact' (Latin: *contingere*: com-, with; *tangere*, to touch). Contingency is linked then to proximity, to getting close enough to touch another and be moved by another' (2004: 27). Contingency is about *getting close enough to feel something happening*, prior to determining *what is* happening. The privileged moment to stay with this befalling and contact is the event, where determination may be suspended and withheld. What the event produces is an unnameable force, an inclination towards

others that resists being pinned down; a surprise that cannot be adequately accounted for.

What the event may open up is a gap or a tension between the explicable and the inexplicable, between the structure and the unusual moment that seems to overthrow a structural rationalisation. I want to stay with this tension, because I think it is important to the kind of work that ethnographers do; this tension, which is also a risk, offers a paradigm to understand what others teach us. Which is kind of what ethnography is all about, responding to and staying with what others make possible through the shared events of fieldwork. This also suggests something about community – to be with others is to be open to the force of another that tests and contests any self-same continuity.

The problem of thinking 'the event'

The notion of the event is pivotal to Lyotard's philosophical inquiry.²⁸ The event is important because it offers a chance to disrupt, and thus to rethink, prior structures of meaning. This is one of the significant features of poststructuralist work: the attempt to maintain the space for a disruptive difference that resists unification into an exhaustive account. Rather than seeking to justify truth claims, or to create transparent representations of the world, post-structuralist thinking tends towards the vulnerable moments when truth, rationality and objective coherence is cast into doubt. Poststructuralist thinkers have been particularly sentient to this constitutive disruption of a complete or masterly account.

There is a specific and coherent ethical and political imperative in this emphasis, namely, of how to create representations without seeking to dominate, foreclose upon, or totalise the potential for other avenues of meaning making. This has been the generative tension of post-structuralist thought: how to think through and

²⁸ For a discussion of the importance of 'the event' to Lyotard's thinking see Geoffrey Bennington (1988) *Lyotard: Writing The Event*.

perhaps beyond the ‘closure of metaphysics’.²⁹ It is within this context that Lyotard’s emphasis on events becomes important.

Lyotard’s reading of events becomes one way to resist ‘the rule of the concept’ (Reading 1991: xiv), a way to resist the reduction of the complex flows of social life to ‘the extraction of meaning’ (ibid: xiv). Lyotard seeks in the event an opening of the world, rather than a closure upon it (Chrome & Williams 2006: 6-7). There is resistance to an absolute, exhaustive comprehension of the event. This is so, because the event disturbs or transforms prior frameworks of comprehension. The event in this sense is singular and thus breaks with a universal frame of comprehension. The event disrupts ‘a determinate standard of judgment’ (ibid: 11), and this exposes the lack of a unified and complete narrative – of ‘cross situational objectivity’ (Hage 2006).

The event is ‘something [that] happens after which nothing will ever be the same again’ (Reading 1991: xxxi). The disruption ‘of a determinate standard of judgment’, creates an excess, a *différend*³⁰, a surprise that cannot be rendered wholly, captured completely or subsumed to discourse (we could again think of Marcus’s (1995: 6)

²⁹The problem of the ‘closure of metaphysics’ can best be read through deconstructive theory. Deconstruction is a critical style that examines the conditions of possibility of thought, writing and representation. Deconstruction enacts a practice of double reading, which involves letting ‘two motifs interlace’ and ‘suspend[ing] the critical moment of deciding between them’ (Bernasconi & Critchley 1991b: xi). The two motifs, Bernasconi and Critchley continue, of a ‘double reading’ are ‘the impossibility of escaping logocentric conceptuality’ on the one hand, and on the other hand, the necessity ‘of such an escape arising from the impossibility of remaining wholly within the (Greek) logocentric tradition’ (xi). Deconstruction relies upon a constant negotiation between the ‘impossibility of escape’ and the necessity of not ‘remaining wholly within’ a tradition. In some ways, then, deconstruction can be read as a practice that attempts to break with, yet must maintain a relationship to, a philosophical tradition. This, Critchley contends, is the difficulty of ‘closure’ within deconstructive strategy. Critchley defines ‘closure’ as ‘the double refusal both of remaining within the limits of the [metaphysical] tradition and of the possibility of transgressing that limit’ Critchley (1992: 20). The demand of deconstruction and the ethico-political obligation of deconstruction is one of attempting to break through the economy of the same – i.e. the metaphysical tradition – and to move towards what is marginal, repressed and elided by the same – i.e. the radical movement that highlights the impossibility of closure. It is a movement towards what is otherwise; it ventures to open thought to the logic of *différance*, therefore seeking to resist closure, finality and totalisation. The problem of closure is therefore a generative tension at the heart of deconstruction in particular, and thought in general. For an explanation of deconstruction by Derrida himself see his (2002a) *Negotiations: Interventions and Interviews 1971- 2002*, see especially (12-40).

³⁰ Hugh Silverman offers a definition of the *différend* in Lyotard’s philosophy. ‘The *différend* is a difference, marked out by the juxtaposition of two or more alternatives. The modern wants to identify positions, to make them speak to each other, even to resolve, reconcile, over-come and abolish the differences. A postmodern philosophy will need to remark on the *différend* [how it functions, what are the consequences] and to seek to operate in terms of that *différend*, recognising all the while that the *différend* cannot be removed’ (2002b: 2).

surplus of difference that characterises postmodern anthropology). There is a remainder, a ‘drift’ (Lyotard 1988b), there is something different in the event that exceeds absolute contextualisation. There are contingencies that can’t be managed. There are forces or tensions that avoid capture. There is something unheard in the event that Lyotard wants to stay with:

To become sensitive to their quality as actual events, to become competent in listening to their sound underneath silence or noise, to become open to the “It happens that” rather than to the “What happens” [of the event]... (1988b: 18).

What Lyotard is interested in here, as Bill Reading points out, is ‘what it is that an event is before it has been accounted for’ (1991: x). Events happen, the problem is how to listen to the happening, to the *it’s happening* of the event – to the uncertain moment ‘when we realise our moral or political frameworks cannot account for some new problem with which we are faced’ (Woodwood 2006: 22). What Lyotard wants to do is to stay with the happening, to suspend the moment of judgment in order to keep thought and discourse in a state of surprise – listening to the otherwise, listening for other potentialities that resist closure and determination.³¹ It is in this way that the event can be seen, as Kathleen Stewart writes, as a ‘shock’ that ‘exceed[s] what we call reason, order, and “common sense” (2003a: 431). The event is a ‘moment of shock’ that ‘erupts as a shadow suddenly revealed skirting the order of ideal representations of things’ (433).

³¹ Walter Benjamin (1973) too, wants to stay with the event, in this case the event of the story, its telling – its ability to gather others around ‘as a community of listeners’ (91). He writes in ‘The Story Teller’, collected in *Illuminations*, of how the art of storytelling, full ‘of depth, that requires a state of relaxation which is becoming rarer and rarer’ (87) is being engulfed in the noise of information and mass media that saturates modern life. He writes: ‘Every morning brings us news of the globe, and yet we are poor of noteworthy stories. This is because no event any longer comes to us without already being shot through with explanation. In other words, by now almost nothing that happens benefits storytelling; almost everything benefits information. Actually, it is half the art of storytelling to keep a story free from explanation as one reproduces it’ (89). Information aims at reducing events to a (ideological) meaning that is quickly assimilated. The modern listener quickly assimilates information in-order to move on to the next: the time to be immersed in the affective and epic words of the storyteller – who stays with and lingers on events withholding judgment (91) – is passing as the anxious gathering of information accumulates and deadens the senses. We no longer dwell in events, but extract from them, information – information that enables judgment, assimilation, and the reification of a position towards the world.

It is also important to note that the event itself ‘drifts’. The event cannot be read in-itself, it must be linked in order for comprehension to take place, to a regime of phrases. This is what Derrida means when he argues that an event cannot be absolutely ‘singular’, it is necessarily ‘doubled’ and ‘multiplied’ to begin with (1981: 291). In short, we cannot read the event *in-itself*. But, what we can read is the effects of the event on structures of meaning, we can read the linking, we can read the *articulation* upon other things. The event is readable (and thinkable) because of the consequences it has. ‘One can speak of the event meaningfully’, writes Woodward, ‘because of the effects it has in, on, and through intelligible structures. The event is pure difference, or transformative capacity, and such capacity can only be positively registered in that to which it makes a difference, or which it transforms’ (Woodwood 2006: 14). It is at this point that it is important to think about ethnographic inquiry and the question of community.

What I want to ask is how do events with others (fieldwork) transform and make a difference to our understanding? Do we as ethnographers stay with this transformative potential, or do we foreclose upon the work of others and the things ‘they’ produce by returning to a rational, codified and disciplined account, built around, and for, the extraction of meaning and determination? I was speaking to Sniper and I asked him why people had left Ululla in early 2007. He replied ‘I don’t know, we were there, and then they [Sheila and BJ] just left, we had to go then’. There is an ethical insistence in this, an ethics that denies, at times, an attempt of explanation – sometimes unexpected things just happen. Sniper was not about to pre-empt other’s thoughts – their thoughts were up to them. He wasn’t going to explain Sheila’s intentions. Community is a happening, an event that draws people together and onwards towards others – other sites, other events for gathering together (Sniper went and lived with Sheila, in town). If we think of community as ‘what happens’ then don’t we then as ethnographers – as people who engage with others – relate to the community through description, explanation, through the extraction of ‘rational’ meaning? Reducing the community, in the process, to series of explanations for which the anthropologist positions himself/herself as the arbiter of meaning?

And isn't this where ethnography sometimes leads – having the authority to be able to say confidently 'what happens' in Martu, or Arrente or Balinese culture? Being able to say coherently and perhaps exhaustively this is 'what happens when the Martu...' 'when the Arrente do this what they really mean is that...' 'what's really happening in the Balinese cock-fight is that...' And what does this ethics and politics of representation foreclose upon? Is there any shock, or surprise, or excess that opens the chance for communication?

I see another potentiality in the event, and in the work that others do to open up another way of seeing and being in the world. What is required is a little sensitivity, the suspension of determination and trying to stay with the force of the event as a force that moves and touches.³² What we should be seeking in writing events is the befalling of one's self-same continuity with the world. Anthropology is in a privileged position to write this because anthropologists expose their work to the force of others. In fact, this is the event of anthropological possibility.

Anthropology, a non-event?

Anthropology has been described, Hage notes, 'as a science of the non-event'. 'Some unkind people think anthropology itself is a non-event' (Hage 2006: 5). The argument goes that anthropology writes in an ahistorical time (that of the ethnographic present), that it freezes time, contingency and change by describing communities as if they were objects, bound up in themselves, as if the communal bond was some kind of essence that is dolled out, that each subject speaks, performs or illustrates. This 'essence' is harmonised and reified in kinship structure, ritual practices, or key opposition that the ethnographer 'works out'. By studying the banal facts of everyday life (kinship, cross-cousin marriage, food distribution) anthropology foreclosed on the unexpected, the lateral; the irruption and passion of

³² An aside. While many struggle with the ethical implications of Derrida's work his insistence on 'suspending decision' 'withholding judgment' 'a tireless negotiation between things' is an ethical move – of not pre-empting, or attempting to speak for others, of maintaining a critical space without closure or absolute determination (see Derrida 2002a: 11 - 40).

transformative events (and the contingencies involved therein) was (is?) left to the historians (Hage 2006: 5).

I want to take a different approach and think of ethnography as *a science of the event*. I want to be kind to anthropology. Can you imagine an ethnography where nothing happens? What would the anthropologist write about? What would nudge and agitate the anthropologist's writing if there were no events, if there were no events with others? What would enable the experience of community with others – which is the possibility of anthropological work – if there were no events that inspired, challenged and questioned one's practice, that pricked the skin and touched the intellect, that enveloped one in affective relations that transformed one's relation to the world? Where would ethnography be without the encounter, without 'contact' and 'proximity'? Where would it be without being touched and moved by another, without being tipped over into another paradigm, into another opening of the world? How could anthropology take place without being exposed to the work of others, of taking this as the work itself?

There is no ethnography without the event, it is the very stuff of ethnography. However, the problem is how to think the event. How to think the event without this being the occasion for ushering in all those tired and saturated anthropological notions that fence-in and explain the event (a ritual, a performance, a meeting, a gathering, kinship etc.) as if they were unmediated, objective signifiers that have the effect of 'construct[ing] another society as unified, "over there" objective...characterised by "certain distinctive beliefs"' (Muecke 2004a: 205). The problem is how to resist the description of the event as if it were a stable signifier of identity, as an objective reference for a communal essence that the ethnographer 'works out', controls and reveals. The problem is how to keep the surprise of the event working beyond a reduction to the self-same and secured presentation of knowledge. By writing the event we can articulate the extensions, connections and networks that expand across time and space. I will now embark upon a close reading of an 'ethnographic' event in Fabian's work.

Stopping the event in its tracks?

With this interest in the resistance to a complete and masterly account, and in the hope of creating a writing exposed to the outside, to difference, to resisting determination, I would like to turn (with my tongue in my cheek) to a rather strange essay written by Johannes Fabian and collected in his *Time and the Work of Anthropology: Critical Essays 1971 -1991*. Fabian uses an anecdote in his essay, ‘Of dogs alive, birds dead, and time to tell a story’, in order to discuss what he sees as the use of allochronic (literally: other-time) discourse and a denial of coevalness (sharing time) in ethnographic writing. This essay extends and draws upon his earlier, 1983 work *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object*.

Essentially, this well known work makes the argument that anthropological work constructs others as if they existed in another time; this is what Fabian calls allochronism. The allochronism of anthropology stems from ‘a persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse’ (1983: 31). The ‘conjuring trick’ of anthropology is that it ‘constructs the Other in terms of distance, spatial and temporal’ this has the function ‘to keep the Other outside the time of anthropology’ (1983: xi). This ‘petrified relation,’ Fabian writes, ‘is a scandal’ (1983: 143).

I want to use the event he describes below, as a way to be re-surprised and to re-think what makes sharing time possible. What are we looking for by sharing time with others? Fabian writes:

Here, then, is the first story. Billie, our dog, is a White West Highland terrier of, I believe, striking and distinguished appearance. One day, my friend and I took her for a walk in the streets of Amsterdam. Billie was very young then and we kept her on one of those long leashes that come with a self-rewinding reel. We were walking and talking and did not pay much attention to Billie. We ‘knew’ she was trotting along happily. Suddenly my friend,

who had been holding the leash, stopped. She turned around to look back. 'Look Johannes,' she said, 'there is a dog exactly like ours.' I looked and saw the dog. It took us a split second to realise that it was Billie, at the far end of her ten yards of freedom. (1991: 228)

I, too, would be at the end of my tether, trying desperately to get away from this event, much happier to explore the world away from the heels of anthropology – always being linked to a pre-emptive phrase regime (Lyotard 1988a). Following lines of scent, following them until their intensity crescendos, moving on, finding the trace of others before me. Rambling rhizomically from intensity to intensity, but always dragged at the neck by this anthropologist and his auto-rewinding leash. This anthropologist and his friend, engrossed in thought, follow lines of articulation. Certain strata carry them away, take them off as they remember things; as they present these things to each other. Ideas building, being traced to a moment of intensity, they are being moved by the work of another. Then other lines take them off again, endlessly beginning and ending, sniffing out and marking territory as they go: retracing, crossing over, being taken off again. We are rambling. For a moment we forget ourselves, are in other places, engrossed in other thoughts that are not of the here and now, but of the before, and of the future, and of over there. I stop, look them in the eye, ears pricked at the end of my tether. They turn around: 'Look, Johannes, there is a dog exactly like ours.' They do not know me, themselves. My rambling world collapses. Ears limp, tail between my legs, I come, dragged back to where I'm called. 'Billie come here', in a straight line I come to heel to the anthropologist, drawn on the self-rewinding leash.

Sometimes it takes the honesty of a dog and the joy of her rambles to reveal the nature of an event. It is interesting to discuss how Fabian works this anecdote, how he unleashes it, so to speak. Fabian uses this anecdote to reveal, in a self-reflexive move, what happens in allochronic anthropological discourse. He argues that: 'Rather than experiencing our dog – and through her, us and the event – as being there as well as here we saw another dog' (229).

Fabian corrects his misrecognition of Billie as other by arguing that sharing time is both *here* (Johannes and Friend) and *there* (Billie). He had seen Billie as other (and not the same) because she was *there* and he was *here*: the lesson here is that spatial separation may create a split-second reflex of othering, something that needs correction. Fabian attempts to resolve this by recognising the event as that which includes both here and there. ‘Sameness’, Fabian writes, ‘it would seem, requires or, if this is too strong a word, goes together with presence here, with sharing the same time as well as the same place as the one who considers identity’ (229). This proposition, or more likely this presupposition, of ‘sharing time’ is ‘bounded’ (Fabian’s term) in the ‘event’. His conception of the event rests on a definition of the event as ‘something that requires contemporaneous togetherness’ (229). This is fine, but, contemporaneous togetherness does not mean presence or sameness, or that the event expresses these assumptions. Being together does not mean recognising the same; we don’t spend time with others in order to receive sameness; we engage with others because they offer a different vision and relation to the world, and this touches us, moves us, impels us on. Being with others turns us towards the world in surprising ways. Isn’t the whole idea of fieldwork to be taken out of one’s self-same relation to the world? To have one’s ideas, methods and assumptions pushed, challenged and transformed by the work of others? To not be able to return to one’s writing unaltered by the events we share in common, and in difference, with others?

But, I want to say something more than this. Fabian uses the event to describe and play-out again, his prior framework of understanding the ethnographic encounter, i.e. his coeval model. It may not be a bad way to look at things, but the point I want to make, is that the event becomes meaningful precisely at the point where his ethnographic model returns. Explanation of the event, its reduction to (its proper) meaning is secured by the dog returning to the master. The outward extension, the possibility of encountering something else – that tension which ties the same to the other – is resolved by the dog returning ‘to the one who considers identity’. The other becomes a way to reaffirm one’s position. The account is unified, coherence is secured by foreclosing on the disruptive and transformative work of others. (The

event becomes meaningful – reduced to its signification – but it no longer *makes sense*, it no longer ‘jumps’ or quivers or agitates on the border of an interruptive potential, perhaps.³³) Our orientation to the work of others, to the force of their difference, to those events that we cannot control, that provoke and question our methods and assumptions, is dealt with by giving back something already the same.³⁴

So what have we learnt? Simply perhaps, that Fabian’s coeval model, conceived in sameness and in bounded events, may be total and is just played-out in the same kind of ways in different places and contexts. Have model will travel, anywhere. What I am trying to do is to *wander* whether we can be swept up in events in ways that mean you cannot simply find your feet, your model – or your dog on its leash – unaltered. This would imply untying the event from the demand of finding its common-sense meaning. It is about trying to trace those connections and points of contact: memories and stories speeding away, gathering up threads as you go.

You may well be thinking that this is nit picking, an overly close reading of a rather obscure moment in Fabian’s *oeuvre*. But, there is a chance in this reading to force the question: what are we looking for by doing ethnography? How do we relate to the events of fieldwork? Is it by standing back in a position of ‘cross-situational objectivity’ (Hage 2006: 6) determining the meaning of the event – walking our readers through it – or should we make our work respond to ‘the fragmentary structures of the “now” that the investigating subject inhabits’ (Muecke 2004: 208),

³³ I am getting the sense of the ‘jumpiness’ of events from Stewart, who quotes Lingis. Lingis writes about an encounter at a mine on the Arctic Circle: ‘The Young miner who showed me the mine put out every cigarette he smoked on his hand, which was covered with scar tissue. Then I saw the other young miners all had the backs of their hands covered with scar tissue...when my eye fell on them it flinched, seeing the burning cigarette being crushed and sensing the pain...The eye does not read the meaning in a sign; it *jumps* from the mark to the pain and the burning cigarette, and then jumps to the fraternity signalled by the burning cigarettes’ (Lingis 1993: 296, original emphasis, quoted in Stewart 2003a: 434).

³⁴ The strangeness of this anecdote is compounded by the fact that Fabian recognises many of the issues I am grappling with. He writes in *Time and the Work of Anthropology* (1991) that, ‘an ethnographic past can become the most vivid part of our present existence. Persons, events, puzzlements and discoveries encountered during fieldwork may continue to occupy our thoughts and fantasies for many years...In fact, we would not have a present to look back from at our past if it was not for the constant passage of our experience from past to future. Past ethnography is the present of anthropological discourse inasmuch as it is on the way to become its future’ (93). Forward and back he goes, he is agitated, puzzled; the imagination is evoked. The problem may come though when we seek to correct recognition. Rather than working with puzzlement we seek to define and resolve the source of what agitates – we can’t stay with the happening of the event. We want to must master it and (exhaustively) determine meaning, insulates ourselves, perhaps, from its disruptive effects.

where no stable or unmediated position is possible, being tripped and tipped by the force of others – by their radical break with a continuity of the same?

An event takes place because one's thoughts are placed in question. An explanation cannot be gathered together, it fails, reaches its limit, trips over the edge perhaps: one is put in question. How prepared are anthropologists to follow the lead of others, at what point do they yank it back to where they stand? The rhythm, the spacing (Nancy 1991), the ramblings of others, are they moments to stop, pull back, survey the scene; the other at her ten yards of freedom? Could we be taken along, open to the otherwise, listening, sentient to the happening?

What I want to do in the next 'spacing/rhythm' is to use a story, a research event, as a way to respond to Lingis's sense of surprise as 'the active pleasure that holds on to the giddy piece of time that just lost the support of its past and jumped the rails of the future' (2007: 68). To be in community, as I considered in 'So let's now, get back there, to this present', is to be in a kind of 'event'; it is to be in the midst of relations that are joined through the past and present and that enable a flashback to the past and into the future – that is what happens when people share time and space, a kind of 'jumpiness' as the experience of the now. In this sense, 'Community is not a substance, nor a subject; it is not a common being, which could be the goal or culmination of a progressive process. It is rather a being-in-common which only *happens*, or which is happening, an event more than a "*being*" (Nancy 1990: 149, original emphasis). Community happens. What I want to do is both banal and potentially radical at once; I want to stay with the happening of the event of community.

spacing/rhythm two.

With Molly, Sadie, Dusty and Cath to see Rita at Karalundi

Community has a force that tips you into another paradigm, this demands that prior frameworks of analysis be put in 'jeopardy' (Muecke 2004a: 203), that the risky and contingent force the apprehensive work of ethnography to 'the side of the road' (Stewart 1996), to the site of the happening. There is an inscriptive labour here that shapes the research event. There is no speaking for the community here, only the necessity to go with another relation. Another interruption takes hold, another sense of the turning of the world is glimpsed. What this ethic does, is force the relation as a movement towards others into view. It is an ethics, it is a spacing and a rhythm of the relation as the basis for being in common. It is very strong.

An important interruption happened in 2007, people left Ululla. I initially describe this, before moving onto a 'jumpy' ethnographic event which releases us from securing objective coherence. Finally, I close this spacing/rhythm with a discussion of 'new ethnography'. New ethnography is attentive to the otherwise and unexpected, it follows and forms around the dynamic work of others.

When everyone leaves

I was initially interested in exploring community as a point of contact that joins people together through fieldwork at Ululla. I was sustaining radical thoughts of community whilst still being nourished by the presence of community at Ululla, within its bosom so to speak. But then everyone left Ululla in 2007 and moved elsewhere (people returned in 2008). Molly became very sick and needed a serious

operation so she moved to Meekatharra to be closer to medical resources. Shelia was offered a new house in town (Wiluna). Sadie moved to live next door to Molly and so that Daniel (her husband) could be closer to his place, Jigalong (it is much easier to get a ride from Meekatharra to Jigalong straight up the northern highway than from Ululla). Sniper and Salina were at Ululla but it was too quiet and lonely so they moved in with Shelia at 'the reserve' while she waited for her new house. Most of the young men – Sadie's two sons, Molly's son, Cliffy Cutter, Gail's partner CB – were in 'lock up' and because people now have mobile phones they could live anywhere to receive calls from them (the Ululla 'landline' phone used to be one of the only reliable forms of communication). The collapse of CDEP (Community Development Employment Programme, that is, 'work for the dole') in Wiluna, meant that people were able to draw their welfare entitlements anywhere without being tied to a specific place (people no longer had to fill in fortnightly claim form and use the Ululla fax to send them, they could claim their entitlement anywhere). People moved slowly over the course of the year to other places.

Now, Ululla was always changing, people would come and go all the time. The Ululla community was never bound to Ululla, it was always coming and going, leaving and retuning. This is a desert reality where people very much value mobility and are directed towards regional affiliations; extensive relations rather than bounded places, as I have been arguing. Travelling to see relatives is highly valued (Myers 1986). The claim of others is an ethical force that demands movement to other gathering places of community. This is an absolute obligation; the demand of community is to be open to the claims of others as Deborah Bird Rose (1992, 2004) has emphasised.

When everyone left Ululla my project had to travel as well and had to leave the affective bosom of community (community as sharing a place to live, hanging out on the verandah or around campfires, on the back of a ute). The project had to engage much more pragmatically with the idea of community without a proper holding and happening place. Most of the research in 2007 took place away from Ululla, mostly in Meekatharra, Wiluna and travelling between places. The end result

of this – the force that this event had (everyone leaving) – enabled me to fully realise and confront a thought of community without identity. Like any project, it had to respond to the cultural real of changed circumstances. Of course, this is not a unique experience, people change, things change, research directions change. This is the dynamic condition of ethnographic work. Abandoning place made a thought of ‘the relation’ as the pivotal force of community imperative. Again, there is no ‘bounded community’ that has a ‘proper’ place upon which everyone would centre an identity, rather there are extensive systems of relatedness that force people to move, and that provide multiple and dynamic sites for being-in-common.

However, this does not mean the community somehow disappeared; it was still there it was just no longer happening at Ululla. Ululla was no longer a site for the event of community. Or it was, but now more symbolically, in memory (we were there as, Sniper said) and imagination (we’re making plans to go back there, not right now but later on, as Leonie says below). In an important sense, the problem here is not finessing this discontinuity, but enabling it to work to produce something else – another thought of community, another point of articulation becomes important to trace. It is important here to go beyond any singular place or bounded notion such as ‘Ululla’ as *the* community: Ululla is a node within a network (Deleuze and Guattari 1987), a home among others that changes in time depending on what’s going on elsewhere.

So with this in mind, and following Brian Massumi when he tries ‘to take seriously the idea that writing in the humanities can be affirmative or inventive’ (Massumi 2002a: 17), let’s get back to the work of the happening with others and see how this method gets results.

Going round to Rita’s house

Time to tell a story. It’s a story about going to Karalundi to see Rita, with Molly and Sadie, all three sisters of the Jackman family, who are all in their 50s. The story starts in Meekatharra. Molly and Sadie had moved from Ululla to Meekatharra earlier in

the year. Cath, Dusty and I had been camping in Meekatharra with Don and his son, catching up with people. It was great to be with Don as he unfurled his long legs in a camping chair.

In the morning we (Cath, Dusty and I) went around to Rita's house, but she'd left and gone to Karalundi – a Seventh Day Adventist mission school 50km north of Meekatharra. I went round to Molly's house to see if she wanted to come 'for a ride'. She did, and Sadie came too. On the way, Molly pointed out all the places she used to go to when she was at Karalundi as a kid. She did her schooling there (along with most of the Jackman family). Once she had finished school, she worked at Karalundi in a domestic capacity. Molly had told me about this the day before, she'd told me about all the hard work she had to do: *I had to wash all the sheets on Tuesday and do all the uniforms on Thursdays*, she said it with a groan (remembering the work) and with a laugh (perhaps for the routine). Molly is pointing out all these places as we drive towards Karalundi, little markers on the side of the road that kick off memories and stories. There are breakaways to the east that are full of goats. I'd thought she said 'ghosts' so I piped up and said *what kind of 'ghosts'*. *Abh you know, those wild ones with big horns. Really*, I said, excitedly. She may have sensed I had the wrong idea, *You know any kind of nanny-goat. Oh*, I said. *I thought you said 'ghosts.'*

Sometimes your attention for the unexpected can be misguided, overworked. She pointed out where they were dropped off as kids, on the way to Karalundi and allowed to collect koglers (a kind of native pear that grows as a vine). Molly pointed out a 'back way' to Ululla through Moloogool, Diamond Well and Paroo stations – *we did that once*, she added. She pointed out places where she had got emu eggs, this kicked off other stories about getting emu eggs at Ululla. That road to Karalundi, that Molly had travelled innumerable times, was full of stories, events and memories. She pointed out a cross on the side of the road surrounded by flowers. That was where my niece died, the rear gate on the mission truck had opened, she's fallen, Molly hushed, became quiet. *They got rid of the truck after that, got the bus*. Every couple of kilometres she would point out another story on the side of the road. We got to the gate at Karalundi mission. It was locked. I thought of gated communities.

I looked to Molly, we waited. *That whitefella will come along*, said Molly. Sure enough, in a few moments along to the gate comes a short man, dressed in Cuban heels, ankle hugging jeans, shirt and cowboy hat. Hardly what you'd expect from a Seventh Day Adventist – all those references to the romance of producing beef (Seventh Day Adventists are vegetarian). But I suppose most people are dressed in contradiction. *This the boss coming now*, says Molly. *He dresses flash way*, I said. *He all the time dresses like that*, she added. I could imagine his boots crunching on the ground. Molly knew him and he her, they talked for a moment. He asked me how he could help me, in a way that put me on my best behaviour. I explained that'd we'd come to visit Rita who was staying here with her daughter Deborah who works here. He opened the gate whilst balancing his Cuban heels on the rather menacing cattle grid that stood, gaping, on the other side of the gate. We drove through, the cattle grid clunking, and he locked the gate behind us. Molly directed us to Deborah's house with her hand. As we drove around she pointed out all the buildings: *That's the girl's dormitory, that's the boys, that's where I used to do the laundry. Sheets on Tuesday and uniforms on Thursdays*, I said, cheekily. Molly laughed. *That's where I used to cook, there's the farm...the orchid...all the teachers' houses*. We pulled up at the Cutter's house and we were greeted on the verandah. *Where you come from, Meeka?* Leonie asked. Leonie is Rita's daughter. *Yeah. I heard you were coming, someone said you were asking for us at our house, but we came up here in the morning*, said Leonie. I'm not sure how word got here that we were coming but it had beaten us up the road. We sat on the verandah and Molly, Sadie and Rita gathered and dragged chairs together and sat talkings, their limbs relaxing into the others, all looking into the space and light beyond the verandah. They were asking each other about family members, where they were and what they were up to. *Sniper still there (in Meekatharra), no he left (for Wiluna) with Ginji (his daughter in-law), she came from Newman in that Toyota. Daniel. No! Daniel never came (from Newman)*, said Sadie. Sadie said something about Daniel losing his key card in the creek, but I only caught half of it.

They kept swapping news, asking questions, filling each other in on the family's happenings. Three sisters leaning into conversation with each other. Conversation slowed, Molly told Rita why we were here. *But what am I going to say*, said Rita, to her

sisters. *Just, wangka (talk) you know, anything*, said Molly. I suppose this was my moment to interrupt. I addressed Rita and explained what I was doing and the kind of things I was hoping to talk about. *Oh, yeah*, she said. We began. Rita's daughter Leonie joined in.

What follows is an edited version of a much longer discussion. Rita and Leonie are talking about the early days of Ululla. Leonie was one of the first of the Jackman family to stay at Ululla – she did six months of community hours there. Her family (her mother, sisters and brother) ended up following her and making Ululla a home. Over time more of the Jackman family (including Molly and Sadie) went to Ululla and made a home.

'The first time we got there (to Ululla), these lot was there,' says Rita motioning to Leonie.

'I went from Meeka done 6 months there. Yeah. That's how...,' Leonie is cut-off by her mother.

'That's how I followed them,' says Rita.

Leonie follows up, 'I asked Don if he know any oldies, to come, to Ululla.'

Rita, begins to explain the first days, 'It's been a thing first...ohh what's that. Albion Downs (another station that shares the southern boundary) used to own it first, first it used to be a, ohh what it is: top thing, top woolshed (shearing shed). It was only for weathers (castrated male sheep). It's when our brother used to work there, and his wife, the one that Gail and Nicole lost, you know. That was before. We used to stay at Yillerra (a station on the western boundary) at the time, when – worked for the old, ohh what's his name – Biggsy (Bob Biggs). Then Ululla closed down (Albion downs stopped working it as an out station), we come back when Don got it. I don't know it went away for awhile (Ululla). And Then Don bought it for himself. And then these (pointing to her kids), went to do their time there. Few girls used to stay there, inni, before we came (mentioning to Leonie).

She follows, 'Gail, was first.'

Rita corrects, 'No (cutting her off), Janice first.'

Leonie adds, 'I don't know, Janice used to be cooking...for the shearing. Then Gail went out there with Aaron and Kirone. And after Gail came out, um, back to Meeka, I went out there then. Me and some other girls...'

Rita, adds that, 'And then we followed. No! Cliffy (Rita's son, Leonie's brother) went out first, just to give him a hand. Yeah, then we stayed on, right up, until just us lot were left there. I don't know, we use to go away and come back again. This time we never go back since.'

I ask, 'That's what, I'm, um, trying to speak to people about, people moving around lots, not staying put all the time, like the community always coming and going you know...'

Rita picks up on this, nonchalantly, 'Yeah, come and go. Stayed on there for awhile, until Murray (Murray is a whitefella from Perth who has lived on and off at Ululla for that last 10 years) came on his own, before he ever meet Cheryl (whom he later married), so we got to know him, he been doing artifacts with the old people when they were still alive.'

I turn to Leonie, 'What did you think of it, Leonie, when you first got there.'

She replies, 'Oh,' laughing.

Rita explains, 'Pretty quiet.'

Leonie confirms that, 'It was quiet then, too much bush.'

'Too much thicket,' as Rita says.

'Yeah, too much thicket, but I got used to it then, so it was right,' Leonie adds.

Rita says with some sadness, 'Yeah, we all got used to it. We stayed on and on, our boys from prison, come out and do their time there. We sit down with them.'

Leonie indicates, 'They made it as a home for them, to do their hours.'

'Yeah, I don't know,' says Rita.

I add, 'That's really helpful thank you,' a long silence follows.

Rita says quietly, 'I had a bad luck with my husband, then I just...moved out, too much memories.' She trails off, begins again, 'Now and then I used to go back, but lately I never been back. I'll have to go back there later on,' she says with optimism.

'We are making plans to go back there, to live there. Not at the moment, later on,' Leonie suggests.

The conversation slowly turned as Deborah (who is Rita's daughter, Leonie's sister) came home from work. She came, as she invariably does, with infectious energy and 'spunk', we caught up on news. *Where you heading what you been up to, this your wife and baby? Hello Dusty*, said Deborah, all at once, in one breath, without pause. We caught up on all the news and the conversation shifted to the others we had in common. She was going to Canberra next week with the Karalundi kids on a trip, catching the midnight flight from Perth. Conversation turned back to Ululla, Don and Helen. To Sniper, and Nicki Nicki and Daniel and Irene (Molly/Sadie/Rita's sister). By this time Sadie, Molly and Rita were sitting together again, their chairs in a little semi-circle, talking, catching up, little stories about things that have been happening, keeping track of all the family.

How do we sustain a thought of community? What 'event' gives the character of the community? Where does the happening of community take place? A direct discussion? A little road trip with all those memories forcing themselves into view? The forcing of chairs together in order to share one's experience of the world? Or is it the relations that make community possible: was it Gail or Janice or Cliffy, or Leonie, or Gail's father, who established a relation to the place – a relation that could be followed by others? What event enables a community to gather, to go and then come back again, to sit down with another and get used to the quiet?

Molly indicated that she wanted to go. We said our goodbyes and drove back towards the gate. It was locked, Molly told me to try in that shop there (pointing to a building). I got the key, unlocked the gate as I balanced on the ferocious cattle grid, drove through, returned the key and then locked the gate. Quite the performance to get out of this bounded community. We headed back to Meeka. Halfway there I saw a goanna on the road, I called *bunka!* Molly said, *pull up, pull up!* We overshot it. I turned around and slowly crept back north up the highway. We parked on the shoulder of the Great Northern Highway that was silent, stretching off, on its own, into the distance. Molly told me to *block the goanna on the other side*. She directed me, as Cath pointed out laughing, later, like a sheep dog. She loved these middle age women bossing me around. Molly motioned with her hand to walk towards the goanna, the goanna stopped, she told me, silently, to do the same. Molly grabbed a rock and flung it, she hit it, but it ran away madly scuttling across the road towards Sadie who was waiting with a big stick on the shoulder of the road. Sadie is quite a small woman, and this stick was more of a log towering above her head. She brought it down, but missed the goanna that went scuttling, clouds of dust following it back into the bush. Sadie in bursts of laughter. We all laughed. It would have been a fairly strange performance, an odd arrangement of relations and positions and objectives in the middle of a major highway where massive road-trains thunder by with awesome violence.

We got back in the car, turned around and drove south again. Molly had seen a kangaroo on the way to Karalundi that had been hit the night before, but that was still alive. She wanted to stop and put him to sleep. We came across the kangaroo. Three roos had been on the road at night, two were dead, one was still alive, her head 'sitting up', her body resting on one good leg, the other broken in awful fragments, hanging by sinews. You could see where she had been knocked by the truck, you could see the drag marks as she clawed her way off the shoulder of the road and towards the bush. She was panting, in pain, distressed. Poor thing. Molly said I had to kill it. I tried to resist, *can't you*, I pleaded. No you must. She told me how to kill it. The event happened, we drove on. We were back in Meekatharra in a

moment. We dropped Sadie and Molly back at their place. I started to try and write about the events of community.

If we are to write community, then what we need to do is to stay with the happening of community. To write community is *not* to be able to find a position outside what takes place. So when you speak about it you are thrown into it and cannot stand back from this force; the multiple, the singular events erupt and are forced into view. Isn't this part of what Rita was saying? That she can't stand back, that there is still too much pain. That one cannot be objective in relation to community. To think of a place she called home and that held her family is to be thrown into the still too-present force of the relation, that the force of the relation is still happening. When people would say, 'I don't know about that one, go and see Shelia or Sniper', although in a very different way, does not this ethic do the same? It forces the following of the relation, it negates the possibility of standing back from the community itself. Was not the same thing going on with the car trip, events being forced into view? The happening was *still there*, still had force; that it articulated something. The ethnographer is thrown into and towards the force of events shared with others. You are directed, shown (sometimes directed like a sheep dog), exposed to other happenings, sites of activity; memory 'jumps' up and takes you off.

There is always a relation, there is always a chair pivoting on its leg, being directed to face another, to sit down with another and offer up what you know of the goings on of the world. One does not face oneself in community, one is turned towards others, their work, a kind of extension outward.³⁵ Another story takes off. This is the imperative of community – the sharing of singularity, the sharing of difference as the site of being in common, as Nancy might say. And it is what Molly, Sadie and Rita showed me one day when we went to Karalundi, it was an oblique offering – it

³⁵ Martin Thomas notes in his book *The Artificial Horizon: Imagining the Blue Mountains*, that 'The process whereby memory is triggered by the view to the horizon sits a little oddly in a culture where memory is more often associated with reflection. Think how frequently the pool and polished surface appear in war memorials and other intentionally mnemonic structures' (2003: 20). What I mean here is that Molly is directing our attention outward towards a kind of horizon, rather than inward towards self-reflection. Perhaps, in this sense, we could think of memory as noisy and vital – it erupts in breakaways – rather than in quiet pools of self-reflection.

came from the ‘side of the road’ and interrupted the monotonous drone of a vehicle that may have otherwise been hell-bent on reaching its objective, hell-bent on setting the story straight without hesitation; without sensibility to all the things spilling out and into conversation, coming from the side, taking us off. An account that was forced to follow the lead of others as the condition for being together, as the condition of an ethnographic event.

The relations that takes you off and then back again, by chance and by course, of being with others; this is what we must stay with as the condition of ethnographic communication (it is not a regrettable accident as we shall shortly see). We must sustain the happening of the *in*, because this is where it happens, of *in*-community research. Nancy calls this in *Being Singular Plural*, keeping the *in* of being-*in*-common working. Working the *with* of being-*with*-others, is not ‘an addition to being’ (30), the with, the towards others, is ‘not secondary’ (2000: 30), ‘sociability’ is not a ‘regrettable and inevitable accident [nor addition], that has to be managed in some way or another’ (35-36), it is rather the condition of spending time and space with others. Sitting down sharing what we know of the happenings of the world: offering these singularly in the company of others.

New ethnography

‘The world always appears’, writes Nancy, ‘each time according to a decidedly local turn [of events]’ (2000: 9). If we are to gain a sense of this local turn then it demands a staying with the force of these events to change our gait – to be tripped and tipped into another turning of the world. To be forced to go with the work of others. To be interrupted, to encounter, to follow the lead of others. One is thrown-into the event of community. This is not a choice as such, but what happens as the condition of doing ethnographic work. ‘New ethnography’ has opened its ears to this.

Rose suggests that ‘Yarralin people do not offer answers, they tell stories which open possibilities’ (1992: 234). Rose takes this as a teaching about an ethics of

listening. A listening that is not about creating categorical determinations, or judgments, but demands a practice of listening – listening to that sense that others are forcing and working. In a different kind of way Michael Jackson has also ‘listened’ to an unsaid command that happens in Warlpiri communities. He writes:

While I would be lost in thought, Warlpiri would always seemed to be focused on the world immediately at hand. I was constantly being reminded of how hard it is for intellectuals to desist from seeking general laws and abstract patterns, how rarely they notice the singular detail of things – individual trees instead of undifferentiated bush. (1995: 52)

New ethnography wants to listen to this unsaid thing (a kind of teaching or imperative) that is going on, a kind of unsaid ethics that is forcing one to see another possibility for being-in-the-world. What we have here is a sense of something happening that is irreducible to ‘the rule of the concept’, to ‘general laws and abstract patterns’, that cannot be subsumed into a masterly and transparent account. Again, a ‘sense of something’ – an ethical insistence perhaps – rather than a determinable ‘essence’.

New ethnography, its working

This is the kind of thing that Kathleen Stewart imagines for a ‘new ethnography’:

Its effort would be to displace not just the signs or products of essentialism (generalisations, reifications [standing back]) but the very desires that motivate academic essentialism itself – the desire for decontaminated “meaning,” the need to require that visual and verbal constructs yield meaning down to their last detail...to gather objects of analysis into an order of things...It would mean displacing the rigid discipline of “subject” and “object” that sets Us apart and leaves Them inert and without agency. It would mean displacing the premature urge to classify, code, contextualize,

and name long enough to imagine something of the texture and density of spaces of desire that proliferate in Othered places. (26)

This is withholding judgment long enough for something else to take place, withholding determination to articulate the force of other turnings of the world. Staying with the event that disturbs and transgresses prior frameworks of meaning long enough to trace the rupture, the break, the singular event the breaks-away from rational, codified explanation. Listening to the ‘drift’, to the ‘It happens’ after which ‘nothing will ever be the same again’ (Reading 1991: xxxi). To be thrown, to be in contact, to be close enough to be moved, to feel something happen (Muecke 2004a: 3, Ahmed 2004: 27).

Importantly, this is not work Stewart can do on her own. She was forced to break with prior frames, to work on something new, because of her exposure to others. The rhythms of community worked the place for a thought of something different.

The hills and ‘hollers’ of a ‘hard-core Appalachian coal-mining region’ of West Virginia’ (1996: 3), demanded another kind of writing, ‘where the effects of capitalism and modernization pile up on the landscape as the detritus of history, and where the story of “America” grows dense and unforgettable in re-membered ruins and pieced-together fragments’ (4. A writing that ‘grows dense in the thickets of storied sociality’ (9). ‘Picture’, she writes imperatively, ‘how a home place long threatening to dissolve into the sheer shiftiness of history might grow in-filled with an intense synesthesia of person, sociality, and landscape, how a haunted cultural landscape becomes a dizzying, overcrowded presence’ (16-17). She evokes later,

In the hills you hear this inversion repeated over and over like mantra when people are asked direct questions about what they think and they claim they “don’t have no ideal” [this is the way “idea” is pronounced in the hills of West Virginia, and there is of course a deeper potential for meaning in this ideal/idea which Stewart evokes] and then move quickly into a story in which words and images expand out of bounds to become a kind of

theoretical model in themselves – a model to think with that centres no particular “idea,” advances no particular “meanings,” and reaches no particular conclusion but rests in modes of attention, engagement, and encounter indexed in the local identity of ways of talkin’ and ways of doin’ people. (80)

Open, sentient, forced by the local ways of talkin’ and doin’, Stewart responds imperatively, forcing a narrative towards ‘the side of the road’, towards an ‘incessant narrativization of a cultural real’ of an “Other America” (1). The winding hills ‘so tightly packed’, the ‘intimate hollers tucked into the hillsides’ and the ‘dizzying roads’ that threaten to ‘break off’ forced the proliferation of another kind of ethnography. The storied landscape takes over: ‘Riley, sitting with me, grew nervous and digressed from my futile attempts at chronology into stories of dramatic encounters, hilarious failures, and bitterly hard times’ (27). He tells Stewart of a world full of ‘imagination, danger and vulnerability, that ‘I bet you didn’t know there’s hills underground, same as above, a hill’s got a inside same way its got a outside. They’re two sided’ (27). He then tells her of a near death experience when the brakes fail on the coal-car he is riding: ‘at the bottom of one a them hills there’s a right smart twist where the track takes a turn’ (28). His narrative grows dense, fabulous, full of tension, evoking death and heroic survival in equal measures. By listening, staying with, and being sentient to the work of others, Stewart’s work is literally marked by events. *By the force of a cultural real that is happening.*

Basil Sansom also stays with the happening of event. His *Camp at Wallaby Cross: Aboriginal Fringe Dwellers in Darwin*, seeks to describe ‘happenings’. The drive of his ethnography comes by drawing upon the surprise that is at the heart of events; he evokes another worldly sense in the process. He tells of ‘how a man whom I called Tommy Atkins mounted a ceremony, how a widow borrowed widely and then redeemed her debts, how a delinquent wife was chastised in public with full approval of onlookers who held that she deserved to suffer’ (1980: 3). This is what people who camp in the fringes of Darwin call a ‘happening’. Sansom shows that the fringe camp bosses – what he names ‘Masterful Men’ – work to make their

camp the place where it all happens. The fringe camps are run, as Sansom notes as ‘informal Aboriginal hotels. They are places where any visiting countryman can “drop his swag”...They are also places that provide the visiting countrymen with a base from which to prosecute his business while in town’ (7). Visiting countrymen will be “looked after” by the ‘Masterful Men’ who work to ‘secure custom, trying to ensure that the good time spending of country visitors will be actively associated with their own particular camps’ (7, 8). The ‘Masterful Men’ become ‘a kind of privileged elite’ (7), in that they effectively free themselves from unemployment benefits and wage labour (on cattle stations). They are free to dedicate themselves ‘wholly to “blackfella business”’ (8).

What is particularly pertinent for my argument here is that Sansom’s work becomes attuned to the happenings. He incorporates the style and form, the particular rhythm and phrasing of the work of others. Another turning of the world, full of complexity and density, desire and purpose, pain and joy, is traced. A kind of cultural poetics of an ‘othered’ Australia becomes apparent. Not other, as Stewart argues, because it is somehow outside Australian cultural and social processes but because it evokes another kind of imaginary, another kind of cultural real (Stewart 1996: 3, she is of course referring to America). Another imperative is evoked and forced into view.

Michael Jackson (1995), reflecting on his *At Home in the World*, where he explores the experience of ‘home’ with Warlpiri people in the Tanami Desert, writes: ‘I often had the experience of being in a picaresque novel. Life seemed to take place as a succession of events or happenings, each subtly disjointed from before and after...something was brought to light in them, something was changed or differently understood...’ (2005: xxvi) These events, which often took place as journeys with Warlpiri people into their country, were drawn upon in order to structure the form and content of *At Home in the World*. As a result, Jackson writes a narrative rather than an ‘ethnography’. Rather than building the text to reveal the ‘key structures’ of a culture, he builds stories, observations, dialogues, inscriptions and the ideas of others into the process of making the text itself. He is able to

rearrange our perception of ethnographic work, bringing things to light in the process. In fact, one of the key arguments that Jackson offers is that being at home in the world depends on the human labour of inscription – that ‘a sense of home is grounded less in place per se, than in the activity that goes on in a place’ (1995: 148). Warlpiri people he notes,

recognise a metaphorical fusion between person and place, this fusion is felt in bodily practice – making an artifact, hunting and gathering, lighting a fire, cooking a meal, performing ceremony. But such activities engage more than an individual’s relationship with landscape or objects. Carried out in concert with others, generation after generation, and depending on complex relationships...these activities unite the living with the living and the living with the dead. It is in this way that a place becomes charged with the energy and vitality of those who live and labour there (1995: 148).

Jackson’s journeys with Warlpiri people, his awareness of the kind of labour that ‘they’ are doing on him, means that he cannot stand back, he cannot order the particular experiences of others into a total account. He writes that ‘no wholly consistent, systematic knowledge of the Warlpiri world is possible. To create such a synthesis would ignore the multiplex character of lived experience and deny the contingencies that bear upon the shape of narrative and activity alike’ (153). The rhythms and events of community, deny the possibility of cross-situational ethnography; they deny anthropology as a non-event. The singular work of others becomes a way to move thought, to breakaway, to offer the sense of another way of doing things. Another way of being at home in the world is glimpsed, through an attention to *that* inscriptive labour that is going on (and this implies a kind of ethics – a practice – of response).

The writing of community cannot complete itself but must be constantly engaged with and encounter others who disrupt a self-sufficient, complete or total relation to community. Obviously the ‘traditional’ anthropological project is not possible here.

Contemporary anthropology, however, is attuned to the productive and disruptive effects of difference. It listens to the style, to the force of a cultural poetics, to the specific rhythms and events of being exposed to the work of others. It draws upon style, rhythms, and the spacings of events as the generative condition of possibility. It draws upon these, not as something to be overcome, or to be worked out and transcended but as the condition for engagement and to say something about being in the world, about the unique turning that others give light to sense. It moves thought away from settled representational structures and towards other more ‘real’, more ‘happening’ imperatives.

Towards the next ‘spacing/rhythm’

In the next spacing/rhythm I question the idea that ethnography is premised on an insider/outsider, subjective/objective problematic. This is commonly and pervasively conceived as the problematic of ‘being there’ (the subjective realm) and ‘writing about it’ (the objective realm). Kirsten Hastrup, for example, locates the problematic of anthropology as ‘the dual nature of anthropological practice of fieldwork and writing, or presence and recreation (1995a: 21). This tendency is emphasised by Tonkinson below.

Tonkinson (1991 [1978]) writes in his *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia’s Desert* that: ‘The Mardu I have known are not given to either philosophising or attempting objective assessments as to their cultural origins or their complex social institutions’ (17). He says because of this the ‘fieldworker [is] carried away in flights of interpretive fancy’. He continues: ‘This is, after all, the fieldworker’s task in translating the raw materials of social processes into meaningful structural and symbolic abstractions – but the Martu seem not very interested in embarking on that particular trip’ (18). This is a common justification for the need for objectivity. ‘They’ don’t offer theoretical explanations about important structures, so we must etc....But why must we? And what parts of another’s cultural practice deny or work over claims to transcendent objective knowledge? Why, if

people constantly tell you that we are not interested in objective, total descriptions, would one attempt to find them? Surely this is an important cultural fact that shouldn't be erased for the sake of theoretical transcendence? To say that it is the anthropologist's job merely highlights that what some anthropologists do is to replace the experience with others, what they command, the thought that others make possible, with an attempt to represent the community as if beyond and outside itself. This is what anthropology (supposedly) commands. And this process replaces people's ideas about the world with some higher calling for transcendence beyond the world of interaction. We can better understand it from above or from afar, so the argument goes, but what does this miss? I think what is missed here is the chance to think differently; a chance that resists totalising abstractions, a chance that doesn't forget the conditions of one's being and understanding in a community. I explore this overleaf through a complex critique of the subjective-objective divide in anthropology.

spacing/rhythm three.

Out of time: 'the moment of community' and the ethnographic present, a radically empirical approach.

Losing the community

'Community', Nancy writes, 'is given to us with being and as being, well in advance of all our projects, desires and undertakings. At bottom it is impossible for us to lose community' (1991: 35). In a sense, to be engaged with others *is already to choose community* and this is not a decision that 'begins in me', as we will see later through Levinas. What I want to do in this 'spacing/rhythm' is to examine the ways in which anthropological work *can lose* the community: I want to think of how it loses the *being-with* or the in of being-*in*-common through creating community as an object. Part of the problem, is a difficulty of thinking the subjective and objective modes of anthropology.³⁶ What I want to do in order to respond to this is to say that exposure to community collapses subject and object positions. More particularly, I want to argue that no objective positioning becomes possible when one is exposed to community. I aim to show that, by taking an objective positioning, anthropology loses the community by attempting to transcend the actuality of relations. In this way I hope, following Michael Jackson's lead, to resist 'anthropology's proclivity to flatten out difference and contingency in order to promote an illusory authority' (1998: 33). In other words, this is a practice that secures authority by standing back from the work of others in community. A masterly subject ('stable, self-same, self-legislating identity'), takes over and is brought forth to speak of the community

³⁶ This is commonly conceived as the paradox or tension between being there and writing about it, between experience and representation, between the need to engage through fieldwork and the need to create a coherent and unified account. I discussed this in the opening of the 'spacing/rhythm' 'Anthropology, a science of the non-event?'. I will extend this discussion at point in this chapter.

itself (Ian James 2002: 130). I want to keep the relation working as a point of contact, force and contingency, working over a stable position of authority.

Jackson, in his book *Minima Ethnographica: Intersubjectivity and the Anthropological Project*, has used ‘intersubjectivity’ as a productive mode to redress ‘the biases towards subjectivism and objectivism in anthropology’, he does this by ‘demonstrating the value of intersubjectivity for ethnographic analysis’ (1998: 3). ‘The critical issue’, Jackson writes of this project ‘is intersubjectivity and interexperience – the ways in which selfhood emerges and is negotiated in a field of interpersonal relations, as a mode of being in the world’ (28). The thought that Jackson forces here is that one’s experience of the world is shaped by both subjective (a finite, particular) experience and by forces ‘outside’ the individual (the things shared-in-common – plurally so – with others). But, rather than be stuck in-between these two artificial poles and this rather old problem, Jackson forces the inter-subjective (the ‘interindividual’ (6)) as an ambiguous, contingent space of negotiation that collapses any hard distinction between subject and object positions; they territorialise and deterritorialise on each other, to borrow a phrase from Deleuze (1987: 10).

Thus Jackson provides a model that works beyond a naïve subjectivism or objectivism. The anthropological project is thus not about being more one than the other, (i.e. more subjective or more objective), but about tracing the shifting point of relations with others as the site of producing a vital and relevant anthropological knowledge: a shifting point that ‘unworks’ objectivity as much as absolute proximity.³⁷ Relations here are points of articulation where things meet without welding, where things are allowed to move and pivot on the other, releasing a force and an imperative in the process. However, our point of meeting, our relation in common is also a point of difference and articulation. Jackson focuses specifically on the shifting and ambiguous negotiation ‘between being-for-oneself and being-

³⁷ Absolute proximity, formally thought, would be becoming the same as; it would be speaking in the place of the other. Instead what we’d need to think is an absolute proximity that is still a ‘separation’. Proximity would not be point of ‘communion’ and ‘sameness’ and thus a kind of speaking in/from /for the place of another, but rather getting close enough to be moved by another (Muecke 2004a). Nancy is interested in the ‘distance’ that is opened between singularities, writing, ‘There is proximity, but only to the extent that extreme closeness emphasizes the distancing it opens up’ (2000: 5).

for-others' (1998: 16). My approach has a different focus. I want to consider the *grounding* of ethnographic work, what could be called its condition of possibility, rather than the conditions of emergence of, and balance between, individual and collective forces. Thus, I focus on the 'jumpiness' (Stewart 2003a: 434) of the ethnographic experience for which the response is not reclaiming a solid and unshakeable ground (I am not suggesting that Jackson's work does this). This being said, I have found Jackson's earlier work on radical empiricism most useful, and it is to this that I initially turn.

Radical empiricism grounds knowledge in experience with others and it rejects the possibility of an objective relation to others and to the world (Jackson 1989: 3). It forces anthropologists to stay with the shifting ground of finitude. Radical empiricism helps us understand that the 'grounding' or 'foundation' of the anthropological subject-object is shown to be one exposed to a shifting and dynamic unfolding that is 'full of movement' and is 'anything but stable' (Massumi 2002a: 10): this is what I show here.³⁸ Secondly, I will move on to an analysis of Geertz's (1993) moment of 'rapport' in his (in)famous 'Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock-fight'. I show that the securing of 'rapport' (which I will rename the moment of community) enables the anthropologist to move his/her account towards objective cultural description, losing the community in the process. My approach shares much in common with Clifford's (1983) and Marcus's (1997) analysis of 'fables of rapport'. However, I want to take a slightly different tack. I want to consider Geertz's 'fable of rapport' (Clifford 1983) as a moment when he gains and loses the community. Geertz is recognised by the community through a shared and accidental event, but he loses the community when he begins the 'real' ethnographic work.³⁹ Lastly, I examine the writing mode of ethnography – the

³⁸ The original quote is, 'the ground is not a static support any more than air is an empty container. The ground is full of movement...Any geologist will tell you that the ground is anything but stable. It is a dynamic unity of continual folding, uplift and subsidence' (2002a: 10).

³⁹ Marcus (1997) in his article 'The Uses of Complicity in the Changing Mise-en-Scène of Anthropological Fieldwork' drawing on Geertz 'fable of rapport' (Clifford 1983), defines rapport as the 'threshold level of relations with fieldwork subjects that is necessary for those subjects to act effectively as informants for anthropologists – who, once that rapport is established, are then able to pursue their scientific, "outsider" inquires on the "inside"' (86). His interest in this article is to trace the 'ironic entanglements of complicity with rapport' (86). By this he means the ironic or contradictory demand of anthropology to be complicit with

ethnographic present – and will show that this mode furnishes the suppression of the community by separating subject and object position: the ethnographic present cannot stay with the community.

I am arguing here that being exposed to community forces a breakaway from prior structures of meaning, that one is dragged out of one's 'self-present' and 'rational' positioning (one pipes up – there are breakaways to the east that are full of 'ghosts!'). To be exposed to the event of community is to disrupt a 'determinate standard [or positioning] of judgment' (Chrome and Williams: 11) – it is not to be able to return to a settled framework of analysis. There is no objective positioning possible, one is forced and moved by the unexpected events of community (every couple of kilometres Molly would point out another story on the side of the road), the 'grounding' is a shifting one (Massumi 2002a: 10). This sense that the world is shifting and cannot be reduced to conceptual certitude is an important force at the heart of radical empiricism.

Radical Empiricism

Jackson, in his work *Paths Toward a Clearing: Radical Empiricism and Ethnographic Inquiry* (1989), describes the difference between traditional empiricism and radical empiricism. Empiricism, he tells us, is interested in creating objective analyses by separating the relation between 'observer and observed, between method and

the 'inside of a community or group' (95) – that is to see it from their point of view – on the one hand, and the demand to transcend and objectify this complicity in order to create the necessary authority to do detached, scientific and 'real' ethnography (not Marcus's term) on the other. Marcus initially traces the function of rapport within classic ethnographies such as Geertz's 'Deep Play'. Here the attainment of rapport enables Geertz to pursue his 'outsider' (detached, objective, scientific) analysis from the 'insider' position (i.e. from the actor's point of view) (89). Or as Clifford (1983) notes, it enables Geertz to 'disappear into his rapport' (132). Marcus then traces the contemporary questioning 'in which the figure of rapport has lost much of its power as a regulative ideal' (87). This is due, Marcus argues, to the 'unprecedented reflexive and critical perspective on fieldwork relations' that came in the 1980s (87), and the need, because of the critique of imperialism and the effects of 'globalisation' for multi-sited research practices. This is a research model that responds to the flow of information, capital, ideas and cultural practices across (permeable) boundaries. Marcus writes: 'Anthropologists, of course, continue to work intensively and locally with particular subjects – the substance of ethnographic analysis requires this – but they no longer do so with the sense that the cultural object of study is fully accessible within a particular site, or without the sense that a site of fieldwork anywhere is integrally and intimately tied to sites of possible fieldwork elsewhere' (96). It is no longer possible, Marcus argues, to think of anthropology as 'crossing a boundary' into another world 'of enclosed difference' (96).

object' (1989:3). Radical empiricism, on the other hand, 'denies the validity of such cuts and makes the interplay between these domains the focus of its interest' (3). The importance here for anthropology is that radical empiricism actively engages the relationship between 'subject' and 'object'. William James, founding figure of radical empiricism, states:

Rationalism tends to emphasize universals and to make wholes prior to parts in order of logic as well as that of being. Empiricism, on the contrary, lays the explanatory stress upon the part, the element, the individual, and treats the whole as a collection and the universal as an abstraction. (1976: 22)

In terms of anthropological theory this difference could be conceived of as the difference between the rational/detached methodologies as developed by, what Clifford (1983: 120) calls, the 'first generation of professional anthropologists' and more contemporary practices where the relationship between observer and observed, subject and object, is dialogical and interactive, generative of the text itself; in short, that there is no absolutely unequivocal subject or object position possible.

Things happen, happen singularly so, and force the otherwise or the unexpected into view and this is what moves thought on – not towards completion or finality but onwards without rest. There is no desire here to transcend the world, to offer a total meaning that would no longer be exposed to the 'indefinite plurality of singularities' (Nancy 2000: 35). It would be, rather, to follow those 'breakaways' that take us off from a hell-bound journey to an objective. In this way radical empiricism jettisons all attempts at objectivity; there is no 'real' place outside experience. As James writes, 'Radical empiricism, as I understand it, *does full justice to conjunctive relations*' (original emphasis 1976: 23). Radical empiricism wants to stay with the relations that connect experience with a relation to the world. The work here *turns* on the relation. We could rejoin Nancy at this point: 'In other words, every position is also a dis-position' (2000: 12), so that a position we take is already a *dis-position* towards others, towards things and forces in the world. To take a position is to be

exposed and disposed to the force of the world. What radical empiricists want to show is that the interaction between ‘subjects’ and ‘objects’, between observer and observed, is precisely what gives social phenomena shape, form and meaning. In a sense, the investigating subject is thrown into relation with the things he/she is investigating, that he/she is examining, and this is something beyond choice.

Thus, one can only know because one has been forced to see by the affect, movement or shape of the world and this requires experience of the world – an exposure or sentience to its relations. Relations expose the world, the world exposes relations. Nancy argues that ‘the world is not something external to existence’ rather: ‘the world is the coexistence that puts these existences together’ (2000: 29). Or, by drawing upon William James, ‘The relations that connect experiences must themselves be experienced relations, and any kind of relation must be accounted as ‘real’ as anything else in the system’ (1976: 22). There is no vantage point beyond the world. In fact, we could think of concepts as a response to and because of the force of the world: to be in the world is to experience something of the world.⁴⁰ By thinking concepts through lived experience, radical empiricists are happy, then, to stay with the world. They are not interested in transcending their position as-being-in-the-world, as being-towards-the-world (Nancy 1997). Jackson puts it like this:

Concepts do not transcend this life-world, mirroring its essence or revealing its underlying laws. They cannot get us above or outside experience, only move us from one domain to another, making connections. Thought is like a

⁴⁰ Deleuze would be the pre-eminent thinker here. Thought, according to Deleuze, is not a representation of world but part of the world’s ‘infinite and open becoming’ (Colebrook 2002: 71). To think is not to posit that there is a world that is then represented. There is no world external to what we think of it, *and with equal force*, the world always exceeds what can be thought of it. Deleuze argues that: ‘There are images, things are themselves images, because images aren’t in our brain. The brain’s just one image among others. Images are constantly acting and reacting on each other, producing and consuming. There is no difference at all between images, things and motion. (1995: 42) As Colebrook states: ‘Deleuze is not arguing that reality is “just an image” or is constructed by mind. On the contrary, reality in all its difference and complexity cannot be reduced to the extended images “we” have formed of it. Nor can the mind be seen as the author or origin of all images’ (2002: 69). Deleuze is very much interested in the force of the world as a condition of thought. Consider also his and Guatarri’s famous orchid and wasp parable (1988: 10). Here he rejects the idea that representations ‘mimic’ the world and instead highlights the mutual becoming between representation and the world.

path, says Heidegger, a way into and through the world, a movement towards a clearing. (1989:1)

Radical empiricism values movement and a changing conceptual terrain because the world itself is always changing. It keeps the shifting ground as the basis for thought. To be sentient to this is to necessarily resist definitive or objective accounts of the world. Radical empiricists want to maintain a relation to force and change, to a position as *dis-position*; the world resists containment by moving again, by bring other relations into view, new forces are always just taking shape on the edge of our concepts. With this in mind, James writes, ‘Our fields of experience have no more definitive boundaries than have our fields of view. Both are fringed by a more that continuously develops, and that continuously supersedes them as life proceeds’ (James 1976: 35).

What this means is that by taking experience as the condition of being in the world, the problem comes not with transcending and objectifying this through a unified conceptual account, but, the problem comes with just how to make experience accountable to a real place and time, to a real relation with others: to something that *really* happens. Trying to stay with the relation is particularly pertinent to anthropological work because it locates itself very much as a field-science, very much as a sustained, concrete, ‘real’, actual engagement (read relation) with others. Here, I see an ethical potential that radical empiricism highlights: the experience with others is not something that one can stand outside, but rather, others force another opening into the world. One’s conceptual frameworks are contested, another thought becomes possible.⁴¹

⁴¹That fieldwork contests one’s preconceived ideas is not a new thought. Marcus, introducing his *Critical Anthropology Now: unexpected contexts, shifting constituents, changing agendas*, writes that: ‘The distinctiveness of the papers in this volume lies in the strangeness of the positions in which a number of the writers found themselves in the field’ (1999: 1). He adds that this strangeness is not the ‘exotic strangeness of traditional anthropology’ but ‘being immersed in other worlds of difference’ that contest one’s anthropological training (1). That the ethnographies collected in the volume all take place at home, that is in the US, further emphasise my point that fieldwork is important to anthropological inquiry precisely because it forces the ethnographer out of their self-same relation to the world. One is exposed to the differential force of the work of others. Michael Jackson, (1995, 1998 & 2005) has explicitly explored the ‘unsettling’ that comes with fieldwork. He writes that ethnographic knowledge is ‘tested in an ambiguous and stressful field of interpersonal relationships in an unfamiliar society’ (1998: 5).

The ethical – and here is my idiosyncratic reading of radical empiricism, as a relation with others that resists conceptual reduction or mastery – is thus the condition of being and thinking in the world. The real formations of another’s community are felt relations of force that inscribe and move the anthropologist to see the world differently, to make another thought of the world possible. There is, thus, a contestation of a self-sufficient relation. To throw back to Muecke, it is ‘about not eliminating the risky or accidental’ (2004a: 203).

The problem here is just how to maintain the opening, how to resist returning the relation – that point of contact and contingency with others – to an objective (thus outside the relation) and unified account that forecloses on the shifting ground of ‘reality’; the shifting ground that works over attempts at conceptual mastery.

Massumi grimly outlines the problem of conceptual mastery here:

If you apply a concept or system of connections between concepts, it is the material you apply it to that undergoes change, much more markedly than do the concepts. The change is opposed upon the material by the concept’s systematicity and constitutes a becoming homologous of the material to the system. This is all very grim. It has less to do with “more to the world” than “more of the same.” It has less to do with invention than mastery and control. (2002a: 17)

This is one of the key elements of the re-writing of ethnographic authority that came with the ‘writing culture school’. The interest here was staying with experimentation, invention and experience as the condition of ethnographic possibility. This move rejected claims to transcending experience through the ‘writing up’. The ambiguous and dialogical nature of experience produced the ethnographic text, its concepts, and its possibility. This enables a critique of the kind of masterful and objectivist approaches that had dominated earlier ethnographic methods, particularly those developed in the 1950s. Clifford was one of the first to show this in his article ‘On Ethnographic Authority’ (1983). The

central thesis of the article is that ethnographic authority essentially, to borrow a phrase from Rabinow's reading of Clifford, 'rests on two textual legs' (Rabinow 1996: 39). The two textual legs are an empirical "I was there" - i.e. learning through experience and experiment, and the suppression of this in order to establish the anthropologist's scientific credentials.

This suppression is important for two interrelated reasons. Firstly, by suppressing one's voice in the text, anthropologists were able to differentiate their voice from that of amateurs: travellers, missionaries, government officials and other 'men on the spot' (Clifford 1983: 121). These voices couldn't claim the position of 'scientific neutrality' (122), as they were too conditioned by their position. Secondly, by suppressing the positioned voice, anthropologists were able to make a claim to 'objective truth' and thus appeal to a universal meta-realm beyond the actuality of experience, the particular experience with others became a way to establish a universal claim to meaning.

These early anthropologists (Clifford marks of a 'rough period bounded by the years 1900-1960' (120)), secured authority by transcending their location in the name of science. They made universal claims, and here is the tension that Clifford traces, *from* their experience. A shorthand for this could be that the relation with another community (field work, concrete engagement) receives its authority – its exemplary status within the discipline – only insofar as it is able to be surpassed by the meta-demands of the discipline. The ethical event of being in-relation to others, where one is thrown towards contact, to the force of a plurality of relations, becomes something to transcend in order to establish anthropological authority (I am drawing a lot here from Clifford).

At this point, a radical empiricist might say, that the anthropologist thrown into the world responds to it by way of concept, mastery and control; through seeking a unified and objective stance beyond the actuality of relations. (Is this a self-preserving stance to nullify the contest of the other? An attempt to describe another realm, sealed in-its-difference, as if beyond this world? A way to appeal to the

community of anthropologists that demands ‘strong objectifications’?) As anthropology developed along with contemporary social theory, this tension resolved through textual suppression of one’s position in relation to others, became increasingly problematic.⁴² By the 1980s it became an untenable ethical and political position. The critique that came in the 1980s rigorously questioned this mode of ethnographic authority. By highlighting the dialogic, ambiguous place of experience in producing ethnographic work. The new critique, armed with poststructuralist theory and an interest in maintaining a space for difference beyond representation, wanted to re-claim experience and to write this into the text. Experience was not something to be transcended, but to be kept in view as the condition of possibility of the work.

What I believe the critique that came with ‘writing culture’ did was to reclaim the experience of community. It reclaimed the ethical and the political, there was no way to transcend these: it stayed with the conjunctive relations with others as the condition of possibility of ethnographic work. It sought no space outside the logic (and ethics and politics) of relations. A new imperative was at work, an imperative condition of contest, contingency, of dialogical and provisional knowledge – of the community having a force for which one can no longer be the master.

I will now focus on the moment of ‘community’ that establishes the condition of possibility for doing ethnographic work. To illustrate this, I use Clifford Geertz’s *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cock-fight*.⁴³ I am using this text for two reasons. Firstly, it is one of Geertz’s most widely influential and well-known essays and has

⁴² Clifford begins to highlight this in his article. One of its aims is to ‘trace the formation and break-up of this [ethnographic authority conditioned on participant-observation] authority in twentieth century social anthropology’ (1983: 118). He goes on to outline the impact of post-colonial movements, globalisation and the radical critical theory of 1960s and 1970s, that have had the effect of ‘making it increasingly hard to conceive of human diversity as inscribed in bounded, independent cultures’ (118-19). (A more developed critique was formed in Clifford and Marcus 1986). Michael Taussig (1987) highlights the importance of this critique in his ‘Acknowledgements’ section to *Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A study in terror and healing*, saying that ‘Jim Clifford...made it easier for all of us to draw upon the legacy of critical modernism, and not simply expose ethnographic authoritarianism but to know what to do with such an exposure’ (xviii).

⁴³ This was originally published in the leading American journal *Daedalus* (1972). It was republished in this journal in 2005 in an edition devoted to influential essays that the journal had published on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. It was also published in Geertz’s (1993) *The Interpretation of Cultures* as the final chapter, which is the source I use here.

had a seminal influence on contemporary ethnography.⁴⁴ Secondly, this article illustrates most clearly my argument that the moment of ‘rapport’ – which I am naming the experience of being in community – is not only the condition for ethnographic work but that it is *the suppression of this* that guarantees the objective, transcendental ambitions of ethnographic work. Once rapport has been established, the ‘real’ (i.e. objective) work of ethnography can begin. Once subject and object have found their proper place, the work of describing cultures in-themselves, without points of contact and contingency, can truly begin. Once the ethical basis of anthropological work has been established, it is present only insofar as it is elided. With this comes conceptual unification and the anthropologist assumes a position of cross-situational mastery. Questioning and contestation are replaced with the anthropologist gaining control of his subject/object. The anthropologist calls the other to where he stands. You may sense that I think this is rather a grim proposition.

Geertz’s event of community

Many ethnographies begin with contingencies and a kind of affective relation to community. The forces that got one there, to the ethnographic site, are explained. This is a kind of ethnographic ritual in itself, a common practice at the beginning of ethnographies.⁴⁵ What is described in these early moments of setting the work out are the initial contingencies of being accepted by the community.

The classic example of this is Geertz’s *The Balinese Cockfight*.⁴⁶ Geertz begins his ethnographic work, he establishes the site of the work, through describing his initial

⁴⁴ Marcus calls it ‘perhaps [h]is most broadly influential essay’ (1997: 85).

⁴⁵ Clifford (1983) argues that ‘even within classic ethnographies, more or less stereotypical “fables of rapport” narrate the attainment of full participant-observer status’ (132). However, I relate to these textual rituals more positively than Clifford. I am interested in the experience of community, rather than the establishment of participant-observer authority. A good example of the experience of community that inaugurate the ethnographic work is Bell (1983). She writes in the first chapter entitled ‘Into the Field’ that: ‘My appreciation of the central position of Aboriginal women in the design and structure of desert society began in 1976 at Warrabri’ (p.7); her ethnographic work – its scope and focus – arises out of a specific experience of community. Bell goes on to outline a series of events that begin to shape her ethnographic work (see pp. 7-39). Similarly, see Cowlshaw (1999), chapter 1: ‘Fields of Inquiry’.

⁴⁶ ‘To criticize Geertz, writes Brunner, ‘has become an anthropological obsession, almost a rite of passage’ (Brunner 1998: 216.) Geertz has had a commanding influence on anthropological work. Edmund Leech calls

absence or invisibility in the community. He cannot ‘establish rapport’. There is no contact or proximity to others. There is no ethical event of being addressed. He talks, rather engagingly, of his status as a non-person: ‘People’, he writes, referring to himself and his wife who is also doing research in the village, ‘seemed to look right through us’ as if they weren’t there (1993: 412). Geertz is unable to communicate or address others; he is ‘unnerved’ (412). He suggests, ‘the villages dealt with us as Balinese seem always to deal with people not part of their life who yet press themselves upon them: as though we were not there. For them, and to a degree for ourselves, we were non-persons, spectres, invisible men’ (412).⁴⁷ It takes

Geertz the ‘Priest King of American cultural anthropology’ (1989: 137). This is particularly so because Geertz was the link man between 1950s objectivist anthropology and the kind of critique that came in the 1980s (Sewell, 1997: 35-36). The linking concept here is ‘interpretative anthropology’. The ‘interpretive turn’ refigured the notion of ‘culture’. Rather than understanding culture as something that could be understood in its totality, E.B. Tylor’s ‘most complex whole’, which tended towards objective description and essentialisation of actual cultural processes, Geertz wanted to understand culture through the meaning it had for ‘actors’ (1993). (This turn to ‘actor’ is perhaps most strongly shown in the work of Bourdieu, his ‘theory of practice’ that largely emerged in the 1970s, has been equally influential, see his (1997) *Outline of a Theory of Practice*.) Culture, was not so much ‘a power, something to which social events, behaviours, institutions or processes can be casually attributed; it is a context, something within which they can be intelligibly – that is, thickly – described’ (Geertz 1993: 14). Culture became the context in which things (events, behaviours, actions, rituals etc.) became meaningful. Culture here was very much located as a ‘shared system of symbols and meanings’ (Parker 1985: 62). This led to two key transformations. Firstly, a more organic notion of culture that privileged agency over structure: ‘social life’, became, writes Moore and Sanders, ‘the creation and negotiation of meaning’ that could be understood from ‘actors’ models’ (2006: 10; Ortner 1994: 375). Secondly, this interpretation of culture enabled the ethnographer to access meaning through analysis of public actions, expressions, rituals, acts, and so on; ‘deep meanings are derived from close observation of society’s most quotidian events’ as Marcus writes (1997: 86). Cultural meaning becomes accessible to an ethnographer through interpreting its expression in events, behaviours, rituals etc; ‘culture’ as public expression was literally surrounding the anthropological eye (cf. Moore and Sanders: 10-13). Bruner writes that Geertz ‘tries to understand how people understand themselves, and we can have access to these understandings through the study of public interaction’ (1998: 215). This interpretative turn (i.e. culture as meaning, as a kind of ‘reading’ of public presentations) Geertz likened less to the work of the ‘cypher clerk’ (cracking codes, working out order, detailing in a ledger) than that of the ‘literary critic’ (Geertz 1993: 9). Thus Geertz draws on allegory, metaphor and symbolic analysis as much as more traditional and positivist anthropological methods. This move also revealed Geertz’s humanism. Geertz sought to show that ‘their’ cultural texts, rituals and cultural processes held the same kind of function – that is, creating social meaning for actors – as ‘our’ texts, rituals and cultural processes. Thus, Geertz can move powerfully at times (other times problematically) between cultural contexts, creating a kind of cross-cultural empathy as the basis for his analysis. Geertz’s turn to interpretation, his drawing on literary styles, methods and sources, his interest in philosophy, and his emphasis on the broader implication of ethnographic work, enables a fairly radical critique of 1950s objectivism and paved the way for the rethinking of anthropology that came in the 1980s. Sewell captures Geertz position and influence well when he argues that: ‘He is a favourite target of critique among anthropologists of the most varied intellectual provenances – he has been attacked by positivists, postmodernists, and materialists alike. The positivists criticize Geertz for abandoning the scientific values of “predictability, replicability, verifiability, and law-generating capacity” in favor of the more “glamorous” or “alluring” qualities of interpretive method. The postmodernists, by contrast, reproach him for not pushing his interpretive method far enough – in particular, for failing to subject his own interpretive ethnographic practice to critical interpretation. The materialists, finally, criticize him for his neglect of history, power, and social conflict’ (Sewell, 1997: 35-36).

⁴⁷ Crapanzano has commented on Geertz’s unnerving, so much so, that he confuses his wife with invisible men! See (1986: 70).

an event, a shared moment, an ecstatic gathering and dispersal for him to be recognised and for the ‘real’ work of ethnography to begin.

Geertz describes how his attendance at a cockfight early on in his fieldwork changes his status as a non-person. But, it is not the cock-fight that establishes his rapport, but the dispersal of it, as everyone madly runs away from the police truck that ‘roars’ into the village to break up this event – cockfights are illegal in Indonesia.⁴⁸ Geertz like everyone else is scared of being caught in the event and thus runs to escape – he flees from the event. They (Geertz and his wife) end up in a house of people they do not know, here, their ‘host of five-minutes’ leaps to their defence when the police march into the house. The police interrogate the host who replies with an ‘impassioned description of who and what we were, so detailed and so accurate’ that Geertz is astonished (415). ‘The next morning’, and this is the moment of anthropological possibility, the moment of rapport, ‘the village was a completely different world for us. Not only were we no longer invisible, we were suddenly the centre of all attention’ (416). Everyone is warm and affectionate, they are teased, accepted; ‘we were quite literally “in”. The whole village opened up to us, probably more than it ever would have otherwise...and certainly very much faster’ (416). He continues, ‘It led to a sudden and unusually complete acceptance into a society extremely difficult for outsiders to penetrate. It gave me the kind of immediate, inside-view grasp of an aspect of “peasant mentality” that anthropologists not fortunate enough to flee headlong with their subjects from armed authorities normally do not get’ (416).

We have recourse to remark on this for two reasons. Firstly, what establishes connection to others, and thus the possibility of ethnographic work is a shared experience of community. The ethical event, where one’s relation with another is brought to the front of the work, conditions anthropology’s possibility. An experience that Geertz is subjected to, that *he feels* and is exposed to, first through his lack of communication (here he gains a sense of what is at stake in not being *with* the community), and then through becoming part of the community’s ecstatic

⁴⁸ See Geertz’s description p. 414.

‘sharing’. So here ‘community’ spaces the possibility of anthropological work. But secondly, this experience of community only functions insofar as it enables the anthropologist to overcome or transcend it. Geertz gets some distance from the experience of community and this enables him to begin the proper anthropological work. The interior, or true essence of a culture is gained – he has their voice and speaks in their name – this only becomes possible by treating the community as an object.

The opening scene of trying to establish rapport is what we could call a ‘messy text’ – where the relationship between ‘representor’ and represented, between subject and object, is ambiguous, shifting and in question. This is also where the ethical basis (although it becomes suppressed in order to begin the real work) is revealed. Geertz explores this rather meaningfully, and was one of the first anthropologists of his generation to do so (Marcus 1997: 86). He throws himself into the community only to find himself floundering, unable to begin the work of ethnography, unable to describe events as if they were stable objects of analysis. He is, in fact, subject to being an object himself: invisible, un-individuated, blending into the background, so much so that people look through him, they don’t address him. He has nothing to do, no work is possible. But then the moment of rapport, of connection, contact and passion comes; everything settles down, he begins his analysis. This for me, is an interesting move. What it shows is that once the subjective and objective dimensions of anthropology have settled down, been worked out, found their rightful place – the anthropologist as observing subject, the Balinese as object of interpretation – then the real work of ethnography can take place. The ethical relation, the experience of community, becomes something to transcend, to elide from the text in order to establish authority. To lose the community is to begin the proper ethnographic work.

What is involved here, is not only a banishing (through transcendence) of the experience of community, but also a yearning and a nostalgia for an ‘archaic’ ‘native’ community; a community that could be harmonised into a common substance, that could be transparent to itself, that could gather and render finite individuals into an

undifferentiated whole. A community as if beyond the world of contact and communication, sealed in itself. The community becomes an object, it no longer has relations of connection and discontinuity; there are no points of contact and differentiation, it becomes a singular body, a heaving mass. A series of cock-fights in a particular Balinese village becomes ‘*The Balinese Cock-fight*’ (Jackson 2005: xxvi), with the abstracting definitive article in the singular. Specific actors, their names, their ideas, and their presence are effaced in an undifferentiated and exotic mass; individuals become ‘card-board figures’ in Geertz’s interpretive scene (Crapanzano 1986: 71). Geertz gets to work to describe and then interpret the cock-fight in order to reveal, as we are told ‘a story they tell themselves about themselves’ (448). But what kind of story is told about ethnography.

What there is, in this story, is a difficulty of dealing with what may be called a key opposition of ethnographic work – that of subject and object. We can see this apprehension more clearly by doing a ‘double take’ on Geertz’s text.

In the normal course of things the Balinese are shy to the point of obsessiveness of open conflict. Oblique, cautious, subdued, controlled, masters of indirection and dissimulation - what they call *alus*, “polished,” “smooth” – they rarely face what they can turn away from, rarely resist what they can evade. But here [in the cock-fight] they portray themselves as wild and murderous, with manic explosions of instinctual cruelty. A powerful rendering of life as the Balinese most deeply do not want it...is set in the context of a sample of it as they do in fact have it. (446)

What the Balinese call *alus*, we could call ethnographic authority. That is, being polished, unaffected by the work of others, smoothly walking through a village, and later through a text and perhaps a lecture theatre, controlling the meaning of things, unfazed by the claim of others: head aloft, eyes focused on the space beyond the immediacy of others, detached. The opening moment when Geertz cannot establish rapport is a powerful rendering of life as ethnographers do not want it; they are shown to be nervous, unsure, all too dependent on the address of another,

all to constituted by the ethical address of another, the *with* of being-with. Deep fears emerge as the other as object resists penetration. The subject and object bound together in community, in a shared ecstatic event, there is no external position possible; they are slipping on one another, it is nightmarish, it cannot be the work of anthropology. ‘A powerful rendering of life as the...[anthropologist] most deeply does not want it...is set in the context of a sample of it as they do in fact have it’ (446).

So a lot of anthropology emerges in this event. It is a way of ‘catching up’ (Geertz, 452) some of the significant features of anthropological work. A problem I locate in a need to keep subject and object apart, clearly divided. In fact, it’s almost possible to say that anthropology works to keep them apart in order to do its work. Moreover, this process is seen as the paradox of anthropological work.

In the new foreword (2002) to Fabian’s *Time and the Other*, Matti Bunzl identifies the problematic of anthropology as stemming from a difficulty of accounting for two modes of engagement:

Fabian’s argument is motivated by a contradiction inherent to the anthropological discipline: on the one hand, anthropological knowledge is produced in the course of fieldwork through the intersubjective communication between anthropologists and interlocutors; on the other hand traditional forms of ethnographic representation require the constitutive suppression of the dialogical realities generating anthropological insights in the first place. (2002: x)

This is a common distinction and has been articulated by many anthropologists.⁴⁹ My question here, and the one that will guide the discussion below, is why is this a necessary contradiction – why do these two modes of engagement – what we could

⁴⁹ Hastrup (1995a) for example calls this paradox, ‘the dual nature of anthropological practice of fieldwork and writing, or presence and re-creation’ (21). Many have questioned this distinction, for example, see Pratt (1986) and Gupta and Fergusson (1997).

call the subjective and objective dimensions of anthropological work – need to be kept apart, why in fact are they conceived as *two modes* of producing knowledge? Why is the ethical present only in so far as it can be worked out and mastered?

Replacing proximity with separation

Part of the problem here is ‘the ethnographic present.’ What I think the ‘ethnographic present’ as an authorial position does, is replace proximity to others with description and explanation. The ethnographic present replaces the experience of community, where no stable position may ever be possible, (the *in* of *in*-community research), with a position free from risk, where surprise is held at arm’s length, and where others become backdrops for interpretive penetration. The ethnographic present is all about cross-situational objectivity protecting the ethnographer from the pressing bodies of others, from actually being there, thrown into the event of community where no stable position, no conceptual mastery can take place.

The approach to the question of community that I am taking, and indeed was forced to take by the people at Ululla, entails something quite different to the secure writing position of the ‘ethnographic present’. Eric Michaels states that, “This conventionalised failure of ethnography to articulate its practice has a name: “the ethnographic present.” It refers to a conceit that can only arise where discourse is masked, the author disguised, and the subject objectified.’ This, Michaels says, is a ‘symptomatic failure to admit that the fieldworker is inescapably employed in a reflective practice, which can be obscured but not changed by writing about it’ (1994a: 138).

But I think we can push this further, because I believe this is the precise point where ethnography loses community and replaces it with description, decipherment and explanation. What is lost is the sense of community working, that sense that individuals *are* differentiated, singular so, within community. Community *is not* a unitarian or total object that fuses individuals into a common-being, but rather

paraphrasing Nancy, what furnishes the spacing of relations (1991: 18). That, as Norris states, ‘what we have in common is precisely not a shared identity [i.e. a common-being], but rather the “fact” that we are different from one-another’ (Norris 2000: 273). Community is the place where this differentiation, singularity or finitude happens. The problem with anthropological thinking that presents a common-being (the Balinese, the Martu etc.) is that it reduces community to a logic of identity – that there is a ‘common being’ or an ‘essential unity that identifies and underlies the group’ (Norris 2000: 273) and it is the work of anthropology to bring this out. In this way, the community becomes self-contained and bounded because reduced to the revelation of a generalised subject that would speak, consolidate and represent the essence of the community. This is the central theme of the final ‘gathering’ – community. But what I want to say at this point is that the ethnographic present, because it keeps subject and object apart, furnishes a thinking of community as the place of unification (where everyone becomes the same, shares some immutable essence that is found and described) rather than a space of connection, an articulation point between singular plural beings (Nancy 2000).

The ethnographic present

Traditionally, the advent of ethnography has been presented and thought through the ethnographic present. *The Encyclopaedia of Social and Cultural Anthropology*, defines the ethnographic present: ‘A hypothetical time frame, characterized by the use of the present tense, employed in ethnographic writing. Normally it coincides with the time of fieldwork, which is not necessarily the time of writing, or indeed of reading’ (Barnard & Spencer 1996: 604). So, in order to resolve the tension between ‘being there’ (the need for a subjective dimension) and ‘writing about it’ (the need for an objective dimension) we develop an out-of-time, out-of-place writing position. So out of time, that it is not actually real, but hypothetical. It’s a real (grim) leap of faith. The tension between writing and doing, between subjective and objective ‘positions,’ is conceivably resolved or accounted for in this move to ‘the ethnographic present’. The tension between two things is replaced by something else, perhaps something not quite proper to either. This seems odd.

Kirsten Hastrup's (1995a) work, *A Passage to Anthropology: Between Experience and Theory*, grapples with the question of the ethnographic present. Initially, I think we can begin to approach her account with optimism. However, the full implications of her work on the ethnographic present are problematic. The intention of her work is to uphold Said's notion that, 'There is no vantage point outside the actuality of relationships between cultures' (Said 1989: 216, Hastrup 1995a: 4).⁵⁰ Here, Hastrup presents the ethical basis of anthropological work, noting that 'the cultural resilience of the colonized and the global cultural flows that are part of world history...still make us realize that histories are intertwined and territories over-lapping' (3). Thus ethnography rests on an 'interactive co-presence', on a 'improvised encounter'. This doesn't destroy 'autonomous cultural projects' but is highlighted in the 'embedded' and 'practical lives of people' within which ethnographic inquiry takes place (4-5). Hence, ethnography is a negotiated and located practice that resists the fetishisation of difference, it emphasises points of contact and the sharing of language and experience of the world.

There seems to be no problem in the doing of ethnography, in the subjective dimension; the doing is local and engaged, anthropology's 'object' is not categorically bound or cut off, or out of time with broader global forces. The doing is conceived as a subjective relation with a community, that works over a disembodied or unitarian account.

⁵⁰ Derrida has also said something useful here. Derrida talking about European cultural identity, and identity in general, writes in *The Other Heading* (1992b) that, 'What is proper to a culture is to not be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we"; to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference *with itself*. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself' (9-10). The point here is that in order to assign or decide cultural identity, one cannot do as much *in itself*, but only thorough a relation with difference between cultures. Cultural identity here is a kind of straddling of the border between cultures, between the inside and outside; a straddling that reiterates *and* erases the border at once. He continues that, 'This can be said, inversely or reciprocally, of all identity or all identification: there is no self-relation, no relation to oneself, no identification with oneself, without culture, but a culture of oneself as a culture of the other, a culture of the double genitive and of the difference to oneself' (10). Thus 'culture' *is* the relationship *between* cultures. Cultural identity is always doubled to begin with, generated by the dual figuring of the familiar and the foreign.

However, I think her argument becomes something else than it claims to be when she turns her analysis to the ethnographic present. She writes that the ethnographic present rests on a ‘performative contradiction’, which she defines as:

the claim to objective, historical scholarship, including the critique of imperialism, is at odds with the implications of the anthropological practice of studying the others by way of engagement. (4)

What is opened up here on the one hand is kind of *différend* – a difference that cannot be reconciled – between ethnography as interaction, dialogue and engagement with others, which is subjective and dependent on the work of others, and on the other hand, the claim to transcend these conditions in the writing up (through the ethnographic present) in order to speak coherently and objectively about another community. Thus, the *practice* and *writing* of ethnography is in tension or paradox. It is this tension between subjective and objective modes that legitimates, for Hastrup, the ethnographic present (20).

Rather than saying it is a paradox, we could say, in a deconstructive move, that it is a condition of possibility of ethnographic work, that the tension is generative. We could say that anthropological work turns on this difference, in that this tension between the subjective and the objective opens up the scene of engagement, writing and thinking. Indeed, we could say here that the ethical basis cannot be transcended, that it is the condition of possibility. Thus it is not about solving it through deploying the ethnographic present, but keeping the tension working. This seems more positive than abandoning tension through resolution, in subject and object becoming one in the ethnographic present (the ethnographer effacing his/her active engagement and proximity to others by being as if outside and beyond contact, removing himself/herself from a relation to others, forgetting the condition of possibility of the work).

To trace, then, how Hastrup potentially resolves the problematic or the ‘performative paradox’, as she names it, is the focus of my response, and particularly

I want to focus on the awkwardness of her response. It is the tension of her grappling, the tension between ‘theory’ and ‘practice’, between doing and writing, between subjective and objective points, that is most interesting. I think this awkwardness reveals a deeper awkwardness in how anthropology thinks of its practice.

Awkward thoughts

Hastrup argues that fieldwork is not just a matter of being there, but of active and sustained engagement, this requires a movement of ‘becoming’. ‘This does not,’ Hastrup writes, ‘imply that the anthropologist gradually becomes identical with the others’, but it rather ‘implies that one give in to an alien reality and allows oneself to change in the process’ (19). I am all for this, though I would express it differently. Yet, it is precisely this change, this transformative capacity, which remains a sticking point. Transformative capacity becomes something to resolve via the ethnographic present:

Although part of the anthropologist’s life-history and also representing a moment in the course of local history, the experience of the fieldworld as such is outside history (as a particular temporal mode). It is so strongly marked by liminality that the ordinary succession of events is suspended (cf. Turnball 1990). Furthermore, insight is obtained by a degree of violence; the ethnographer must keep up a degree of pressure in order to elicit information (Griaule 1957: 14; cf. also Clifford 1983). Power differences inform the dialogue and distort history. They also create history, but it is a kind of history that is but a fleeting moment and cannot be spoken about in ordinary historical categories. Hence the ethnographic present. The tense reflects the reality of fieldwork. (20)

Fieldwork is thus not ‘normal’, it is completely otherworldly; being with the other is out of time with ordinary history; being transformed and lead astray is not proper, it needs to be controlled and brought to order by deploying the ethnographic present.

This presumably affords the anthropologist an objective position of control over subjective disruption, as unfolds below,

Fieldwork is outside history quite irrespective of the fact that all societies have histories of their own and are deeply involved in global history as well. The reality of fieldwork is a liminal phase for both subjects and objects, in which the distinction between them is dissolved; at alternating points in the discourse subject and object take on the complementary positions of namer and named (Parkin 1982: xxxiii-xxxiv). History seems to be suspended for both parties. The present is what frames the encounter and lends it meaning. The frame is far from fixed, but somehow fieldwork is stuck within it. (20)

And here the problem is approached head-on. The problem of ethnography – a problem that requires the ‘performative paradox’ of the ethnographic present – is that fieldwork (what I’m calling the experience of community) collapses the distinction between subject and object. This would only be a problem that requires a rather radical *ahistorical* resolution, if subject and object were thought to be secure in the first place, or, in fact, if the job of ethnography was to restore their distinction and to keep them apart. In other words, fieldwork messes up the distinction, this is not normal, this is not historical, the otherwise is freaking the anthropologist out again; thus the performative paradox is what deals with this.

Brian Mussumi has something interesting to say about paradoxes:

Generating a paradox and then using it as if it were a well-formed logical operator is a good way to put vagueness into play. Strangely, if this procedure is followed with a good dose of conviction and just enough technique, presto! the paradox actually becomes a well-formed logical operator. Thought and language bend to it like light in the vicinity of a superdense heavenly body. This may be an example of miraculation. (2002a: 13)

Indeed, the ethnographic present becomes rather miraculous, for it not only expresses the reality of fieldwork, but is in fact, in the end, something akin to prophecy! Like all miracles this has to be read to be believed.⁵¹ Furthermore, this suspended body of the ethnographic present is not only all this, a paradox, a reality, a prophecy, but it is outside ordinary history and experience. Well it would have to be in order to do all that! Vagueness aping a logical operator. It is not like Hastrup doesn't try to think about movement or the ethics of relationships and broader forces of power and domination. Indeed, she talks of the intensity of the ethnographic experience and the responsibility one has towards this. Yet her paradox – the legitimating force for the ethnographic present – fails her. It fails precisely because it is written as if the collapse of subject/object (the experience of community as an event, as something that happens) doesn't really, in the end, affect the real work of ethnography which is written *as if* an objective, transcendental position was the generating force of ethnographic inquiry in the first place.

The collapse between subject and object is too freaky, too much. This is why the collapse between subject and object constitutes the legitimacy of the ethnographic present, precisely because the ethnographic present is written *as if* objectivity is the true ground of ethnography. This is a retreat from engaging with the (risky and transformative) actuality of relations. Being-with-others is too much, it's time to circle the wagons, 'link a phrase', try to forget as much as possible those others that interrupt our plans. Look, we know fieldwork collapses the distinction between subject and object, to deal with this we write *as if* objectivity were possible and the necessary condition of ethnographic work. Billie on the end of the leash is freaking the anthropologist out. Are you with me or are you another? A subject an object? We better return to the 'one who considers identity' (Fabian 1991: 229). People seemed to stare straight through me, as if I wasn't there. I can't handle this, it's too much. I must write as if I'm in control, I must return this event to a safe and secure

⁵¹ Hastrup writes, closing her introduction with the sub-title 'The Prophetic Condition,' and I am generally baffled: 'The prophetic condition is a condition of both structures and individuals who find themselves between two worlds. The prophet gives voice to a new world but belongs to an old one. The voice is not always heard. The words seem incomprehensible beforehand; afterwards they are trivial... The anthropologist is "like" a prophet, structurally speaking. The two worlds mediated by the anthropologist are more often separated in space than in time, but in principle the anthropologist gives voice to the new world' (24).

knowledge, I must seek that stable place outside the ever more that gathers at the edge of our concepts (William James 1976: 65), if I'm to write at all.

Anthropology and its Kant

This relation between the subjective and objective is an old problem, and it affirms the Kantian legacy inherent in anthropology. Kant was presented with a problem at the end of the German enlightenment (Beiser 1999: 22). On the one hand the enlightenment showed that knowledge is socially and historically positioned, that it is 'rational'. The argument here is that knowledge is relative to one's location in space and time, to one's relation with an object of consciousness; this is the ultimate conquering of the experience of the world by 'reason' – by an intending and rational consciousness. However, on the other hand, if 'rationality' is carried to its logical end, this would not only mean that rationality itself could be turned upon itself and thus doubted (i.e. what grounds the truth of rationality?) but that there is no truth in general, no truth outside of an individual's position in relation to an object of consciousness which is always relative and specific. This radical rationality is named scepticism (ultimate doubt about truth and the eternal laws of nature) and would doubt the presence of God, Nature, Truth and so on. Kant tried to 'walk', as Frederick Beiser notes, 'the middle path between dogmatism' – the belief in the immanence or universal position of god, or moral belief, for example, 'and skepticism (doubt about all belief)' (Beiser 1999: 22). However, this middle ground proved impossible (23). Beiser continues that:

This middle path [Kant proposed] would consist in a tribunal to examine all of our beliefs according to "*the eternal laws of reason.*" The tribunal would avoid dogmatism because it would rigorously examine all the claims of reason; and it would also escape scepticism *since its eternal laws would be the necessary presupposition of all discourse, even that of the sceptic.* (22, my emphasis)

'Kant hoped' that this move would 'bring reason's house in order' (22), by founding knowledge on an unshakeable ground. Yet, what this middle ground

actually pertained to was not ultimately reasonable, because it was founded on the belief that knowledge could only proceed ‘as if God, providence, and immortality exist[ed]’(26). *As if* there was a standpoint outside of reality. *As if* there was a pre-rational force that enabled human rationality. As if there was an objective totality outside of the actions and thoughts of human. As if one could represent from outside and towards the transcendence of local forms. *As if*. As if, indeed. The time was not yet right for the critique of the closure of metaphysics, the abandoning of the ‘as if’ or the death of God or Man (the position of transcendental reason) as it has been called came with the poststructuralists. In a very real sense, this same paradox is at work in the notion of the ethnographic present. It becomes a ‘logical’ response to the ‘reality’ of fieldwork precisely because anthropology is not yet ready to lose the binary between subject and object relation, between skepticism (social location through fieldwork) and dogmatism (an external position of authority). It keeps them apart in order to ground its work.

The condition of possibility of thought, as the critique of Kant showed, was that these two positions could not be reconciled, and, furthermore, that an irrational middle ground could not ‘walk the walk’. Hastrup’s performative paradox is a kind of Kantian middle ground. Her paradox does all the subjective stuff, and it does it well, but ultimately this work of ethnography is only possible ‘as if’ the condition – the real condition, the reality in fact of ethnographic work – is ultimately and miraculously based on the ‘as if’ of transcendence of the local through description from an external position of authority. What is elided is the ethical relation with another as the basis of ethnographic work. It is the suppression of this ethics that authorises the ethnographic present. A relation only insofar as it can be mastered and synthesised.

Back at the event?

I think Hastrup has difficulty thinking the event. Rather than writing from the position of holding that self-rewinding leash, I think we need to be thrown into the event. Rather than bringing the tension that ties subject and object back into

sameness (a 'becoming homologous'), back to the heels of anthropology, why not think of the tension as a linkage point that connects and opens the possibility of doing something different? Why not think of the relation as that which turns us towards the chance to imagine another way of being-in-the-world? The awkwardness Hastrup has with the event (of fieldwork) is of how to think of experience that seems to break with continuity, that works over and resists ordinary experience, which seems to interrupt the smooth progression of history. It is 'awkward' only because the dynamic situation of being-with-others is something to resolve, or transcend, through a precondition of continuity and distance. This thinking is awkward because, as I argued above, it rests on a precondition of objectivity of standing outside the event and calling the other to order. By calling the other (ultimately) to where one stands, it reduces movement to a stationary relation; it forecloses on a transformative opening by returning to a synthesised explanation that is secure in-itself. It replaces tension with 'resolution'. "Billie, come here, don't stay there, you're freaking me out! Good, I can relax now. I tell you, this dog has a mind of its own!"

I am arguing that Geertz's event of community is replaced and worked over by taking a position as if 'over their shoulders' (Geertz 1993: 452). Fabian calls his dog to where he stands, potentially foreclosing on the otherwise. Hastrup thrown into the event of fieldwork resolves this through the maintenance of the 'as if' of a 'performative paradox'; she forecloses on the possibility that others, drawing on Lyotard, 'punch' a hole in an objective positioning. What we have in the ethnographic present is a refusal to be thrown into the event of community. One stands back, absents oneself from relations, and thus closes oneself from the claim of others.

The ethical condition of anthropology – of being exposed to the work of others through inter-subjective engagement – is effaced. One can then resist engaging the possibility of being transformed by the work of others. One stops listening to the happening of community, to its force that unfolds, and forms the possibility of writing itself.

Getting movement back in the joints – the ethical relation?

Levinas argues in *Otherwise than Being* that what constitutes social existence is a sensibility and vulnerable to the other. Thus sensitivity carries a dual meaning. To sense something is to be cognisant (or to have a sense) of its meaning, its orientation or presence, but it is also to be sensitive to something, to feel it and to be affected by it (Lingis 1986: 59). This sensibility is also shared by Lingis, drawing on the work of Levinas he contends that:

Not only is there no receptive and perceptive sensibility without susceptibility with regard to what one is exposed to, but the exposure to alterity as such – an openness opened by the outside – is at the basis of the openness by which the subject opens itself to objects and to things. (Lingis 2002: xviii)

The subject is disrupted, opened up by the outside, his/her ‘essence’ is displaced by the approach of alterity, by the signifying work of others. Alterity cannot be consolidated into the self-same, it cannot be reduced to self-identity or to a self-sufficient ‘Being’. One cannot call the other to where one stands, the other drags us out of ourselves, pulls us away from a self-defining relation to the world. There is no stability, return or stasis, only ever this movement towards where another calls. This is the key point of Levinas’s ethical phenomenology: that existence is possible because of the work of the other. This ‘happens’ because of sensitivity, which is both a sense and a susceptibility to the other; we are put in motion by the force of another.

By discussing the notion of event, I want to bring ‘a tinge of the unexpected, the lateral’ into the discussion (Massumi 2002a: 27). I want to show the emergence of things across time and space and to show that there is an unassimilable intensity that occurs in events which connects up otherwise disconnected thoughts, experiences and formations. What there is in the event is a contingency of relations, there are

lines and strata and points of connection, there is no stable point beyond this movement. The ground that gets one to community is interrupted, it breakaways, it carries one towards a movement of arrival that never happens in-it-self. Community opens towards other relation, other sites of gathering: this is the space of its work (Nancy 1991). You're walking around the block and someone calls you over, beyond the flat, to where they're camped. They tell you of town and a busted tyre, there is a goat with an eye on the spaghetti, you write this up on the verandah, that liminal space between the inside and outside, a meeting point. Shelia comes up, 'Story now about Ululla.' 'You know that other day when you came back from town, and you were telling us...' 'Yeah, what'd I say.' We laugh. 'You know how it's like community,' she cuts me off. 'Any cup of tea.' There is a sitting down, a dragging of chairs across the dirt into a little gathering, Wombat is there, another story develops, taking us away and beyond the present collection of persons to other times, other events, we wave our hands at the horizon and gesture to the community. What can we think, we can only imagine, we can only remember, we can only be taken away, beyond ourselves and our self-present walk, by others, to where others gather and then on again, without rest or respite as long as the community exists. To here, to there, from now to before and into the future in a flash, through the lines and relations that connect, inscribe and proliferate.

Perhaps this opens ethnography towards a sensibility, susceptibility and affect of the relation. What community forms is a relation, what takes shape is a relation. This is what I explore in the next 'gathering'.

breakaway .

The event of the goat

I took all my notes to Derrida's *Grammatology* (1974), to Alan Schrift's *The Logic of the Gift* (1997) and Vatimo's *The Adventure of Difference* (1993), out bush one day. I'm not really sure why. The flies at the very least would have made it hard to read. The cramped hunched posture of trying to write notes in the bush would have been another hindrance to the work of reading, but perhaps that was, after all, the point. So I'd taken these notes out-bush, all these hastily and inspired notes and inscriptions, scratched in ink, containing the traces of furiously scribbled moments of thought. These notes that were contained and bound, in their way, in a notebook. The notebook got soaked in petrol as it banged around in the dusty boot of a car, each page soaked through in the bottom corner. A strange thing happened. The petrol illuminated the words from the previous page backwards on the following page and vice versa. Each soaked into the other, washing together, bleeding into each other.

Washed into Spivak's words (she writes the preface to *Of Grammatology*): 'There is then, always already a preface between two hands holding open a book' (1974: xiii) are Derrida's words quoted by Spivak – laboriously read backwards, 'Words and things or thought never in fact become one' (xvi). What strange and compelling script. Spivak's preface/Derrida's text washing into each other through strange and potent magic. So the notes were soaked through and wreaked the offensive stench of petrol, they'd spin me out a little, I'd recoil each-time I got close enough. Those damned notes, I would think to myself. The merest whiff would make me find other things to do. I decided to put the notes in the sun, see if the sun and heat could dry things of a bit. I left the notebook hanging in the branches of a little mulga tree outside my 'donga' (a moveable building found on mine-sites and state schools), the

pages self-turning in the breeze. I left them for awhile, the pages and inscriptions, the leaves, happily chatting away in the gentle breeze. I came back and the goat, Malita, who does not discriminate against anything, had the notebook in her mouth and was chewing away. I yelled, she dropped the notebook and ran away, bleating and carrying on in consternation. Now the other corner of my notebook, the top corner, is bitten through and torn by teeth marks. Titles of chapters and books have become inexpertly eaten out, chopped into two, thoughts suddenly disappearing as if over a cliff. The top of the page is where I write questions to myself, some of these questions are eaten out, some just finish on the margin of the goat's incision. For example, 'it is not the same as but diff...' and then teeth marks, eating into the completion of concepts and sentences; creating fragments. Another quote in the margins, written there for special significance and attention, 'There can be a number of variations on that theme' which is a repetition of something Spivak said earlier, just written inside the goat's rather spectacular comment on the use and abuse and sustenance of theory. The goat also quite happily eats cigarette butts, teabags and rubber gloves, anything it would seem is useful, desirable, palatable - as long as your constitution can make sense of it.



Maybe this is the point of theory, a gut feeling, something that one can make use of, a sense of something being useful, even if it is things that others throw away. Things

you find in the dirt. But perhaps more particularly, the forces of Ululla seem to mark everything, make things bleed into each other, preface/text, forwards, backwards, lines of thought suddenly incomplete, vanishing into cardboard. All a little blurred and tremulous on the page, washing into each other. And not just the actual words but also petrol, dirt, goat, teeth, the constitution of theory – all contained in the text. A strange kind of ritual ablutions where the ink stains one's hands and smudges the script as you go, moving forwards, smudging out what has come before. The hand: writing, rubbing out, smudging and inscribing, performing the mark and transformation of an encounter. Perhaps thoughts, words and things have their moments when they merge, even if only in a battered and dusty notebook where smudges become like captions, or clouds, drifting across the page.

articulation.

Listening and becoming sonorous: the question of philosophy

Can philosophy listen? This is the question Nancy asks of philosophy in his book *Listening* (2007). Hasn't philosophy established itself, its authority, its pre-eminent relation to truth, as that which hears, understands, comprehends beyond, or even after, the straining and tension of listening? Nancy asks is 'the philosopher [could we add the ethnographer here] someone who hears (and who hears everything) but who cannot listen, or who, more precisely, neutralises listening within himself, so that he can philosophise' (1). The philosopher foreclosing on the happening, the yet to be determined that comes in waves, that resounds, that reverberates and envelopes the body in attentiveness. The sonorous that comes like a trembling, a pulsing, one straining to hear to gain the sense of a direction, an appeal; a tipping towards the edge of an/other rhythm. Does this talk of the philosophical? And how different is this listening to hearing, to understanding and comprehension, to standing back, determining, characterising, naming, as if standing outside. 'This is what happens when the...[insert proper name]...do this, what they (really) mean is...[insert determination]...'. Can philosophy stay with the happening, can it listen to the 'it happens' as Lyotard says. Working to listen to the 'it happens' rather than this is 'what happened'.

Nancy works to listen to the 'difference' that 'shouts' and 'grates' between 'listening' and 'understanding', 'between a tension and a balance' (2). A tension that is fully there in the French word *sens*. *Sens* means both, at the same time, 'meaning' and 'sense' (the 'five senses' as well as 'intuition, feeling – as well as direction', as the translator Mandell points out (2007: xi – xii)). *Sens* is flecked with meaning, both

senses at once, Nancy works to open the speckle that has been repressed by philosophy. He asks, ‘Why is it that one sense of *sens* has dominated, that is understanding, comprehension, truth’ (2-3)? He wants ‘to prick up the philosophical ear’ to question why ‘form, idea, painting, representation, aspect, phenomenon, composition’, (2) have become the ‘model, support and referent’ (1) of philosophical possibility rather than ‘accent, tone, timbre, resonance and sound’ (2).

‘If to hear’, Nancy’s words tug, ‘is to understand the sense... (to hear a siren, a bird, or a drum is already each-time to understand at least the rough outline of a situation, a context if not a text), to listen is to be straining toward a possible meaning, and consequently one that is not immediately accessible’ (6). To listen is to be attentive to a sense beyond or prior to determination, an excess that escapes closure.⁵² To listen is to be sentient to that which reverberates, resounds and becomes sonorous, this is to be ‘on the edge of meaning’ leaning towards, straining to hear, an ‘edgy meaning of extremity’ without resolution (7). It is a kind of ‘cultural poetics’ of an ‘othered’ space. Not so much outside, or ‘other’, but one that is marginalised, forced to ‘the side of the road’ (Stewart 1996), deafened out by the work of hearing.

The sound of the gift as the exhaustive sound of a working

The following conversation was an attempt to talk about the idea of gift-exchange and community, it happened on a six week research trip to Ululla in 2005. I was

⁵² Levinas writes that: ‘In sound, and in the consciousness termed hearing, there is in fact a break with the self-complete world of vision and art. In its entirety, sound is a ringing, clanging scandal. Whereas, in vision, form is wedded to content in such a way as to appease it, in sound the perceptible quality overflows so that form can no longer contain its content. A real rent is produced in the world, through which the world that is *here* prolongs a dimension that cannot be converted into vision’ (Levinas 1989: 147, quoted in Jay 1993: 556) Martin Jay in his admirable work *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* points out that the postmodern critique of presence and ‘ocularcentrism’ – the critique of the primary place given to sight, visual knowledge, objectivity, transparent truth, reflection, penetration and so on – can be traced to a ‘intense fascination with Judaism that gripped many French intellectuals in the 1970s and 1980s’ (1993: 546). This he attributes to Levinas, who brought a ‘iconoclastic Jewish attitude toward visual representation’ and thus enabled the ‘powerfully antiocular impulse in postmodernism’ to find new (anti-representational) modes of thought (546). Jay writes that Levinas ‘explicitly tied ethics to the Hebraic taboo on visual representation and contrasted it again and again to the Hellenic fetish of sight, intelligible form, and luminosity’ (555). Levinas, he adds, concentrated on the ‘voice’ and ‘the ear’ – on that other sense that could not be seen or reduced to a ‘object of visual knowledge’ and thus he opens a sense (as response to a call) toward an other beyond assimilation; an other that is without self-reflection (556).

thinking here, naively, of ‘the gift’ as a way to approach ‘community’. Could ‘the gift’ be an ideal moment of community, when the ethical basis of the relation is revealed? Where exchange, debt and responsibility is revealed and becomes symbolically present in the giving of gifts? A moment, a symbol, an ethics of giving, that would unite the different strands of a community together? The presentation of the community itself? (Nicholas Thomas in his work *Entangled Objects* takes issues with these Maussian stereotypes of the gift.⁵³) Could the gift be an ‘enduring structure’, that ties people together through a symbolic abstraction? Could the community itself be represented through the presentation of gifts? Once again I was naïve, or perhaps just looking for that ideal moment when all would be revealed, when things could be explained, and an objective positioning could be established. A moment to grasp and hold on to: a model, a support, a referent, to prop up the account. I have heard rather than I am listening. The conversation takes place between Shelia, Sadie, and Irene, at Sadie mob’s camp. The unexpected forces a rethinking of community and gift here.

This is what I said: ‘I’m thinking about Ululla, and one of the things I’m thinking about is that Ululla works and, you know, is a good place, because everyone shares and gives to each other.’

‘Oh, yeah,’ Shelia said.

‘Kulo (wait, hang-on),’ said Sadie. After hearing Sheila’s response Sadie wanted to hear what I said, she leant in closer to our gathering.

‘You know it is because people are generous and not greedy – we all look after each other,’ I continued.

‘Yeah that’s right,’ said Irene.

⁵³ Thomas (1991) in his work *Entangled Objects* takes issue with ‘Maussian stereotypes of the gift’ (4). Thomas argues that, not only was the ‘primitive’ gift opposed and contrasted naïvely to ‘modern’ capitalist trade in western (Maussian) descriptions of exchange, but that indigenous cultures, throughout The Pacific, contrasted their own cultures to that of nascent capitalist networks (4). To say that such a thing as a ‘gift’ society exists, denies a whole history of cultural exchange and interaction with global networks, including nascent and latent capitalism, as well as the exchange between indigenous cultures and early anthropology. What he means here is that ‘the gift’ is in fact very much embedded in broader intercultural exchange networks and historical processes that produce the idea of ‘the gift’. There is, in short, no pure phenomena, no total social fact, that could be described in-itself to speak the (bounded) whole. This is the point Derrida (1992a) makes (although his point is a philosophical one) in his critique of Mauss in *Given Time*, I draw on this in the ethics gathering.

‘So I was wondering if we could talk about that,’ I said.

A long silence overcame our intimate little group as we perched on the edges of the beds dragged out onto the verandah. Fidgety feet in the red dirt, eyes evading the other. The metal edge of the old spring bed frames digging into our thighs, constricting the circulation of real and symbolic things, maybe. Perhaps I was a little desperate, couldn’t stay with the silence that shouted at my now researching ears, and so I said, desperately:

‘Well what about the shop⁵⁴ – you know how that’s like people giving and taking, but I’m trying to think of the kind of bigger relationships that are part of it, you know – all looking after each other, being generous and that, you know...’

I was cut off by Sadie: ‘Sometimes we don’t like giving, we take-off with our key card,⁵⁵ gone now, into town,’ she said, with a flick and a flurry of her hand to the horizon, which is the Martu symbol for travelling and taking-off, ending her comment with a laugh.

‘Drinking on our minds – take-off,’ says Irene, punctuating her comment with the Martu sign for drinking, and with a cackling laugh too. ‘When we are finished and pika (hung-over, sick), we pay someone to bring us home (back to Ululla),’ said a still chuckling Irene.

So much for the big idea of generosity and exchange. After such a retort there seemed no possibility of an ideal ethics of community here. But after the talking I realised that this conversation was never going to be about the ideas of generosity, debt, reciprocity or exchange as I knew them, or was thinking about them through the literature on ‘the gift’. Words and concepts rich and bountiful in the literature on the gift were shattered, rather brilliantly, by Sadie’s response: ‘sometimes we don’t like giving’. (Out went the Maussian stereotype that could construct another society ‘as if over there’ bound in its difference, totalised in its presentation

⁵⁴ The nearest town is about 70km away. The shop is a vital part of the community, it is not for profit, and provides an essential resource. In many ways the community could not exist without it. It is, however, also a source of much difficulty for both Don and for the Ululla community. Everyone knows this, but also knows that without it Ululla wouldn’t be a viable place to live.

⁵⁵ An ‘eftpos’ card.

(Thomas 1991.) Whereas western literature on the gift seems to posit the possibility of generosity – the absolutely ethical giving without expectation of recompense – (I’ll get back to this in the next spacing/rhythm) Sadie savaged any possibility of generosity to begin with! And, indeed, it is something I should have been aware of beforehand, as I knew quite intimately all the politics, obligations, indebtedness and difficulties of the Ululla community shop.

But what happens when ‘the other’ returns something beyond expectation, that annuls the discourse and the meaning that you were intending or were thinking about, shattering the ideal moment in the process? Could this say something about the community that gives and takes and spaces relations as a kind of listening ‘on the edge of meaning’, where what is important is an openness to the interruption of one’s best laid plans? Is this indeed the nature of what it means to be in relation with others – not be able to determine exhaustively the intentions of others – a kind of ‘edgy meaning’ that resonates. Being attentive, letting the unexpected happen, being open towards another articulation, another singular multiple exposition. Is this the ‘gift’ of being with others, of being taken away, off a self-secure track? That there is space for difference, that an/other works, that reverberates in tension and sonority as the space for being-in-common?

Is it that meaning lies not ready for the grasping, somehow waiting for illumination and confirmation, but trembles uncertainly, agitating and resounding on the limit of sense? Is this what ethnography is about? Could our ears be directed towards the other things that are going on, enveloping, resounding, reverberating at the edge of hearing, as a kind of positing or spacing of community as an opening towards the outside of an expected meaning? How to stay with the nod to the horizon, the flick and flurry of the hands, the taking-off, gone, now, clouds of dust billowing, making one choke and splutter in the wake of what has departed before your eyes.

Perhaps another way to consider this would be to return to the dialogue (and eventually to the other things going on) which provided that startling moment and that opened up a gap between wanting to talk about the gift and Sadie’s ‘sometimes

we don't like giving'; a startling moment as the surprise and condition of knowledge addressed to what is yet to be known, and that extends, takes-off all the way to the horizon. As always, with things at Ululla, it will unfold slowly, in its own time: sense drifting, gradually reverberating.

'I sometimes get pissed off with him for my money, I go long and then I come back again, but I still come back and pay,' says Irene.

'But do you think he kind of looks after everyone by keeping the shop going,' I said. 'Yeah – he takes care of us, you know, gets the things in the shop for us, what we need,' reflects Sadie.

'Christmas presents for the kids, sometimes we get pissed off with him for taking things, I want to buy something for Deneal [her daughter] and Don's taking all our money,' said Irene.

'Yeah' joined Sadie.

'Endowment week I only get 170 or 180 (dollars), I don't want to give – that's why I can't share with you fellas,' Irene said.

'I'm planning to go to Leinster, to get our clothes, CDs, kids been get one, DVD player,' said Sadie.

'I feel bad when I come back,' says Irene (coming back home without paying her shop bill).

'When I don't pay, I don't like going to the house,' says Sadie with a chuckle.

'I stay here, I don't go – he might growl,' adds Sheila.

'That's what Daniel (Sadie's husband) was saying the other day, I didn't pay three times now, I don't want to go to the house,' said Irene with a laugh.

'But next day, money day – we give him,' says Sadie.

'What about Martu way for the gift,' I said.

'Oh yeah, we all the time take a marlu [kangaroo] into town for the old people – they might shout us a can, "aye" call out, come here, have this,' says Irene. 'If we lend them money – they return to us – they sing out, come down the creek – we go then,' says Irene.

‘What about people who don’t share,’ I asked.

‘We just don’t give em, tell em to get going, you don’t give us, no, no, we jump on the ute, tell ’em we’re going back to Ululla, so they don’t follow us around askin,’ says Irene with mirth.

‘Everyone here all right, shares. They get a marlu (kangaroo) – we share all our things here – they give one to Sheila, one to Sadie, they sing out, share it out, giving to each camp,’ says Irene.

‘We right, share our meat, kuka,’ adds Sadie.

‘Don shares too, shares his meals with us. I ask ’em what you having for dinner – and then I have tea there,’ Irene says.

‘Yeah, Priscilla and Deneal all the time eat with Don,’ adds Sadie.

‘Yeah, he shares his things with us, if you fellas (whitefellas), here now, he can’t give us. But when here self, he can share then. Never mind he growls at us for not paying, he still shares his things with us, when here self, he right, shares his things,’ says Irene.

‘What else,’ says Irene, “Sheila you got to talk.”

‘No I can’t, you’re the good one,’ Shelia replies.

It was great to slip into the rhythm of conversation (and to see how simple the gift could be - a giving when you can) after the onslaught of questions about giving, which I suppose were trying to talk about ‘the gift’, but ended up mostly talking about the shop and all the obligations, repercussions and complexities of relationships transacted through it. As we sat there, relaxed now, Irene said that she was going to have milka (food - Christmas) in Leinster.

‘I’ll get Deneal (her daughter) some ear-phones, that’s good enough for her,’ said Irene.

‘Yeah, good there,’ Sheila joined in.

‘Whose brown motor car is that,’ I asked.

‘That’s Kay’s – CB’s mummy, this one’s (pointing to Greta who was sitting nearby) tjamu (grandson), he’s trying to get his car started. He got no brake, but he knows how to drive him.’

CB (Carl Bingham) was using his mother’s brown motor car as a jump-starter, to try and start his white car, which had been either going or not-going for the last week or two, going then not going, not going then going.

He’s been trying for sometime to get her going. In fact, all of the time I’d been talking with Sadie, Irene and Sheila. He’d been working the starter. The starter motor spinning frenetically, high-pitched and energetic, trying to get ‘er to kick into action. Occasionally she’d grumble and roar for a second, drowning out the high-pitched whine of the starter, that worked away underneath and incessantly. And then silence again, the wind blowing between the trees, feet twitching in the dirt, the dialogue from our camp released and set in the grip of the machine, underneath, working; going, not going, alternatively. Interrupting, resounding, falling silent, as we sit perched on bed frames.

I wondered later, on the verandah (that seems to only be a welcome and at-home-place when one has paid their debt!), whether my questions were like the starter motor rather furiously being worked, trying to get the big machine firing, turning over, beating its rhythms, bringing movement, opening new vistas. To get off the ground, open up the horizon, so to speak, leave a billowing cloud of dust in its wake; that of course is the big idea of a thesis. The moment when it all comes together, the components joining up and firing in order, without interruption: parts seamless with the whole. So, I was thinking about all this and the big questions of Ululla, perched on a seat, on the verandah in the soft late afternoon light, and CB’s car roared into action. It spluttered as he worked the accelerator, revving higher, back-firing, recovering, roaring, coughing, revving again, all in an instant. And then gurgling away, idling down almost rhythmically; a deep bubbling carried with the wind. The lack of exhaust, as he revved it up, made it a particularly menacing proposition, clapping, coughing, spluttering, roaring up; like gun shots as he eased

off into a fast idle. He'd back off and the machine would threaten to die. The machine would interrupt itself, the components becoming fragmentary in their relation to the whole.

But why all this talk of growling and taking-off, of being pissed-off? And why such joy in fleeing and then feeling bad when you return, broke, sick and tired from radical generosity where no tabs seemed to be kept? And then silence once again, the wind a little blustery, coming in waves, as CB left the starter and buried his head in the heart of the machine. How do you write about this kind of stuff? How do you write about this place, I thought, as I sat on a chair, staring out through the louvres (that open up and close off the outside, French words and concepts popping up in the desert!), with my fidgety feet stirring up some dust, without foreclosing on all that is happening at once? Do you deafen yourself in order to hear? Could we actually listen and stay with moments of suspension and question; desist from reducing things to their 'meaning'? To let things happen, unfold, resonate, to get going like that.

Wanting to talk about the gift, generosity, ethics, community but carried away by the other things going on. CB got her going enough to drive her around. He kept the bonnet up as he drove, roaring, spluttering, growling up the road. He stuck his neck out, craned around the windscreen that was obscured by the bonnet. You can just hear her now carrying away up the road, bubbling, rough-idling, always threatening to die. She eventually stopped, you could hear nothing but that soft wind that came in little gusts, that trembled in the leaves of trees. CB came walking back down the road. A big bloke, bare chested, deep voice, his shirt flapping away, trailing behind him, secured in his jeans, little explosions of dust billowing from his foot-fall. The car stayed there for a week, silent, helpless, hardly menacing – a little sign post on the road into town. I thought of CB with his neck craned around the window in order to see around the bonnet, and I wondered about how he'd drive it without any brakes (Irene: he got no brake, but he knows how to drive him, reverberating in my head); once you are going I suppose it is difficult to stop. It is demanding indeed, to arrive convincingly at your destination. You'd have to start to prepare a

long time before you got there, maybe even as a condition of your beginning, yet I imagine you'd pull up short or over-shoot all the time. The danger, I suppose, in driving this mad thing.

But, perhaps the moment of arrival is when you lose your brakes and give up expecting to get *there*. And when you pull up, wherever that may be, it is relaxing to find your feet once again, slip back into the rhythm of conversations at Ululla, to look up and around, open your eyes and ears and see what else is going on whilst you've been working hunched over and asking and craning and expecting. I wonder, if this is how things find their place? Find their place in that moment between ending up/over-shooting/coming-up-short, and slipping back into the mundane and everyday discourse that is the basis of communities, where nothing is expected but the sharing that people can give as the basis for being-in-common, for being-in-the-world. Like perpetual momentum without determined end or arrival.

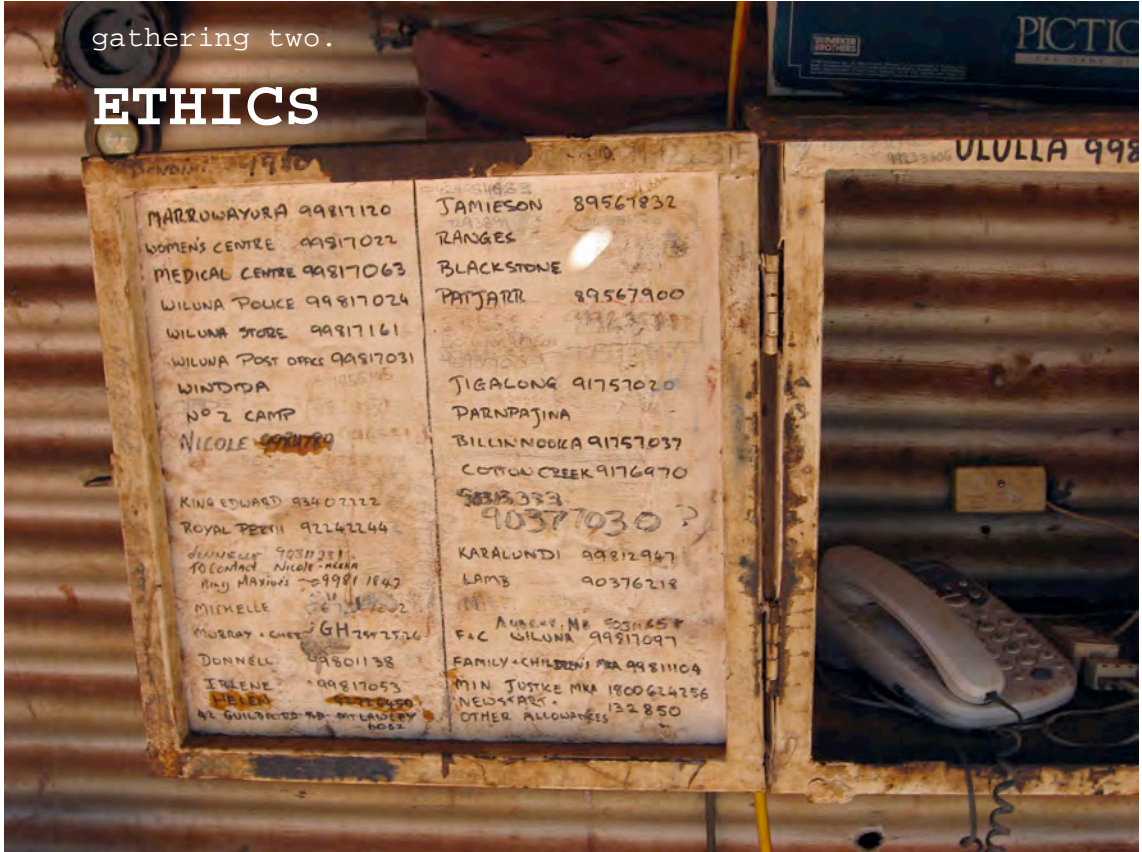
I was all too happy to slip back into the everyday, which sort of has, if such a thing could be said, nowhere in mind. Just here, now, with these people and this place, and the arrangements of everyday expectations, sitting on beds dragged out onto the verandah, talking about Christmas, giving what we can. Communities are made of such mundane at-home-stuff. I felt good to be there, in that spacing, with that rhythm. I later asked Gail (CB is her partner), a little cheekily, 'How's that motor-car going?'

'Up the road, battery dead – but we'll charge it up for later,' replied Gail.

She'll roar for a-while yet, I thought. This machine, (what do we call it, writing, philosophy, ethnography, ethics, communication, community?) hurtling towards the horizon without any brakes and with no convincing way of arrival, coming up short, over-shooting all the time, that chokes and splutters, interrupts itself, threatening to fragment, but that waits ready to go again, ready to be charged-up for later.

gathering two.

ETHICS



opening.

Listening to the relation: Levinas, ethics and the work of others

Sheila and whitefellas

Hamish: What do you think of whitefellas coming here.

Sheila: Whitefellas comin' up?

Hamish: Yeah, white fellas comin' up.

Sheila: It's alright, got to be alright.

Hamish: But it's alright Martu side?

Sheila: Good, yeah, he right Martu side. Yeah, goin' keep goin'. Ah, that's it. We like to see'em whitefellas comin, it's good. Yeah, he right, we like it.

Hamish: Me writing stories?

Sheila: You can do it yourself, he right, good.

Hamish: What about when we leave and don't stay?

Sheila: He right with us, Don, sit down, look after him.

This is the basic problem of Levinas's philosophy, but I'll return to this soon. First, we need to talk about ethics.

Levinas first defines ethics, as Simon Critchley points out, as 'the putting into question of my spontaneity in the presence of the other' (Levinas 1969: 43 quoted in Critchley 1992: 5). Ethics for Levinas, is a calling into question of the same, a calling into question of the self: it is a movement towards an other that does not seek to subsume the other's radical difference. Levinas writes that 'the other puts the I in question. This putting into question emanates from the other' (Levinas

1969: 195). The other intervenes, interrupts, questions ‘the ego, the knowing subject, self-consciousness...the Same’ (Critchley 1992: 4).

The possibility of ethics, then, is a relationship with another that maintains the radical alterity of the other. The movement by which the ‘I’ attempts to possess, comprehend and assimilate the other to ‘the Same’ is the annulment of ethics, the annulment of the other’s alterity, precisely because it collapses the other’s radical difference into economies of categorisation, containment and knowing. An ethical relationship, if possible, would be a relationship with an other that overflows and exceeds the very notion of other – the other that could not be reduced to a general or universal category. This would be to approach the other as radically singular, empty handed as Levinas says. Therefore, the ethical opens up a relation with the infinite, insofar as the other, the truly other, is beyond a horizon of comprehension that would bring the other back into the same. The other exceeds and ‘escapes the cognitive powers of the knowing subject’ (Critchley 1992: 5), and is thus irreducible to a finite categorisation. This is why the relation with the other engages a relationship of what is beyond absolute comprehension (Levinas 1969: 25). It is, in Levinas’s terms, ‘entering a relationship with the ungraspable while guaranteeing its status of being ungraspable...it is not to be able to escape responsibility, not to have a hiding place of inwardness where one comes back into oneself’ (1996: 55).

The links here between this thought of ethics and ‘the event’ – as that which breaks with an horizon of capture – should be clear. The discussion of both the event and ethics that I am developing seeks to maintain a relationship with alterity, thus working against totalising representations that would assimilate difference. Thinking with ‘ethics’ and ‘the event’ is a way to maintain a space beyond exhaustive determination. I see this as the demand of ethnography post-writing culture school, it is not only a political turn, but also an ethical one – of how to maintain the space for difference beyond a finite categorisation. This implies interruption, questioning and suspension of a total knowledge of others. In other words: how to maintain a relationship with the infinite – that which exceeds

exhaustive determination – as the space of the ethical condition of anthropological work.

This can quickly become a reason to stay in one's office, affirm one's prior research, and read more French theory. We cannot represent the other, only show the impossibility of such a venture etc., but this misses the point of the ethical. The chance of being an ethnographer is being exposed to difference, to the force of others as the opening towards ethnographic communication. And ethnography is in a unique position to expose this. Therefore, the ethical problem is how to keep this working as the condition of doing ethnographic work. The problem here is not transcending this condition, separating subject/object, experience/writing, self/other, but *keeping it working as anthropology's work*. Again, tension rather than resolution.

This brings me back to Shelia's words. What I was doing was trying to justify my project with Sheila – it is all right that I do research. Here, I am seeking confirmation for the 'ethics' of my research. I am asking Sheila, whether is it ethical, is it all right, I am asking her to confirm my position. This we could call, following Derrida's critique of Levinas an 'ethics of ethics' (1978: 138), this is what he calls Levinas's philosophy,⁵⁶ it is a discussion *about* ethics, a confirmation of a position, an argument about ethics: ethics here is a certain mode of discourse, the confirmation of a position or project. Sheila sees in my question something else – a demand to look after the other, *actually, and in a way without question* – that it's alright that you (whitefellas) come and go, because we sit down and look after Don, don't worry we'll look after him, she is saying. A kind of ethics that is infinite because that is what must be done.

The basic problem of the ethical is that any discussion about ethics is precisely that, a discussion about ethics; a position is confirmed and justified, an argument is mounted. When ethics becomes 'thematic, constituted from propositions,

⁵⁶ Levinas will say in response to Derrida's criticism, in *Otherwise than Being* that 'the ethical situation of responsibility is not comprehensible on the basis of ethics' (2002: 120). I will be discussing Levinas's *Otherwise than Being* later.

statements and arguments which need to be defended' (Large 2005: xii), then the radical intervention of the other – an infinite looking out for the other perhaps – that ethics is premised on is assimilated to discourse as a kind of affirmed position of knowing or judgement.

This is why the ethical relationship, if it is to be possible, must be something other than discourse; an unutterable, unthinkable beyond as Derrida says of Levinas's work. The other cannot be revealed, or said in discourse. But, again, this is not a call to stay in one's office. The call of the ethical is an appeal to think that which escapes discourse, that which cannot be reduced to discourse. This is something that Alan Watts evokes, 'Only words and conventions can isolate us from the entirely undefinable something which is everything' (1997: 46). The ethical – that which cannot be said in words, that surpasses understanding and exhausts discourse – is, to give a Levinas turn on Watts, the 'something' that really matters. The ethical opens us to a sense that there is something about a relationship with an other that denies capture or containment – that there is an ethical force that an other works on us which cannot be said in words. My lover holds my head in her hands and says, with genuine incomprehension, 'who are you?' There is a force that denies an objective positioning, there is something 'otherwise than being', as Levinas will say (2002). The ethical force here would interrupt a total, determined meaning. As Peperzak comments 'another existence is a "surplus" that cannot be reduced to a becoming a part or moment of the same – the other cannot be captured or grasped' (1993: 20). So, the question becomes, can we stay with the ethical?

To reiterate Lingis's words drawing upon Levinas, to sense something is to be aware of a meaning, an orientation *but it is also to be sensitive* to something, to be open, vulnerable, to feel it and be affected by it. It is to be straining to hear, on the edge of meaning, prior to determination (Lingis 2002: xviii). This is the difficult space of the ethical. To be listening to that which overthrows or 'deranges' (Large 2005) the common sense of sense (as comprehension or understanding).

The happening place of ethics

Lingis writes, in his translator's introduction to Levinas's *Otherwise than Being*:

For Levinas's project what is difficult is not to locate the place where ethical responsibility is in force; as soon as one is in philosophy, indeed as soon as one is in language, one is in that place. But the difficulty is that every theoretical and ontological intention [which is the intention to grasp and comprehend] of philosophy dissimulates the ethical subjectivity, just by formulating it in the terms which are those of theoretical and ontological intelligibility. (Lingis 2002: xviii)

The difficulty is thus not 'ethics' – of being in relation to others – this is what happens when ever we gather together, but of how to think ethics, of how to make ethics intelligible without general themes or representational doctrines that produce categorical principles and universal themes. The problem with anthropology, as I have been showing, is that it forgets the relationship with an/other – the ethical – by pursuing accounts premised on objectivity and categorical determination, i.e. the securing of distance and comprehension. What I want to now explore is how the ethical, if we listen to it, interrupts this attempt at detachment.

I begin by exploring the ethical possibility of anthropological work through focusing on the question of community, ethics and gift. This 'spacing/rhythm' is bound by the question of what it means to be in relation with others; a question that gets to the heart of anthropology, gift, ethics and community, and which provides the chance to present new ways to consider 'difference' and 'sameness'.

The second spacing/rhythm is more critical of Levinas and offers a way to read 'ethics' without transcendentalism. I try and think about that sense that Lingis's highlighted of the ethical, i.e. that it is already happening ('as soon as one is in language, one is in that place'). Strangely, this takes me away from Levinas's transcendentalism and towards Nancy's worldly philosophy.

Part of the difficulty I face here is that I am ambivalent to Levinas's thought while on the whole being sympathetic of his project, if such a thing can be said. But this is the difficult thought of a philosophy of ethics. Levinas's thought is more of a sense of things (that others exceed determination) than something you can prove or categorically determine. In fact, to categorically or exhaustively determine beyond question would leave no place for the sense of the ethical. There is thus a fair bit of ambivalence (we could call this a trembling, a 'being put in question', a responsibility to the other that cannot be adequately responded to) at the heart of Levinas's thought.⁵⁷ This does not absolve me from responsibility to be rigorous here. Levinas demands rigorous work and attention, and this is the challenge I take up here. But, this being said, you will sense my ambivalence and sympathy at once, it kind of agitates without resolution. This may ultimately obscure a clear position in relation to Levinas, this I will have to wear, but it *may just be* the place of the ethical.

⁵⁷ Hutchens (2004), drawing on Manning (1993), writes that: 'Manning has noted that Levinas's rhetoric is expressed in phrases such as "it is as if" and "it is not as if"' (Hutchens 2004: 5, Manning 1993: 111-113). While Hutchens sees this as an empty ('hyperbolic') rhetorical strategy (6), I take it more as a demand to think beyond the text, in a sense beyond what is said, to think the 'otherwise', that trace. In a sense, to take responsibility for thought without determination. However, I can also see Hutchens point.

spacing/rhythm four.

Ethics at work in ethnography: following the work of the relation

To begin this work, I start with a discussion of the gift in order to respond to the problem of thinking the ethical. However, I do not pursue the narrative of the gift throughout the latter part of the essay. I have found 'the gift' as a useful way to respond to 'ethics', a kind of way to get 'into' ethics. The gift is a formal problem well known to anthropology and philosophy, thus it helps me to articulate the problem of Levinas's ethics in resonant ways. I will then discuss Rose's use of Levinas in the middle part of this spacing/rhythm, before moving onto a discussion of 'community' by showing its importance to anthropological work, at this point I begin to move a way from Levinas's transcendental ethics.

A first take on the gift and the problem of ethics

In many ways, the problem of the gift as it has unfolded in western discourse can be seen as the problem of generosity, the problem of a giving without condition. Social binds, obligations and expectations always mark the giving and receiving of gifts; these social forces cannot be untied from the gift. This means, in short, that there are always cultural and symbolic economies at work that make the giving of gifts possible and meaningful to begin with. But this is the precise problem and indeed the magic of the gift. As Mauss wrote in 1925, 'prestations which are in theory voluntary, disinterested and spontaneous...are in fact obligatory and interested' (1970 [1925]: 1). Thus, the gift appears generous but is in fact calculated. The gift is presented as 'free' but obligates

one in response. There is a kind of double logic of the gift always at work, a necessary play between social ‘deception’ (the gift must appear generous) and social reality (the gift is coercive, it obligates others and indebts others to return). Indeed, Mauss’s essay expresses and draws out this magical economy between ‘appearance’ and ‘reality’.

Derrida also, begins with the proposition, first presented by Mauss, that the gift is not ‘free’. However, Derrida, develops and plays this theme out far more rigorously; his narrative becomes a wondrous essay on the conditions of possibility of the gift. He argues that the gift cannot be given gratuitously (without condition), that the giver always gets something back. The gift is always marked by the exchange of something. Now, this exchange is not simply the transfer of things, but is also marked by the interchange of gratitude, praise, indebtedness and so on. Thus, Derrida concludes that the gift is never free from some kind of bond; it is always marked by exchange (1992a: 6). Derrida departs at this point from Mauss by contending that in order for the gift to appear as gift it must be recognised as gift. It is this recognition of the gift *as a gift* that marks the radical impossibility of the gift, and that also marks Derrida’s radical rewriting of the gift.

For there to be gift, Derrida contends, it must be recognised as gift, yet as soon as the gift is recognised, is presented as gift, it ceases to *be gift* and becomes a symbolic equivalent in an ‘economic’ relation of circulation, return and debt – things that annul the generous giving (without condition) of the gift (1992a: 13). So, whereas Mauss recognised that the gift must appear generous but is in fact obligatory, Derrida takes it further by arguing that the instant the gift is recognised as gift, it annuls itself in obligation, social contract and exchange (6). This is the condition of possibility/impossibility of the gift. For Derrida, it is not so much that the gift is ‘structured between a false appearance and a social or economical reality’ (Frow 1997: 109)⁵⁸ but that the gift can never present itself, it cannot be given in-itself. There is

⁵⁸ Frow is commenting on Mauss’ *The Gift* (1970), and not on Derrida’s criticism in *Given Time* (1992).

precisely, as Derrida later concludes, ‘no take on the gift’ (81). What is given is something other than the gift itself.

This condition of possibility bears much in relation with the problem of Levinasian ethics as explored in this essay. In order for the *radically* other to appear, to be thinkable and recognisable, the other must not appear through the force of reference that makes this appearance possible: the other must exceed the representational and symbolic economy that would annul radical difference in recognition, reciprocity and return. Indeed, de Vries writes that Levinas’s philosophy ‘signals itself in the concrete event of obligation, more specifically in the introduction of a responsibility that precedes and exceeds contracts and rules, reciprocity and recognition, norms and conventions’ (1999: 245). A kind of giving without condition or return to the self. ‘The other’ must be like that radical gift that departs never to return to the cycle of reciprocity that gives the gift. In order for the other to be *totally* other, the other must not appear, must not be recognisable as other. For to recognise the other *as an/other*, consumes difference through a return to an economy of recognition; an economy (discourse, language, meaning) that recognises otherness through a return to the same, that replaces the ethical approach of the other with economies of knowing and (self) recognition. This is the basis of Derrida’s 1967 critique of Levinas, ‘Violence and Metaphysics’, which I will engage with below.

The call of the other, for Levinas, must be responded to with absolute generosity – without expectation of return (to the same). The face of the other, a key figure in Levinas’s work, is without condition, it cannot be responded to with any notion of return.⁵⁹ As Robbins argues: ‘Generosity [without return] preserves for Levinas the

⁵⁹ Levinas writes in the ‘Trace of the Other’ that: ‘A work conceived in its ultimate nature requires a radical generosity of the same who in the work goes unto the other. It then requires ingratitude of the other. Gratitude would in fact be the return of the movement to its origin’ (1986: 349, quoted in Robbins, 1999:7). Derrida conceives of the same ‘ingratitude’ in order to give the radical gift beyond all expectation of recompense. Here ingratitude would avoid the ‘gratifying image of goodness or generosity, of the giving-being who, knowing itself to be such, recognizes itself in a circular, specular fashion, in a sort of auto-recognition, self-approval, and narcissistic gratitude’ (1992a: 23).

radical and absolute asymmetry between myself and the other' (1999: 7) This is an absolute generosity because there can be no return to the same if there is to be ethics. 'This is a generosity', Robbins continues, 'that must be thought outside the balanced economy of reciprocal exchange, outside all economies of deficits and compensations, outside all accountable operations' (7). The other must come from on high (Levinas calls this a 'dimension of height' (1969: 34-35), from above, to transcend the mundane economy of symbolic recognition. The idea of 'ethics as first philosophy' (Kearney and Levinas 1986), then, is rather difficult to sustain, if not impossible to say. But it seems to say something about anthropological work.

What I mean here is that anthropology names the other itself, it attempts to name a radically other, other. It attempts generosity in regards to the other – a writing without return to the same, a writing of the *other itself*; it voices otherness itself, speaks as if the other could appear in itself. Yet, perhaps this condition is rather impossible. What I want to say here, in order to refigure this bind is to say that anthropology is conditioned on a shared experience of community, this will become increasing apparent in the latter parts of this 'spacing/rhythm'.⁶⁰ I am not arguing for the radical impossibility or solipsistic nature of anthropology, but I am much more interested in exploring how Rose's use of Levinas's difficult *and radical* philosophy refigures the problem of ethnographic communication and how it opens a space to consider the

⁶⁰ We saw through my analysis of Geertz's cock-fight that anthropology takes as its condition of possibility the experience of community – of being recognised, of sharing something in common as the basis for communication. This relationship of course develops as the ethnographer shares more time, events and experiences with others. However, the problem I highlighted was that this condition for communication is what is often negated by beginning the 'real' ethnographic work of objective cultural description. Here the relations with others, as the *actual possibility of doing ethnographic work*, can become (violently) obscured by the demand to create a unified anthropological text (that approaches other cultures 'as if over there' s if they could be described by revealing their essential practices, rituals, events). Yet we could push this further here. In order to name the radically *other*, other, anthropology must free itself from the bonds and binds of the relationship to others. It must be like that radical gift beyond the circle of exchange – beyond those points of contact, contingency and 'befalling' (Muecke 2004a). In other words, in order to speak of otherness itself – an otherness without relation to the same – anthropology must free itself from the bonds and binds that tie it to others. What I showed through my analysis of Geertz was that once 'community' is established, Geertz works to free himself from his relation to others in order to reveal another world of cultural difference (as a kind of difference-in-itself). He transcended the relationship with others, divides subject and object, thus beginning the real work of describing the other-in-itself. Contingency, contact, exposure to the work of others was negated. Once community is established, it is repressed as the condition of ethnographic work; it is worked over, worked out and transcended.

problem of the ethical, and indeed the possibility of an ethical ‘return’. (Did not an earlier and still latent anthropology attempt to name a radically other, *other*; an other than came from a dimension of height, as if outside the world, beyond a common relation?) This begs the question that perhaps a more productive anthropological inquiry into the writing of difference may begin with the recognition of the binds and bonds and obligations of community that make anthropology possible in the first place. This recognition would therefore deny any radical naming of difference, and would take place through thinking being *in-common* (responsibility, obligation, debt, gratitude) as the basis for communicating difference.

What we name is not difference *itself* but a relation to a cycle of exchange with others. Ethnography here would work the relation as *its* work, staying with the relation as a point of contact and communication: a relation that cannot be transcendental, that cannot speak of otherness itself, but rather speaks of something much more worldly and imperative. It is *not* about taking a ‘dimension of height’, *it is* about being caught up in there – in the nitty-gritty mix of relations. This is the kind of things that Rose’s work responds to. The ethnographic writer humbled, vulnerable, dependent on the address and call of the other; being exposed to the force of others, working this as the basis for ethnography. This might just point to the possibility of ethics at work in ethnographic work, it is what Rose works as the basis of her work.

Rose’s response to Levinas’s ethical call

For Rose, Levinas provides an inter-subjective philosophical framework ‘in which each of us is always, already, responsible for others’ (Rose 2004: 13). Rose continues that:

There is no self without other. Life with others is inherently entangled in responsibility. Levinas thus claims the primacy of ethics as an inherent and inalienable aspect of the human condition. (13)

Ethics most simply is a relationship with an/other, it is the fact of being-in-community with others, the fact that the self, or being, can only exist in relation with others. This line of thought can be traced back, most obviously, to Hegel and Heidegger. However, Levinas's radical metaphysical move is to posit that the self is constituted through a radical and originary exposure and vulnerability to the other, Levinas thus resists a Hegelian reduction of the other to the same – the other without the movement of synthesis and sublation. The other, Levinas argues, comes to disturb, accuse and question self-security, there is agitation and troubling; there is no synthesis or 'at home with oneself' in the ethical (Levinas 1969: 39, 2002: 118).⁶¹ It is not so much that we are thrown-down (as in Heidegger)⁶² but that the self is thrown into question, that the self is 'hostage' to, is 'accused' by the demand of another. This is an assignation from which one cannot retreat to a dwelling or to some original propriety.⁶³ What we have working

⁶¹ Peperzak writes that: "The other transcends the limits of "self-consciousness" and its horizon; the look and voice that surprises me are "too much" for my capacity of assimilation" (1993: 20).

⁶² Michael Jackson writes that: "In Heidegger's terms, our-being-in-the-world is a "thrownness" (*Geworfenheit*); we are "thrown" (*geworfen*) into a world which has been made by others at other times and will outlast us" (1989: 14). What Heidegger means is that there is no choice in existence. What Levinas would say here is that this lack of choice is a questioning, it is 'an accusation', 'one is hostage' to the other – one answers for his/her very self to the other. This is so because it is the other than makes 'my' existence possible. Moreover, this otherness cannot be assimilated to the self but works over any appropriation. This is why Levinas would say: "The responsibility for the other cannot have begun in my commitment, in my decision" (2002:10). This would be an ethical condition that one cannot choose to decline, nor dominate. Žizek complicates any neat distinction further by drawing on Heidegger and arguing that "what if we are effectively "thrown" into this world, never fully at home in it, always dislocated, "out of joint," and what if this dislocation is our constitutive, primordial condition, the very horizon of our being? What if there is no previous "home" out of which we were thrown into this world, what if this very dislocation grounds man's ex-static opening of the world?" (2001b: 9). Perhaps the key difference here between Heidegger and Levinas is that Levinas doesn't use any notion of 'home' nor notion of a loss of an original propriety; there is no 'dislocation', things aren't 'out of joint' in this ex-static opening to others. The ethical work of others would already dissimulate any loss of 'properness'; the 'proper' place is one of being put in question by the other, from which being extends – not as a loss of authenticity but of being's possibility.

⁶³ The most simplistic critique of Heidegger would cite this passage from *Contributions to Philosophy*: "Oneness makes up beingness. And oneness here means: unifying, originary gathering unto sameness of what presences together-along-with and of what is constant" (1998: 138). We could then argue that this assimilates alterity to the same – to an 'appropriation'. The self, here, is a self in retreat, enclosed in an ethically violent dwelling or at-homeness (in oneness). This is an otherness that is to be grasped, and totalised, in order for the self to realise itself. With this kind of critique in mind Caputo notes that the best critic of Heidegger is Levinas (1999: 232). Caputo shows that Heidegger's notion of Being – as Being with others from 'whom it [Being] must learn to differentiate itself into an authentic self' (226) 'erases ethical alterity' (232), because an authentic self would be one that deals with, or assimilates others, to a 'belonging to self', to a grounding in self. It is because of this that Levinas senses a 'whole geopolitics in Heidegger' (Levinas 2006: 101), in that, Heidegger has a great sense of 'the place in which man is enrooted. It is absolutely not a philosophy of the émigré! I would even say that it is not a philosophy of the emigrant' (2006: 101). Levinas later criticises the notion of "belonging to self", 'for self', an 'inalienable self-belonging' that he sees underwriting Heidegger's *Being and Time* (2006: 195). However, a simple

here is an anarchic responsibility to the other as the condition of existence⁶⁴, the other comes to persecute and question ‘my’ freedom, the self cannot operate, cannot *be* in isolation, cannot operate without a primary responsibility to the other. As Lingis states in his introduction to Levinas’s *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, ‘The relationship with alterity is finding oneself under a bond, commanded, contested, having to answer to another for what one does and for what one is. It is also finding oneself addressed, appealed to...’ (2002: xxii). This appellation, we are beginning to see, is both generative and potentially disabling. It is as revealing as it is exposing: the self receives its possibility through its relationship with exteriority. ‘The self, ‘the ego’, ‘subjectivity’ is not self-consolidating but only “emerges” (these are my scare quotes) through contact with alterity. This implies wounding and vulnerability as much as it does constitution and affirmation (Levinas 2002). But, perhaps more importantly, it demands responsibility. It demands that one is responsible for the other that calls being into existence and into question, it is a bond or a responsibility that one cannot refuse.

Rose argues that responsibility is about an ‘ethics of connection, of mutually implicated humans whose primary duty is to respond to the calls of others’ (2004: 13). This giving demands *response*; it obligates and entangles, it envelopes one in connectedness that must be respected. ‘To be claimed,’ Rose writes, ‘is to be called into connection; to

opposition to Heidegger is not easy to make. One would also have to contend with a passage from Heidegger’s lectures, ‘The Concept of Time’, where he writes: *Dasein* [being-in-the-world] is that entity which is characterised as *Being-in-the-world*. Human life is not some subject that has to perform some trick in order to enter the world...As this Being-in-the-world *Dasein* is, together with this, *Being-with-one-another*, being with others: Having the same world there with others, encountering one another, being with one another in the manner of *Being-for-one-another*. (Heidegger 1992: 7-8, quoted in Critchley 1999: 57). As Dallmayr points out in another context: ‘In light of these and similar statements, it is difficult to see how Heidegger’s early work could fairly be accused – as has occasionally been done – of favouring a metaphysics of identity, that is, a perspective privileging self-hood over otherness, nearness over distance, and native autochtony over estrangement’ (1993: 151). For a complex discussion of Heidegger’s relationship to ‘otherness’ see Dallmayr’s work, especially pp. 149 – 180. See also Dallery et al. *Ethics and Danger* (1992). This edited volume explores the question of Heideggerian thinking post Nazi Germany (including Heidegger’s initial embrace of National Socialism); the authors collected in the volume ‘struggle [with] Heidegger to find how to think with Heidegger’s work’ (1992: viii).

⁶⁴ It is anarchic because the other comes before or above any founding moment, subject or language. Furthermore, one is always ‘faced with an other refractory of categories’ (Levinas 1969: 40). Therefore, the relation with another exceeds any definitive point of ‘contact’ – it is ‘relation without concept’ (1969: 42) – one cannot think of the relation as a beginning as such. The relationship with another ‘is already an assignation, an extremely urgent assignation – an obligation, anachronously prior to any commitment’ (2002: 101). To think ‘infinitely’ is to necessarily think without structure, to think with an-archy – a beginning without beginning in structure, a kind of groundless ground.

respond is to start to actualise that connection' (2004: 31). Responsible for the other because it is the other that makes 'my' existence possible, an election, moreover, that cannot be declined or chosen but that pre-exists the subject's decision. This, for Levinas is the ontological structure that makes the subject possible (1996: 54). One is 'one-for-the-other' (2002: 141), a substitution (being in the place of another) that means that I am for the other and thus become myself. Being 'for-the-other' here, means being hostage to another unable to return to oneself: one is radically passive, is hostage to-the-other, in regards to oneself.⁶⁵

The gift too, is nothing if not a respect and responsibility to and for the other. As Mauss writes: 'If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns "respects", and "courtesies". But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself – himself and his possessions – to others' (1970: 45). One gives because he/she owes his/her material and social existence to others, this is the basis of responsibility: this is what gives the gift, what inaugurates the demand to give back. A kind of shared sense of responsibility to others, a kind of debt that can never be struck out, or paid off.

⁶⁵ Levinas writes that subjectivity, '...comes to pass as a passivity more passive than all passivity...[a] responsibility for the neighbour that is incumbent, resounds in this passivity, this disinterestedness of subjectivity, this sensibility' (2002: 14-15). Levinas contends that the subject 'is someone who, in the absence of anyone is called upon to be someone, and cannot slip away from this call. The subject is inseparable from this appeal or this election, which cannot be declined' (2002: 53). What is most surprising and most radical about Levinas's conception of subjectivity is that he understands it to be passive and complacent. This is because singularisation or being called out (and into 'being') is not the work of the subject but of the other, in fact, the subject is passive with regard to itself. The subject has no self-consolidating agency, the subject is constituted through a movement of passive genesis – is 'hostage', worked over by the other. The subject, is subjected to subjectification (being singled out) which is the movement and the work of the other, not of the same or self. Critchley writes that: 'For Levinas *the subject is subject* [subject to another], and the form this subjection assumes is that of sensibility or sentience' (1999: 63). There is no internalising of morals or norms here, but rather an exposure, a vulnerability, a 'corporeal obligation' (Critchley 1999: 65) that cannot be grasped or assimilated. One is thus radically passive (one is worked over, spent, inadequate, there is no reflection) in regard to being one self. This sense is conveyed in the following quote by Levinas: 'I expose myself to the summons of this responsibility as though placed under a blazing sun that eradicates every residue of mystery, every ulterior motive, every loosening of the thread that would allow evasion' (1996: 104).

But will a 'Maussian' logic of the gift, which figures the logic of obligation and reciprocity, do for a Levinasian logic of ethics? Can one indeed give back to the other in terms of a Levinasian ethics? For does not Levinas propose an infinitely radical other who cannot, who must not, be incorporated into the cycle of exchange, reciprocity and return? The other that is beyond all conscious aiming at ends, beyond all restitution and calculation, who is beyond any thought that seeks to envelope and bind the other in a reciprocal relationship of 'balanced' exchange? Does not Levinas propose a self/other relation as one that is radically asymmetrical, one that must break all the bounds of things shared in common, where no point of being-in-common can take place? An other beyond categorisation and knowledge. How could one ever respond to this? How could one think this?

The Problem of the Ethical: Derrida's reading

Derrida's (1978) 'Violence and Metaphysics' was the first public paper to rigorously deconstruct Levinas's work. Any reading of Levinas is written in its shadow, as indeed this one is. Derrida pushes Levinas's work to the point of impossibility, this is what I will now follow. Derrida asks:

What, then, is this encounter with the absolutely-other? Neither representation, nor limitation, nor conceptual relation to the same. The ego and the other do not permit themselves to be dominated or made into totalities by a concept of relationship. (1978: 117)

A relationship would presuppose that there are recognisable qualities in common. A shared language, be it written, spoken or gestured, however minimal, would be required for a relation to another, a relationship that could not exist without the bond of something common and negotiated between two people; a bond, the bind that would interrupt infinity. 'Truthfully,' Derrida continues, 'one does not have to wonder *what*

this encounter is. It is *the* encounter, the only way out, the only adventuring outside oneself toward the unforeseeably-other. *Without hope of return*' (1978: 118 original emphasis).

This is the *aporia* that informs Levinas's radical ethics, an ethics without return, an ethics that 'is possible only if the other is other with respect to a term whose essence is to remain at the point of departure, to serve as entry, into the relation, to be the same not relatively but absolutely' (Derrida 1978: 163). But by Derrida's reckoning, the movement of relativity is not only the condition of possibility of ethics (ethics could not exist with an unimaginable other, the other must be relative to be other, the other must be an other *ego*), but the unavoidable movement that denies the possibility of radical alterity.

Levinas knows fore well the difficulty of his philosophy, a philosophy that as Derrida rightly perceives, attempts to 'liberate thought' from the 'classical alternatives' (1978: 118). Levinas must provoke a truly radically approach to thinking the other beyond language and beyond the reduction of thought to *logos* in order to break with all *logocentric* thought. A break that is indeed difficult (if not impossible) to conceive. Thus Levinas writes that:

The breach of totality is not an operation of thought, obtained by a simple distinguishing of terms that evoke one another or at least line up opposite one another [the classical alternatives]. The void that breaks the totality can be maintained against an inevitably totalizing and synoptic thought only if thought finds itself faced with an other refractory to categories. (1969: 40)

Yet, for Derrida, the other 'refractory to categories' is impossible; thought would always face some sort of categorisation, some sort of minimal condition of intelligibility is always needed. The appeal to an 'outside' is indeed one of the system's internal

moments of cohesion.⁶⁶ The concept of other, as other to me, as alter to I, would be the necessary condition of ‘other’ – and thus a relative other, a non-absolute other, an other in relation, in-common at some point. The idea of a *non-ego* that Levinas proposes would always require *an ego* in order to be thinkable. Derrida picks Levinas up on this point, arguing that:

The other, then, would not be what he is (my fellow man as foreigner) if he were not alter ego...A necessity due to the finitude of meaning: the other is absolutely other only if he is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I. (1978: 159)

Yet I think this is precisely the problem of thinking for Levinas. The *aporia* which informs his work is of how to think an ‘other’ beyond categories, beyond the economy of *logos* that would assimilate the other to ‘the Same.’ His philosophy initiates an attempt to think beyond being, to not reduce thought to a logocentric ontology, an ontology that Levinas sees as a totalisation of alterity, as the abuse of the ethical. Levinas knows well the difficulty of conceiving this. He argues that, ‘The I is not a contingent formation by which the same and the other, as logical determinations of being, can in addition be reflected *within a thought*’ (1969: 39 original emphasis). For Levinas, ethical thought could not exist in writing, but would take place in speaking, in a traversing of the face of the other where alterity passes. Indeed, Levinas talks of ‘traversing this distance’ and not a recording of it (1969: 39-40). ‘That is why’, Jill Robbins writes, ‘it is on the basis of the thinking of a certain impossibility that the ethical becomes legible in Levinas (1999: xv).

But, for Derrida, this (absolute) relation can never be legible. Or as soon as *it is* legible, *is* traced or written, then the mark of radical alterity is violated and is consumed by the

⁶⁶ See Derrida’s *Dissemination*, (1981: 5). He contends that a system ‘internalizes as one of *its* moments’ that which it ‘represses’ and ‘expels’, that which a system makes ‘exterior’ is an internal moment of constitution of that system.

play of signification, writing, discourse, or the relative term. The radical 'other' is consumed by the symbolic economy (comprehension, recognition, restitution) that is the mode of appearance of the other in western discourse. Yet, this violence would also be the very possibility of ethical thought. Thus Derrida contends that:

By making the origin of language, meaning, and difference the relation to the infinitely other, Levinas is resigned to betraying his own intentions in his philosophical discourse. The latter is understood, and instructs, only by first permitting the same and Being to circulate within it. (1978: 189)

Levinas's ethics could only be thought outside of language (without a concept of being outside of language - an inside/outside logic would be a play of the classical alternatives, would still be *in* language).⁶⁷ He must think outside the philosophical tradition that makes a thought of ethics possible. For ethics to be possible, it must be like the gift that departs radically without return, less it be atomised on the horizon of recognition and reciprocity, debt and return.

This critique, and Derrida's work in general, enables Spivak to famously conclude, with words to the effect of: the other cannot be spoken in discourse (1988). Why? Because as soon as 'the other' appears in western discourse then 'the other' becomes something recognisable, knowable and familiar. Spivak writes: 'Absolute alterity or otherness is thus differed-deferred into an other self who resembles us, however minimally, and with whom we can communicate' (1993: 181). Thus, absolute difference is annulled through the return home of discourse, to the return of the familiar; cognition and comprehension dominates for "appearance" (my scare quotes) to take place. So, where does this leave us? Levinas attempts to utter the otherwise beyond philosophy as the

⁶⁷ Derrida argues that: 'One would attempt in vain, in order to wean language from exteriority and interiority, in order to wean language from weaning, to forget the words "inside," "outside," "exterior," "interior," etc.,...For the meanings which radiate from Inside-Outside, from Light-Night, etc., do not only inhabit the proscribed words; they are embedded, in person or vicariously, at the very heart of conceptuality itself' (1978: 140). To do away with this conceptuality, Derrida contends, would be to lose 'alterity...more surely than ever' (140).

ultimate ethical gesture. Derrida says that there is no radical escape from the *logos*, that there can be no concept or relation to the other without a relation to the Same (however minimal this may be). This leaves us precisely in place of the *aporia* of ethics – in a crisis, if you will. It plays out like this: Levinas: This is what I'm saying. Derrida: No, you said something else. L: Yeah I know, but I meant to say otherwise. D: But, that's not what you said. L: Yeah, but I meant to say something else entirely. *You know* what I mean? D: No, I don't actually...

Perhaps we've been here before, in that kind of crisis, with an intimate other, and can understand the sense of each. Trying to say something that is beyond words and themes, and being taken to account in the process.

It is at this point that I want to re-engage with Rose's work, she gives us something more productive than a possible/impossible discussion of representing difference itself. She does this by asking a different question, a question that is not concerned with 'representing difference' or with making a break in *logos*, but with the question of 'what it means to be in relation to others?' This shifts the discussion from a kind of polarisation of self/other, the same/difference, ontology/transcendence, to tracing the relationship between 'the same' and 'the different' as a point of articulation where things work on each other and are in a sense, co-existent. I am indebted to Nancy thinking on community here and I will address this with increasing importance.

I want to approach this by thinking about the work that the people of the Victoria River District (where Rose does her fieldwork) are doing on Rose. Can we listen to the force of 'their' work? How does Rose's work responds to this? The relationship here, as Rose works it, is a force that cannot be declined—one is forced into responsibility and obligation. Again, this shifts the discussion from deciding what difference means (or how to 'speak it', that is, how to speak the proper name of difference) as a kind of project or taxonomy of representation, to responding to the force of difference; that is,

what being with others *does*, what being exposed to others *makes possible*, what this relationship forces one to see. It is an ethics that takes place because of being in relationships with others. A kind of imperative that is beyond representation if we can venture such a thought.

The calling of responsibility

What would it mean to be claimed and called into responsibility by an Aboriginal community? This is the difficult question that I now want to consider. Perhaps Rose's work is a response to this ethical call. She writes in *Reports from a Wild Country: Ethics for Decolonisation* that:

The ethics I am developing around decolonisation acknowledges the claim of others...and to acknowledge the existence of such claims is itself provocative. Response to a claim is itself a call – or a refusal of violence, of further claims of responsibility. (2004: 31)

Rose develops this more concretely by arguing that:

Indeed, they (the Victoria River District community) were quite explicit in asserting their belief that there were others, including white people, who would hear the stories in their moral context and would find ways to make a moral response. For myself, I understood my position as scribe to be a moral claim on my own life, and this book continues my exploration of that claim. (2004: 31)

This is a rethinking of the position of author within cross-cultural representation. Rose has not begun the work with a question to be explored in the community, but by being *put into question* by the community, she has begun the work through response. Not so

much a being-thrown together, but a being thrown into question. Rose has begun by being exposed to the assignation of others. She continues

Aboriginal people in many parts of Australia have taught me more than I could have dreamed. The generosity I have encountered has been warm, and rich with opportunities to expand my thinking and my sense of self. They have shaped many research questions, changed my writing, and taken me in unexpected and delightfully challenging directions. (2004: vii)

What I think enables us to stay-with the *aporia* of ethics here, is that there is a force that others work on Rose, a force she is obligated to respond to and return. It is a challenge, a questioning, an agitation; it is not a resolution, or a justification that would enable definitive statements about others. There is no retreat or being-at-home-with-oneself here, there is definitely no transcendence by speaking of otherness itself; anthropological height, is indeed, collapsed. Furthermore, the force of alterity is worked here because of being-in-common with others. Rose stays with the work of others, she stays with the community as the condition of her work: there is no possibility of her work outside of this exposure. She is put into question, we could say after Levinas, but only insofar as this is revealed through a relationship that ties and binds her to others, to an 'ontological sociality' as Nancy says (1991: 28). The question here is not 'how can an other be represented' nor 'how can difference be represented' but 'how does an other force a response because of a relationship.' How does an other force an opening, a turning, another rhythm of the world into view? (Nancy 1991: 18). And what if this rhythm and spacing is one of ethical challenge that entangles one in responsibility? Rose is pushed towards contact that denies any positioning that stands back, that would totalise as if from above.

Here then, you can sense my ambivalence or 'undecidedness' in relationship to Levinas. On the one hand, I abandon claims to radical otherness, on the other hand, I uphold

Levinas's sense that another forces response; that there is something in the work of others that denies categorisation, containment or an objective 'total' positioning.

Levinas often returns to the notion of the 'face' to show this. The idea here is that the face of the other, bears the trace of alterity; the face cannot be made into a theme, cannot be categorised nor assimilated to the 'same'. Again, the problem here is that Levinas presents the face as the total break with discourse, the 'otherwise than being' that would be a figure, or moment, of ethical transcendence.⁶⁸ The problem again is that trying to think radical alterity, absolute difference and thus absolute singularity, denies the sharing or 'reciprocity' that makes us be, and that makes sense possible – that makes a sense of difference possible. My response would be to recognise the relation as a point of difference and similarity at once, as, in a sense taken from Nancy, singular (different) *and* plural (in-common). In short, sharing difference in common as the site of communication. (I explore this in the next 'spacing/rhythm').

In relation to the above, Rose's thought is useful again. Rose not only responds to the ethical challenge that happens when she spends time with others, but she opens her ears and becomes receptive to the meaning that is being exposed by being in common. One of the first moments of this is her work with Hobbles Danaiyarri.

'I got a bit of troubling'

⁶⁸ For Levinas, the face provides the possibility of ethical response, a way of giving generously to the other. The face is 'not so much a mode of appearing of the other, as a trace where alterity passes' (Lingis 2002: xxi) The face is the 'experience par-excellence' (Levinas 1969: 196). The face of the other person 'calls [the subject] to responsibility, it founds it and justifies it' (1969: 197). The subject is interpolated into being through the face of the other. For Levinas, the face is 'nude' and 'destitute', precisely because the face is not *in* language – it is devoid of language, beyond language, before language, is not reducible to language. Levinas writes that: 'The face is present in its refusal to be contained. In this sense it cannot be comprehended, that is, encompassed' (1969: 194). The face is thus not a phenomenon because phenomena are things that can be comprehended, the face 'is not so much a mode of appearing of the other, [but] as a "trace" where alterity passes'. 'Phenomenon,' Fryer explains, 'are by definition constituted objects of consciousness, those things that can be explained, grasped or as Levinas would claim, reduced' (Fryer 2004: 40). 'The encounter with the face', Fryer continues, 'is that which speaks to the inexplicability of the beyond, the infinitely beyond any totality, the transcendence of alterity' (40).

During Rose's initial fieldwork in 1982, Danaiyarri, over a period of two months, told Rose of an Aboriginal history of the region (the Victoria River District, in the Northern Territory (1984: 31)). Part of this history includes what Rose names a 'Captain Cook Saga' (1984). It is important to point out, as Rose does, that Captain Cook never went near the Victoria River District. What Danaiyarri refers to is Cook's mythical presence, what Cook – as the potent symbol of European law – brings to Aboriginal country. 'The Saga', writes Rose, 'represents Captain Cook as the archetype of all early Europeans. As the first, he is credited with initiating and establishing the conditions of black-white relations. The Saga is not so much about Captain Cook, *per se*, as it is about this relationship' (1984: 30). Cook, as a kind of founding figure or symbol of European law and presence, inaugurates the framework for relations. This framework, rather than bringing order, responsibility and obligation brings instead chaos, destruction and violence.

At the heart of this narrative, as Rose points out, is a moral crisis between two forms of law: a moral Aboriginal law built on obligation, visibility, communication and respect – a law (present and laid down in the Dreaming) that doesn't change and that provides the basis for ethical relations between people, country and animals – and a European law that is deceptive, fickle and closed to communication, that is premised on domination and violence. Danaiyarri calls this 'a book'. 'Same book. Not only one book, book all over. And he still got it today' (33). It is a law that Europeans took wherever they went in order to establish relations that violently marginalised and dominated Aboriginal people.

Right. Well, I'm speaking today. I'm named Hobbles Danaiyarri. And I got a bit of troubling. Long way back beginning. When him been start, that Captain Cook, still thinking about getting more land. From London and Big England, that his country...And when that Captain Cook been come through down to Sydney Harbour...And lotta people, lotta women, lotta children, their

[Aboriginal people] owning that city. That's his [Aboriginal] country. And he don't askem, that man. (31)

Captain Cook is not content with just Sydney Harbour, as Danaiyarri continues: 'I think, nearly three week's time. Shooting all, all the people... That means Captain Cook getting ready for the country, going to try and take it away' (31). Captain Cook packs 'his gear and put it in a sailing boat' and looks for more country to 'clear up' (32). He comes to Darwin following 'the sea':

And Captain Cook come up, see that old fellow sit down makembad [making a] spear there, hunting fish, and he don't ask him [the traditional owners]. Same thing... [the old man says] "Big mob Aboriginal people. This we country. We never look whitefellow come through here. That's the first time you coming. We can be ready for you. Got a big mob spear. We don't want whitefellow." He start to hear that story. Captain Cook been hear that story. "Get ready for this, old fellow. We might start here." Start to put the bullet in the magazine, start to shooting people, same like Sydney. And everything: "Really beautiful country," Captain Cook reckoned. "That's why I'm cleaning up people, take it away. And after that I'm going to sailing boat, pack up gear and gone". (32)

One of the ways Rose draws upon this narrative is to respond to its ethical imperative. She notes that this narrative is 'semi-restricted' in that it is only told to white people who are trusted and who will understand the issues involved. Rose writes that the narrative was 'developed by Aboriginal people and is directed to an Aboriginal audience. Yarralin⁶⁹ people do not tell the Saga to Europeans indiscriminately' (25). She adds that, 'Yarralin people have chosen to communicate the Saga to a broader European audience in the hope that, at the least, it will elicit a response which will help them in their struggle for land and self-sufficiency' (25). Obviously, then, the telling of

⁶⁹ Yarralin is a place (in the Victoria River District of the Northern Territory) where Rose has done most of her research.

this narrative is not just about the transmission of knowledge but contains a powerful ethics of responsibility. It makes a claim on Rose's position, perhaps putting her work into question and demanding a response. It forces her to think of her 'position as scribe' that makes 'a moral claim on my [her] own life' (2004: 31).

Rose cannot stand back, she cannot position her self as if outside the relation to others. The force of Danaiyarri's narrative (and others at Yarralin) forces a staying with the happening of the address of another.⁷⁰ This is not Rose's own work but what others force on her; they force her to listen, to stay with the actuality of the relation as the condition of producing knowledge and writing (see 1992: 30). This force happens because people at Yarralin feel that Rose is responsible, that she will understand the issues involved and will be obligated to respond. Being in-common here means being exposed to difference, it is to be unable to operate as if alone. It is to be forced to stay with the complex relations that happen in community as the condition of ethnographic knowledge. It is to be addressed, to be unable to escape this, unable to work beyond this, unable to escape responsibility. The ethical work of another here, is not one's justification of acting objectively, beyond the relation, but of staying with the address of another as that which 'holds' one to account (Myers 1986). And this 'holding' work could be one way in which we think of being-in-common with others, being in common as the exposure to difference, where another turning of the world is forced that demands response, that agitates and moves on one's 'self'. Levinas calls this 'holding' being unable to escape responsibility. Rose calls this a moral claim on her life. Danaiyarri brings this to bear by exposing the ethical crisis that ensues when dominant and totalising laws seek to violently exterminate the presence and knowledge of others.

Rose's work

⁷⁰ Rose also notes the effect of other teachers at Yarralin like Jessie Wirrpa and old Tim Yilngayarri among others, see Rose 1992: 25-30 & 2006, here she draws on Yilingayarri's work.

What Rose highlights is that the work of ethnography calls one into relation with others, this relation exposes one – makes one responsible – towards others; it implicates and makes a claim on one's position. Rose's work engages the question of working difference-in-common, and thus she focuses our attention on what it means to be in-relation to others in community. This is a relation, as I see it, that is central to anthropological work. And this, moreover, is something that is not proper to Rose, or even to her work but to what she was and is taught by those in the community. There is a force there in what others have taught her that works a space for the ethical.

This force is not just contained in anti-imperialist narratives but can be traced in Aboriginal notions of existence. Rose identifies something like this, in the Dreaming maps of the people at Yarralin. She writes, in *Dingo Makes Us Human*, 'Dreaming travels are celebrated in song, dance and ritual. Tracks and songs are the basis to Aboriginal maps and are often called boundaries' (1992: 52). Dreaming tracks not only function as crucially practical ways to move between camps, water-holes, hunting and scared sites, but also as philosophical and scared modes of seeing and orienting oneself to country, community and identity:

Unlike European maps on which boundaries are lines that divide, tracks connect points on the landscape, showing relationships between points. These are the 'boundaries' that unite. The fact that a Dreaming demarcates differences along the line is important to creating variation, but ultimately a track, by its very existence, demarcates a coming together. (1992: 52)

And these tracks 'connect and divide, cross-cut and re-converge' mapping and seeing the country, incorporating animals, plants, place, humans and ancestors in webs of connection, where no-one thing is 'boss' over another (1992: 52). This is not only a way of being in country, but also can be seen as an ethical and transformative possibility for mapping relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, who *are* tied in

webs of connection across Australia (we could think of Danaiyarri's telling of the Captain Cook Saga in the hope that others would listen). This is Rose's ethical call; to respond and listen to what others share, to have the time and the space to make this *work*. This work, gives some sense of what it means to be in-common with others, of being exposed to difference as the site of being-in-common, sharing difference in common.

The work of others here is not a justification for autonomy but a force that demands response – it demands following a line of connection. Tracing the tracks that 'by their very existence' are both a point of difference and a coming together (1992: 55). She doesn't attempt to name a kind of radical other but shows how communication, responsibility and obligation – how the same, or being-in-common – opens towards an engagement with difference as an exposure to a different relation to, and turning of, the world (Nancy 2000: 9).

I think in this way Rose's work talks about the question of community – what it means to be in common with others, *of how to keep this question of the relation working*. It is here that we can productively draw upon Nancy's work on community. Nancy works us towards a rethinking of the ethical – not as the radical venture outward without return, nor a naming of otherness itself, but a 'worldly' sharing of things in common. In this way, we can refigure the 'bind', or the relation, between difference and sameness. This is of course pivotal to the anthropological project.

Sharing difference in-common

The concept of community is relational. Any notion of community, despite its multiple and contradictory uses, says something about the relationship between people, space and time. Even discussions of 'on-line communities' or a 'community of scholars' tells us about relationships across time and space, however compressed or diffuse these may

be. The key point of community is that it enables us to think about, and provides a space for, the exploration of relationships – of what it means to be in relation with others. This is the question that Rose responds to in her work, it is also the question that lies at the heart of any discussion of gift, (we could also think here of Levi-Strauss's (1963: 95) thought of anthropology as 'a general theory of relationships'). Nancy's work, especially *The Inoperative Community*, is particularly useful here. At the heart of this work is the question of what it means to be in relation with others, he 'forces us', as Finsk in his foreword to Nancy's *Inoperative Community* has pointed out, 'to begin with the relation and not the solitary individual' (Finsk 1991: x).

This beginning in relation opens the subject in a movement of dependence towards difference and towards others. As Nancy says, (and as noted in the opening) existence emerges because, "my" face [is] always exposed to others, always turned toward an other and faced by him or her, never facing myself' (1991: xxxviii). The self and the other exist 'together' in a co-dependent relation (28). For Nancy, it is the fact that being is shared and exposed (to another) that being is possible (25). It is by exposing and sharing that an individual can relate to another. What we share with others, it must be reiterated here, is not the same, but difference-in-common. Thus, Nancy writes that what is shared in common and what shares 'us' is 'a lack of "identity"' (xxxviii). Community here does not 'congregate' (61), is not centred around an identity, there is no completion in another, there is no becoming-one-with-all, but, rather, there is the space of communication and contact, the movement of a relation as such, where we can offer up our different sense of the world in common.

The problem of community however, is how not to reduce this being-in-relation-to-others, *which is common*, to a common (read universal) being that would speak of a singular essence, immanence or identity-in-itself that could be presented, enclosed by, and reduced to a trait, discourse or spokesperson (or the anthropological supra-pseudo individual – the Pintupi, the Balinese, the Nuer (Clifford 1983: 132). More on this in

the final ‘gathering’.) ‘Being in common’ as the space of community, as Fynsk writes, ‘means sharing the fact of not having an ‘ideal’ whole ‘identity’ together’ (1991: xxxix). In place of a thought of community as the presentation of an essence, we have a going towards another, a sharing of a lack of essence together as the basis for being-in-common; community as a movement towards another (60).

This is why Rose’s work is important and this is why I think it gets to the heart of the anthropological problematic. What she does is work the relation, as a site of being-in-common-in-difference, as the basis for her work. A relation that implies responsibility and that force one to retreat from making ‘community’ an object that could be described, represented or reduced to an essence of oneness – whereby the individual work of others is assimilated to a bounded totality. She traces the lines of connection, responsibility and difference that make the work possible and necessary. Her work engages the question of difference-in-common, and thus focuses our attention on what it means to be in-relation to others in community. The relation between one and another, is not something to resolve or work out. It is not something to describe in a way that secures presence, or indeed, difference itself, rather it implies sharing, work, and a preparedness to be interrupted and to follow the lead of others.

spacing/rhythm 5.

Singular multiple extensions: being on one's mobile

If we are to think community not as what gathers people together as one, nor as an object that could be described and generalised to reveal a hidden essence, nor as an immutable point of underlying unity, in short, if we are to think community as communication (which is multiple singular) and not as communion (which is oneness), if this is so, and if this is possible and necessary, what we have to try and think is movement: movement between one and another as such. This is movement that does not progress towards a whole, towards completion or stasis, but that bears out the sharing of a lack of identity: 'a groundless "ground" less in the sense that it opens up the gaping chasm of an abyss than that it is made up only of the network, the interweaving, and the sharing of singularities' (Nancy 1991: 27).

Norris argues in relation to Nancy that,

our basic ontological condition is to be open to what he calls "communication" with one another. As one would at this point expect, communication here is not understood in instrumental terms as the transfer of information from one subject to another. Communication is instead the openness to and difference from one another that makes such transfer possible: "Speech – including silence – is not a means of communication but communication itself, an exposure" (Nancy 1991: 30-31). On Nancy's account, existence is found in neither the "being" nor the "common," but in the preposition, "in". (2000: 277-278)

In this way, Nancy is a more dynamic thinker than Levinas. Levinas is a great thinker of an “I” and a “you”, (he does not think in terms of what makes possible a movement between one and another as such). Levinas immortalises *the relation* (in the definitive singular) with *the Other* (again, in the definitive singular). The problem though is that the world is not like that, the world is full of multiple and complex interrelations, is, in essence, indefinitely plural. By privileging the ‘I’ /‘thou’ Levinas tends to want to forget that the world is made up of many non-discrete relationships, that there are always more than ‘two’, there is also a “we” that spaces the possibility of relations. For Levinas, the ‘third’ is something to overcome through the transcendentalism of the ethical.

This problem with a ‘third’ can be clearly seen below, the ‘third’ for Levinas is the place of politics and justice and violence,

if there were only two people in the world, there would be no need for law courts because I would always be responsible for, and before, the other. As soon as there are three, the ethical relationship with the other becomes political and enters into the totalising discourse of ontology. We can never completely escape from the language of ontology and politics. (Kearney & Levinas 1986: 21-22).

In important ways, Levinas tries to think beyond ontology and politics; he attempts to maintain the difference of another beyond categories and themes of knowledge. This is an attempt to be responsible for another without question or judgment – a responsibility beyond racial, political and cultural regimes of knowledge and recognition. This is what could be called an absolute or total ethics without judgement. He is a thinker of radical singularity, of a relation to *difference itself*, to the Other itself, without recourse to the same. But the problem here is that difference, or the Other, becomes transcendent; the Other transcends the common-world of recognition and communication, the trace of alterity is *otherworldly*. In short, bears the mark of transcendence that is ‘otherwise than being’ (Levinas 2002). By making radical alterity the condition of transcendence (the break-with knowledge, ontology

etc.) Levinas forgets that difference is in-the-world, that difference is the world itself, that we are exposed to difference in worldly and ‘empirical’ ways; one does not encounter difference in transcendence, one encounters difference in the world. (What one may encounter in transcendence is fulfilment and completion, in short being-at-one-with-the-Other, which under Judea-Christian thinking is the promise of immortality, which is another way of saying worldly death and non-existence through transcendence on high.)

For Nancy there is no such interest in being ‘otherwise than being’. Being for Nancy lacks nothing in particular nor in general, the experience of being-in-the-world is ‘good’ enough to stay with and dwell upon. There is no higher demand than thinking being itself. And because of this Nancy is a great thinker of movement, of momentum, of how things unfold in space. Things take place because of a movement in space, within and through space. There is no stasis or grounding in Nancy’s thought, there is no figuring of an ideal as such. What there is, is that sense that things are happening because of movement; an inclination, a being-towards, a being-*with*, a being-*in*-common, a pivotal exposition which is not a return to self nor a relation to the absolutely other, but is rather to be-in-common, to be exposed to networks of contact and communication. Something akin to a flow, a kind of rhythm or unfurling, an extension through time and space. And this implies movement in and with others: ‘It is a contact, it is a contagion: a touching, the transmission of a trembling at the edge of being, the communication of a passion that makes us fellows, or the communication of the passion to be fellows, to be in common’ (Nancy 1991: 61). To be human, to be in the world, is to be moved in such a way that one cannot overcome ‘the passion to be exposed’ that being-in-common takes place, and spaces, and is existence itself. To be in the world is to be open and prepared to respond to others. There is nothing transcendental in this, there is no higher plane of being that is reached, it is just, to quote Serres out of context, the ‘ordinary lot of situations’ (1995: 5)⁷¹ that happens when we listen to what is going on in and amongst ourselves. Thus, what I want to do in this

⁷¹ The original quote is ‘the multiple as such, unheven and little unified, is not an epistemological monster, but on the contrary the ordinary lot of situations...’ (Serres 1995: 5).

spacing/rhythm is to examine the way 'the ethical' happens in ordinary ways. To be with the ethical, to stay with the multiple relations that make an experience of the world possible, is precisely not to be able to find a place of transcendence.

Thursday Night at Ululla

Cath, Dusty and I were at Ululla by ourselves, while Don was in Perth. Sonia rang up. She asked when we came, where we'd been, who we'd seen?

You saw Shelia and Sniper in town, Molly mob in Meeka – who else there, they got that house yet...Where's Don?

He's in Perth, I said.

I'll ring up any time, she said that twice. *Right'o I have to go, see you.* She hung up. I smiled and laughed. A few moments later Priscilla rang up.

Hello, Don there?

No he's in Perth. Who's this? I asked.

Priscilla, she said.

*Oh Priscilla, how you been...*we talked a little.

I knew you were there, she said.

How'd you know?

Sonia told me. You got a baby?

Yeah.

What's his name?

Dusty. She obviously already knew our baby's name, she just wanted to hear me say it.

She laughed, *Righto, see ya.*

She was gone. I laughed and excitedly explained to Cath that that was a classic Ululla phone call. It leaves you smiling and scratching your head as to why someone rang up. But there is no reason other than seeing who's around and finding out where everyone is, staying in contact with others. It reminds me of a Telecom advertisement in the 1990s when mobile phones were just beginning to take-off. The advertisement is set in the desert. There is an Aboriginal guide who is talking to

a very excited and keen whitefella about the country, about the Dreaming and connection to ancestors. The Aboriginal man says that they will meet up with his countryman on that hill, pointing into the distance. The whitefella is mystified. They meet the countryman on the hill, the whitefella turns with well meaning amazement to his Aboriginal guide and asks, 'How did you do that, mental telepathy?' The Aboriginal guide grins, chuckles and replies, 'Nah mate, mobile phone.' He brings his phone into view, and slaps the whitefella on the back.

There is nothing mystical going on here, there is nothing transcendental nor 'primitive' in the ethical, only the demand to stay in contact, to keep track, to keep a line open to others, to respond to the call of another. There is no higher plane of being reached by staying with the ethical: perhaps just a sense of what is going on when we connect up with others, that being is 'ex-istence' (from the outside, from another), that being is to be on call (Blanchot 1988: 6). Which reminds me of another little mobile phone anecdote.

Seeing Gail, Nicole (and Gina) in Perth

When we were in Perth, catching up with Gail and Nicole, their mobile phones rang often. I said, *Everyone's got a mobile now.*

Yeah, but Don, he's the only one with all the numbers, people always ringing up to get the number; we ring him when we want to speak to someone. Gina's phone went off, it was Skindiver, her son, in lock-up, she couldn't hear properly, she gave the phone to Gail. They talk. *That was Skindiver. He'll be getting out soon. He wants to get a motor-car. He's been ringing everyday saying he wants to get a motor car, inni Gina? CB* (CB is Gail's partner, he's also in lock-up) *rings up everyday and worries for a motor-car,* Gail continued, *He's always talking about getting a motor-car, first thing when he gets out.* Gail and Gina laughed. *That's what got them there in the first place – driving without a license, mucking around with motor-cars. All they talk about is getting a motor-car.*

Nicole kept her mobile phone in her bra. She would reach into her bra, apologise and laugh to us each time the phone would ring. *Hello, who's this?...* I suppose as

good a place as any to hold that tool of communication and mobility, against one's heart. The phone rang hot, so to speak, because Nicole, Gail and others are prepared to be open to the demand and obligation to be with others. In fact, a call was never refused. Is this the demand of community I thought? To be open to the call of others, prepared, without rest, to be on call, to be on one's mobile – where contact can be made? Like a contagion as Nancy says (1991: 61). Contact is like a contagion – it exposes and opens the body, to the call of the world.

A Geraldton public phone in the main street, the receiver with sea-air salt grime

A few days after being with Gail, Nicole and Gina in Perth, Cath, Dusty and I were in Geraldton, on the way to Ululla. I was hoping to catch up with Cliffy Cutter, who I heard was in Geraldton. I rang Gail in Perth (on her mobile) to find out where Cliffy was. Gail was at the local shopping centre.

He's in town? I asked.

Nab: he's in Wiluna, she replied.

Ohh, I thought he was here.

He was there, but he left, said Gail.

I'll try and catch him there, I said. We talked for awhile, caught up on what we'd been up to. She asked if Don was back at Ululla yet (he'd been in Geraldton), and I said he should be there at Ululla by now.

She said, *I'll give him a call, see what's been happening.* How very useful mobile phones are! I found out where someone was (I thought Cliffy was in Geraldton, but actually in Wiluna) by ringing someone in a suburban Perth shopping centre; a strange nexus of communication networks extending to unlikely places albeit in common ways.

As I walked away I thought of the shopping centre noises that I could hear in the background: price checks, the hard surfaces that echo and reverberate all the walking feet, excited kids rushing, old men sitting on inside park benches, watching; hands clasped on walking sticks, plastic bags of shopping at their feet. I brought my

hand up to my ear and could feel the faint trace of salt grime that had gathered from the surface of the hand receiver (Geraldton is on the coast, the phone box was on the promenade). I cupped my hand over my ear for a second, and listened to that empty universe sound that you also get from sea shells and telephone hand pieces after the other has hung-up (but before the beeps interrupt and signal that the other is not there). Listening to that waiting, before you know the line is ‘dead’; forcing the receiver from the ear to the phone hook, which is also called a cradle. Returning this modern tool of connectedness to its cradle (a cupped hand, a pocket, a bra strap) waiting, expecting, at times hoping, that another will call and make a demand on one’s listening and response (as Sonia said, twice: *I’ll call at any time* – it was like she was saying, *be ready*.) One’s work, listening, responding, brought into being by the other. Here, there, in Wiluna or a shopping centre in suburban Perth. Ethical transcendentalism? Nah mate, get off it, mobile phones!

To be in communication

Again, we need to think of relationships here as a linkage point, a point of articulation, where things meet and communicate but do not weld or fuse into totality. The other calls and demands that response be made. This ‘points’, writes Christopher Fynsk in his forward to Nancy’s *Inoperative Community*, ‘to the singularity of the self that knows itself as opening to alterity’ (1991: xiii). In other words, a singular being ‘only through its extension’, its readiness to respond and be taken away (1991: 28). If this extension is always multiple singular it ‘cannot be One, and it cannot be thought simply as a gathering or collection’ (Fynsk 1991: xiii). Thus, because there is no communion, no fusion, no becoming one-with-the-other, there is communication: there is that work, the endless work of responding to the obligations and responsibilities that make a ‘self’ and a community possible. To be in-common is to share out and expose existence as difference-in-common. Or, as Nancy says, ‘singular beings are themselves constituted by sharing, they are distributed and placed, or rather spaced, by the sharing that makes them *others*: other for one another...engulfed in the sharing...“communicating by not “communing”’ (1991: 25, original emphasis).

Community is not a unified totality that would subsume difference to the same. In fact, community is an 'ethical' condition in that it breaks with 'the totality that would fulfil it' (Nancy 1991: 61). Community, again, is not an object that secures fusion fulfilment (what Nancy calls a 'collective hypostasis'), but as Secomb noted, 'an activity of interrelation' (2000: 143) where what we share with others is not the same, but difference in common. One does not return to oneself in community; identity is not completed in community, there is no overcoming of difference, rather what we share is a lack of identity, we share alterity together as the basis for being in common. In this sense, Nancy's thought of community is 'ethically' based.

As Levinas has shown, ethics is 'interruption' in the sense that the ethical relation with another interrupts or 'calls into question' not only 'my spontaneity', but also the attainment of conceptual certitude or mastery (1969: 5). The other escapes my attempts at comprehension, the other is more than themes and representations; the ethical insists in that sense of an excess – 'a trace of alterity' – where the other comes to pass (Lingis 2002: xxi). But what I need to say at this point, is that the encounter with the other, which is a privileged moment in Levinas's thought, may happen, but does so because it cannot be cordoned off from the other things going on: the face-to-face happens because it is spaced by the movement and play of relations that constitute it, and this is what takes place *in* community as the spacing and rhythm of relations.⁷² Those multiple singular articulations that happen in community create extensions, networks and an ethics of interrelation that demand a readiness to be on call and to respond.

⁷² Sara Ahmed has explored this in her 2000 work *Strange Encounters: Embodied Others in Post-Coloniality*. Ahmed uses Levinasian ethics to consider the nature of 'encounters', but she mounts a strong argument against radical singularity. She argues against 'stranger fetishism', and is neither interested in 'expelling' or 'welcoming' the other/the stranger, but in tracing the daily interactions that make possible and actualise the nature of the relationship between others. She argues that 'the stranger' is not simply someone who is not recognisable, but on the contrary is already recognisable *as a stranger*, recognisable because the conception of strangeness is produced in prior encounters (37, 8). If the stranger were unrecognisable they couldn't be recognised as strange. She argues that others are marked as strange through cultural, social, historical and political discourses that mark other bodies *as* strange. The ability to recognise someone as a stranger must then rest on prior encounters which establish economies of recognition, marking and difference.

To be with others, to ask others what they know of the world, is not a retreat, nor is it about consolidating a position that would enable the description of an objective realm outside the multiple/singular relations that make community. There is, instead, circulation, communication, the sharing of meaning which is also a division, that movement, that sense of ‘the spacing of meaning, spacing as meaning and circulation’; a ‘circulation [that] goes in all directions at once’ (Nancy 2000: 3). A sharing, an interlacing ‘whose strands remain distinct at the centre of the knot’ (5).

Information (is not a) shelter

It was great speaking to Sniper. When I asked him if I could speak to him about the community at Ululla he said, *Righto, but you’ve got to give me something*, punctuated with his rich chuckling laugh. As he said, *you can help, then I can help back, like that, see*. We were leaning on the corner of a waist high cyclone fence out the front of Shelia and BJ’s house in Wiluna, our shoulders resting on each other. It was a nice way to lean as we caught up and as I explained what I was doing. *But what am I going to say?* he said. We organised a time for the morning.



Sniper and Salina

In the morning, I met him 'at the reserve.' He had a tyre that was punctured and asked if we could fix it up. He slung it in the back of the car, we drove to town and dropped it off at the garage. *Where are we going to talk*, he asks.

We'll go somewhere and talk – that information shelter over there, he said. I thought it a strange place to sit down. I have never seen anyone sitting down there. The Wiluna Shire had obviously thought that an information shelter would be something useful for tourists – give them a starting point before they enter the town. Wiluna isn't a big town, and the information shelter was rather desolate. It was new and shiny though. It had a picnic table made of cold aluminium in the shade, bolted to the ground. There was a map (of the town) and some business adverts that already looked a little obsolete (and thus a little otherworldly). An information shelter in such a small town is more of an ambition than a practical necessity. Anyway, it was a strange place to learn a little about Sniper and that other sense of Ululla whilst we sat amongst a tourist map of the main attractions of the town. Maybe Sniper thought it was a suitable location for telling stories about Ululla, on the edge of town. People drive past, and Sniper and Salina (his wife who was sitting down with us) would wave, reciprocate the hand signal for travelling and taking off – flicking the fingers off into the horizon. Sniper's deep affective chuckle would begin as he said who it was that was driving past: *Williams mob, innit? Jones mob off to Leonora*, his laughter responding to those in the car, outlasting the fading exhaust note.

We sat in the information shelter. When I asked him a question, he would sometimes ask me the same question, asking, *How would you say it?* Or after he had said something he would ask me, *what about you?* Or he'd ask for an example. Or he'd say, *What about whitefellas – your side?* He tested me to respond to questions and ideas about Ululla. There was something generous about it. It was almost like – you've been there, you know, tell me what's its like. Perhaps this is what happens in community. Sharing as a kind of difference-in-common. Your side, my side. Such an ethics denies the authority of spokesperson who could speak in the name of the community. It shares out a difference-in-common, a difference that is not subsumed, or sublated by investing in a single voice. The singular experience is not

the experience of all, it is not the chance to name call everyone, it is rather, precisely that, a singular experience that has its multiple expositions. All there is, is your side, my side, that circulation of meaning. By speaking we open towards the chance exposure of other senses.

‘What else you talk to me and I’ll give you story,’ says Sniper.

‘Ululla is not your traditional country...’

‘Ashwins were staying there, I just seen Don in prison when he came visiting in prison, so I asked him. And Rita mob was staying there, inni,’ he gestures to Salina. She responds, ‘I wasn’t with him at that time. He went there first parole.’

‘I was just a young fella. So when I went back to the prison again, that’s when I met Salina, and we went to Mungilli and worked around there, and then we came back and went to Ululla. Staying there for a long time there, in Ululla. We go out in Ululla, inni, to all the rock-holes, hunting, to the windmills to have dinner out, or on the main road.’



'Are there stories now about Ululla, you know, when you come to a windmill, do people talk about, I don't know...?' I say.

Snipper interrupts, encouraging an extension and saying, 'Yeah, keep going. Like when they go for hunting.'

I continue, 'Like maybe you remember other times, stories that happened. Maybe the Cutters were there and you got all these emu eggs, you know how a story might start...?'

Snipper extends: 'Just, laughing, finding emu egg, everywhere, walking long way, come back, go home on the ute. We was right, staying there (in Ululla) 'til um, BJ, Sheila shift to "Number Two" (a community north of Wiluna). So me and her (Salina) stay there self. I don't know they just took off. To Number Two, only me and her staying there. We walking around out bush, go back have a feed.'

'What about when you're moving around, you know when you drive around in your car?' I say.

'Yeah keep going,' Snipper encourages.

'Maybe you are coming back from Sandstone, on all the old roads and you remember all the places along that road where something happened, someone broke down and you picked them up, or you went out for bunka, and you start getting ngarru (sad, nostalgic).'

Snipper says it in his own way, 'Me and her, we think about going home, we don't like staying around reserve and town. Yeah. You know when you go back home, you see all the trees, you know, and then you fell happy inside. That's how me and her were going when we came from Cue, inni, yeah. Yeah. Lot of family staying there, but they all moved out, they should go back.'

I add, 'You know how I have been staying there the last few weeks and no one is there. It's almost like I keep seeing people: Molly coming out of her camp, you walking across from your camp, hearing the ute coming back from hunting. Yeah, its like people's memories there. You can see Stibly waiting next to the road, waiting

for people to come from town. (We all laugh). But there's no fires there now, in the camps, just the quiet.'

Sniper asks, 'What you thought when you come into Ululla, what you feel?'

'Yeah well, I was just a youngfella, I met Don in Meeka, I met him there we drove out, he was driving too fast, I couldn't keep up with him (Sniper laughing). In my little motor-car. And um, it was really wet, and there was, on that um, Meeka road, lots of big puddles. I'd never really driven on dirt roads, in the bush, thought I was going to get stuck, in the mud, you know, but I was alright. Don way in the front, couldn't see him. And then, yeah, we stopped at the breakaway, that jump-up half way, you know where Don stops all the time. We had a cup of tea there, and he showed me some of the country, you know, breakaways. And then we drove through then, and over those sandhills, and across the sandplain to Ululla. I remember seeing Chrissy, DD, Sadie, Elaine, Molly and Kupsie, I think they were all there. Sheila and BJ, maybe. I don't think you were there, that time. When I first come. I met you later.'

Sniper, perhaps sensing my nostalgia for a return to place, says: 'Those boys in the prison (Chrisy, his brother Stumpy, their cousin Dukka), they might go there for their parole. Boyie is thinking of coming out, yeah. Gail and Carl. They go back it will be full again. They are all in Greenough (Prison). We see a lot of friend like you, take you fellas out, we have a good fun. We learn you Martu way.'

I ask, 'What about when people say they can feel someone coming, they might be sitting down in their camp and they'll say: "Sheila's coming down the road," even though you can't hear or see them.'

'Aye,' says, Salina. And adds, 'Like when you sitting down in a camp, or you might have a sleep, and you think, family might come, they're coming.' 'Yeah,' I nod.

Sniper replies, laughing with a wicked sense of irony as he says it, '*How you feel* when family coming,' in a voice that imitates me. We laugh together. Sniper begins confidently, assertively: 'Well every time I'm there self, well I just, yeah, keep going,' he says to Salina, laughing. 'Yeah,' he says with confidence. 'Nah I can't,' he says laughing. Salina laughs and we all join in. Sniper begins strongly: 'When you been sit down in the camp and he's thinking, or if, must be anybody, family coming you know. "How we do it Martu way"?' he asks Salina.

She helps out, 'Something like, tingling there. Nerves,' gently drumming her fingers on the inside of the forearm.

Sniper begins again: 'That's your family coming.'

'Like you hair, that thing (gently drumming her finger tips on her forearm) it goes like that,' says Salina.

'Tingling, thing, nerves.' Sniper adds, 'when they think about you, sit down and you'll see your family coming. "Clive and Michele are coming," yeah, that's, that's our way. You know they're coming.'

'What about if you're coming down the road and the family sitting down, waiting,' I ask.

'Yeah, same thing.'

'So this feeling, you don't get it with friends?'

'No, just the family. Like kids, if they worry about their mum and dad, long way, you feel it then. You can make a phone call then. "We right" say like that.'

'People always worrying for one another, looking after one another,' I add.

'Yeah, inni,' says Sniper.

'This one Ululla story, Hamish, you got to go to Northam, see Sheila and Irene. Cause me and Salina the last one there, no other family; they all gone Cue, Meekatharra.'

We left the shelter and returned to pick up the mended tyre. We hung around and had some lunch, meat pies with sauce. Sniper took off out hunting after putting the mended tyre on his car. In the late afternoon I drove back with Cath and Dusty to

Ululla. Don is away and the place is empty, save for a few dogs that bark as we arrive and then piss on our tyres when we stop. A different feeling takes over, something like the presence of absence, the trace of this in the motionless objects of community. Not so much mute or empty, but carrying that trace of a sense beyond discourse. Like the discarded engine blocks (Holden 202 straight sixes from the 80's, boxy Ford 4lt V6s from the 90s) slowly sinking into the ground that carry the trace of noise and movement and possibility, the exhaust ports of the cylinders looking like Munch's screaming mouth that cannot be closed from the world, that terrifies in silence. But the chairs that sit empty and the fires that are still, are not terrifying in the silence, perhaps just lonely because they bear warmth and create arrangements and orchestrations that are not happening, but of which they somehow speak. Leaving impressions and marks and traces. There is loneliness in that trace which is neither presence nor absence, that is there but that is not happening for the moment. I grew nostalgic. And then I realised something as I transcribed the interview with Sniper.



To think nostalgically is to think that there is *a proper place* for community. A place that is lost, or that needs to be recovered, to set to work again.

Nancy warns against this thinking. When we think of *a place* (or chairs or a camp, or indeed 'ideals' or 'common-traits') that should be the proper site for community – a bounded territory that holds the essence of the community proper – in short, when we think of community as an object that can have its proper place, then we are also destined to think of community as something that is a potential (that is at the moment lacking) rather than something that happens. This is a community of

the future or of the past, which awaits or has been lost. Community becomes thought of on an essentially nostalgic basis – that it is lost, or threatened, that the true identity needs ‘to be put right’ again.

At this point we can gain some critical insight into Levinas’s philosophy. What Levinas tries to do is to put ethics right again. The thought here is that the ethical has been abandoned by philosophical thought that privileges the ontological and knowable over the radical exposure to the alterity of the other (which needs to be restored as the proper task and place of philosophy). The ethical is precarious in Levinas, precisely because it is constantly under threat or has lost its proper place. This would be a philosophy of nostalgia and loss – that the true ethical event awaits to be put right, and thus becomes a kind of infinitely deferred place of plenitude and transcendence. (This is secured through what Levinas calls the non-relation to the absolutely other who comes ‘out of context but also without mediation; he signifies by himself’ (Levinas 1996: 53). I believe this reading, speaking as it does of a Judeo-Christian ethic – the God that was lost, is not properly addressed in the world, the God who commands without mediation, the God that is yet to come and so on – could be well evidenced in his thought.⁷³ He wants to speak the voicelessness of the

⁷³ Obviously this is complex. Adriaan Peperzak (2003), in a chapter entitled ‘The significance of Levinas for Christian Thought’ in his book *The Quest for Meaning: Friends of Wisdom from Plato to Levinas* develops a rich understanding of Levinas’s relation to Christian thought. We can see through the notion of substitution, the trace of Christian thought in Levinas. Peperzak drawing on Levinas’s notion of ‘unchosen responsibility for...the other’ (215), argues that: ‘As I am “for the other” prior to any possible choice of my own, I transcend my death by spending my life for the Other’s existence, which does not belong to me...’ (215). This, for Christian thinking, would be the example of Christ (as the radically generous and primary gift to ‘us’). This is a Christ who ‘lived and died for our sins’ in a way that couldn’t be chosen. In this way, ‘he gave his life for us’ and thus transcended his own life and that of this world. The lesson being that by giving ‘ourselves’ to the other without condition – beyond choice – we approach proximity to God. A different kind of ethic can be traced in Judaism. Richard Cohen’s writes that: ‘Judaism finds the universal, the holy – the “image and likeness” of God – not in another world, a heaven hovering above or a “soul” or “spirit” detached from matter here below. Rather, holiness is found here and now in the unending divine – human partnership of *sanctification*. The world’s ascent is God descent’ (2003: 135, original emphasis). For Levinas, the other man is holy, righteous, beyond my grasp, precisely because this is where the (unknowable, unspeakable) trace of God is met. It is at this point that I think Levinas’s ethics becomes moralistic, in that, the ethical is a way to God. The particular – the approach of the other – becomes universalised under God. Here, I think we approach the problem of any universal ethics that seeks a quasi-unity in the mystical God-Other. What I mean is that ethics – a set of particular practices – becomes moralistic – a way to God as the proper (ethical) drive of life. Cohen continues that: ‘The ethical zeal to make the world a better place, a zeal that inspires Levinas and Benamozegh [an Italian 19th century Rabbi/philosopher] in their Judaism, is the very same zeal that inspires them to insist upon the multiplicity of paths that can lead to the fulfilment of the commands of an infinite God’ (138). My concern, on a purely philosophical level, is that the multiple (the ethical) only exists insofar as it comes under a religious (thus universal and moralistic) heading that promises fulfilment in God. This forces Kavka to ask in his book *Jewish Messianism and the History of Philosophy*: ‘Does not

lost and true community: he wants to speak in the name of the ‘proper’ which he would name the truly Other – the other itself; but an other that always exists only in the ‘beyond as such’ (Hallward 2001: xxiii).

Rather than consider the ethical as what is constantly threatened and put at risk each time we encounter another, why not be a little more positive and think of the ethical as something that happens to us when we communicate with others? In this way, there would be nothing transcendental or ideal in the ethical, as it would be the entirely mundane experience of being in the world. It is thereby not at risk, nor in need of putting right once again, but *it is happening*, moving, connecting, taking place in singular multiple ways. Badiou notes this in his searing critique of Levinas that: ‘The infinite, as Pascal had already realized, is the banal reality of every situation, not the predicate of a transcendence’ (2001: 25). The infinite, the exposure to a ‘more’ that cannot be exhaustively said (a world without conceptual certitude as a radical empiricist might say), is thoroughly the everyday experience of being-in-the-world. This condition is so ordinary, so entirely mundane, that Levinas wants to make it extraordinary, transcendent, Wholly Otherwise, the mark of the “‘Altogether-Other’...[which] is quite obviously the ethical name for God’ (Badiou 2001: 22).

By making the ordinary ethical relation to another mystical, Levinas seeks to overcome the ordinary with the extraordinary, the common and worldly with the transcendent and nostalgic. The proper place of the ethical – the proper saying that would say it – is lost, or in retreat, and his work seeks to recover this atavistic,

the grounding of the otherness of the other person in the otherness of God make ethics subservient to a theology that centres on the belief that the otherness of God is better than the otherness of the other person? If the goal of my ethical action is to know God, does not this ethics end up ultimately affirming nihilism, since it aspires to leave behind the realm of the human?’ (2004: 13) For an engaging and complex discussion of Levinas’s thought in relation to Jewish thought, and the influence of this on western philosophy see Kavka’s book. See also Bloechl’s (2003) edited work, *Religious Experience and the End of Metaphysics*. I would also want to point out that any religion walks a fine line between moralism and ethics. What I mean is the tension between the ethical – a singular experience of the sacred – and moralism – a set of doctrines, teachings and orthodoxies *about* the sacred – is the condition of possibility of religious belief. This tension is overcome by an emphasis on the unsayability of the sacred, as Kevin Hart writes in relation to Catholicism: ‘Revelation is never given as such in a movement of full presence that can be intuited and translated into constative statements; it enters the world by way of the incalculable and never yields that dimension of its reality, even in dogmatic formulations’ (Hart 2003: 155). This is a similar structure to that of Levinas’s notion of the ‘saying’ and ‘said’: the saying (revelation) cannot be said (dogma), even though the said gives us a sense, or way to, the saying.

diachronic, original truth: Levinas wants to voice (despite the difficulties he recognises) the voicelessness of otherness itself, to bring back to thought 'the true' experience which is lost by contemporaneous practices.⁷⁴

This does not mean we are abandoning ethics. Perhaps, put simply, we are just making it thoroughly worldly. The other may come to disturb and derange prior frameworks of meaning and this forces the obligation to respond. One may listen to an 'edgy meaning' (Nancy 2007: 7) that comes from 'a space on the side of the road' (Stewart 1996), but this, I can assure you, is quite normal. It happens *in*, and is *of* the world. Nancy gives us a good sense of this, because for him being-in-the-world is never lacking, it is not something to put right again, but something to 'dwell in and upon', to wonder with (Van Den Abbeele 1997: 14). *It is happening*, and thus it is not lost nor does it await. As Salina says, 'Something like, tingling there. Nerves.' 'That's your family coming,' as Sniper says. 'Tingling, thing, nerves...yeah, that's our way. You know they're coming.'

The shift

When we think of it, 'community' is utterly ordinary and everyday. The problem comes when we seek to make the very ordinary very strange and mysterious. In order to understand mysterious and otherworldly things we do not so much look at

⁷⁴ The Zizekian critique of Levinas is also an interesting one, and one that is gathering pace. Zizek's critique essentially stems from his critique of Derrida's privileging of 'ethics' over 'politics'; something Zizek sees as Derrida's debt to Levinas. Zizek (2001a) argues in *Did Someone Say Totalitarianism: Five Interventions in the (Mis)use of a Notion* that Derrida makes impossible an appearance of a positive value, or indeed of any firm decision. This is so because Derrida privileges, as Critchley identifies, *the ethical* 'as the infinite responsibility of unconditional hospitality' *over the political*, that can be defined as 'the taking of decision without any determinate transcendental guarantees...' It is because of this that the political 'realm...[comes to be seen as one] of risk and danger' to ethical responsibility (Critchley 1992: 275, quoted in Zizek 2001(a): 156). In a sense, the domain of decision as implementation of actions and (political) processes would always proceed by way of marginalisation of others. Or, as Zizek puts it, commenting on Derrida, any 'particular intervention' would never 'live up to this [ethical] request, that is always unjust towards (some of the) others' (156). The tension that Zizek identified here in Derrida's thought is one between the infinite demand of hospitality on the one hand and the compromised realm of the political where decisions are forced, on the other. By maintaining the 'irreducibility' of this gap between 'the abyss of the undecidable Thing and any particular decision...' the realm of politics and decision (the 'third') is seen as inherently dangerous to the primacy of 'unconditional Otherness' (Zizek 2001a:153). In short, what the 'radicalisation' of the gap between 'the ethical' and 'the political' means in actual terms, is 'the renunciation of any actual radical political measures' (ibid: 154).

the things that are happening and going on around, rather we look with an interest in ‘a dimension of height’ – where the truly other would come to pass. Some kind of figure is appealed to that offers access to the entirely Other – a figure or a universal being (‘the Martu’, ‘the Pintupi’, for Levinas, The Other) that would make it possible to speak in the name of otherness itself. This is what I will name in the next ‘gathering’ the pseudo-subject that is called upon to speak in the name of the other. What this means is that by staking its claim in otherness as the proper work, anthropology misses points of being in common that are happening in rather ordinary ways. Contact points *that are* the possibility for the articulation of difference. Moreover, because anthropology seeks to account for the worldly experiences of others (i.e. what it means to be-in-the-world, or the ‘life worlds of others’) it seeks a kind of figure of wondrous transcendence in order to say something more (brilliant) than the everyday. It stakes its claim in a transcendent figure that could only exist in ‘the beyond as such’. Anthropology seeks something more grand than the ordinary lot of situations that happen in communities; it seeks the all-together-other. It pursues the brilliant exposition that would reveal the true identity of the people. A seeking of transcendence, above and beyond the things that are happening; a search or recovery of that place where it all comes together, the ‘all-together-one’ that would speak of otherness itself. An other that is accessed, addressed and secured through the transcendent position beyond the worldly contexts and mediations that make being-with-others possible.

I feel that the people at Ululla have shown me something else; people have forced me to see the movement between one and another as such as the level where all things come to pass. A kind of circulation of meaning that connects and creates networks of relationships that extend without centre, with no higher purpose than maintaining a line of communication open to another; to not foreclose upon this, but to seek meaning as circulation and exposure to the work and demand of others without rest – without a place beyond the level of these worldly things which happen, and to which we are exposed.

What I will consider in the final 'gathering' is how anthropology wants to transcend the ethical by seeking out the place of unity – that place where the totality of relations can be defined, organised and name called into existence. The proper (brilliant) anthropological work happens by transcending the community, by transcending the imperatives and commands that are happening there: Geertz begins when subject and object have found their rightful place; Hastrup seeks to maintain the 'performative paradox' of the ethnographic present – she maintains objectivity (height and distance) by protecting against the pressing bodies of others; Fabian calls his other to where he stands, refusing to budge, to be taken away and shown something else. Fred Myers's *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, which is the main text of the next 'gathering', exposes itself to the ethical command of being Pintupi, but in order for Myers to do his work – in order to secure the proper anthropological work – he transcends this condition and thus, perhaps, the lesson he learnt from his Pintupi friends.

breakaway .

Walkin' along

Stephen Muecke notes that, 'An elder is telling you a story not primarily because it is relevant to some past state of affairs, nor for future reference, but to impress something upon you now' (2004b: 171). Knowledge may come from the past, from experience, but it is addressed to the now; it matters now more than ever and this is what matters. It also true that thoughts and memories are recalled and told again because something happens in the now that makes them matter; being somewhere in time and place often gives one a sense of this. Continuity between time(s) and place(s), the ability to call upon these, happens because you are somewhere in particular. This is what is known as 'duration', that we have a sense of the world (and of selves and others), because we exist across time. Ian James suggests this in relation to Heidegger 'our experience of being unfolds or gives itself temporally as an event: we experience a meaningful world because we are rooted in the past and thrust into a future...a temporal projection forward and backward' (2006: 49). I would add to this, that this meaningfulness can only matter, because it matters now.

I was in town with Sheila and Georgina Brown, sitting down outside the fast food shed that is opposite the pub. The heavy smells of stale frying oil was in the clean winter air; it soaked upon us like blotting paper. The remains of the last fry-up were slowly sweating in the Baer Marie. Golden crispiness must *not* matter now more than ever (crispiness does not durate). The pub, built in the 1930s when Wiluna was in the midst of a gold rush, has a sign facing the main street, faded and kitsch but done with a tongue-in-a-cheek, saying 'Welcome to Paradise' replete with a desert island, coconut palm and fringes of sun drenched ocean blue. The fading sign, its ironic stand, is set against the dull rusty brown red of the pub which seems to soak up the clear winter light, sitting rather heavy and stale in the air. Nothing is

happening here and so GB says we should go somewhere else. We stopped at the shop down the road, and Ululla Boss (see below) jumped in with us.



We drive to the other side of town to the ‘old goods shed’ which stands alongside the disused railway line that used to come from Meekatharra, the railway line barely discernable, covered in dirt and gravel. Here we looked out across the old town site strewn with rusted cans and glass bottles that used to hold beer, salves, ointments and co. The everyday rubbish of yesteryear curiously bearing that trace of something beyond itself: the trace of otherness is particularly worldly. There are a few chimneys that remain, pitted and slowly dissolving in the wind and in the rain when it comes; the houses long since collapsed and gleaned. The old goods shed – rusted red iron – creaking and yawning in the sun. We can hear the gold mine droning on to the south and east, the cool wind carries it relentlessly. I had been bugging Sheila for awhile. I was hanging around perhaps like a stale smell, or an incessant drone on the wind, perhaps – and this is what happens when you are in research mode – like blotting paper that is eager to swell in the marks of others. I asked about home.

‘So home?’ ‘Whitefellas stopping one place, you know,’ I say.

‘Oh yeah,’ says Sheila.

‘Martu way, people always moving, going to lots of places, like there are many homes: how do people think of ngurra (home)?’

GB replies, 'You need a good home.' She continues, 'People used to go out hunting, out bush, didn't like to be in town, more better than town (in the bush), too much troubles and all that.'

'Town has become a home for people, inni?' I ask.

GB replies, 'Yeah.'

I add, 'Is your home say 'Patjarr, Warburton, Ululla a little bit, Bondini.'

GB says that, 'I only got one spot really but I keep on coming up and down, me I like bush more better than town: it's more safe, and happy – just go out bush all the time. Like the old people, they like hunting and all that, they enjoy themselves. Take the young, take them all out.'

I ask, 'What if you stay in one place too long.'

'Its boring, it's no good really.'

'Is there like a, like an *urge* to travel?' I ask.

'Yuwa (yes), when your family is really long way, and you are just by yourself, it upsets you really. You have to travel to see your families, yeah, visiting.'

'What about you Sheila? Where's your home?' I ask.

'We the first ones to come in, we stayed over here, near the old hospital, other-side (east side) near a gidgee tree – two gidgee tree,' she points, beyond the Shire, which occupies the old hospital.

'You were the first family to come?'

'Yeah, we the first family, old fella and three missus (her father had three wives).

Yeah, we the first family, old fella and three missus – my mum, Rita's mum, Sadie's mum. They all come. Carnegie (a station 500km east of Wiluna). Yeah, we come through there,' looking out to the east, she continues, 'my father used to steal things for us, inni, to keep us alive when we were coming along. Bullocky, sheep, anything. Sugar, flour – everything.'

'My mum was there,' adds GB, 'that's Rita's older sister.'

'This the people, last people,' says Sheila pointing to GB and Ululla Boss.

‘First and last, yes,’ I say. GB’s family was the last family to ‘come in’ (this is explained further down).

‘We walked all the way, right through.’

‘Can you remember walking?’ I asked.

‘Can you do it now?’ says GB poking fun at her aunty.

‘Walked right up,’ confirms Sheila.

‘I think I can,’ (still walk), says GB.

‘Where’s the light,’ (for a cigarette), Sheila says imperatively. I watch her light up,

‘All the way right up,’ she says, exhaling smoke that diffuses like pleasure.

‘Was Sadie born?’ (her younger sister), I ask.

‘Sadie was a little one walking along. We lost the two brothers, sisters – three sister (Shelia’s brothers and sister who have since passed away, but were alive at the time) – they was older than us, walking along. If you come – should have been there in our day – you could have seen us, all coming in.’

Her words and memories, her voice as she points beyond the old hospital to the two gidgee trees, taking us away and back towards this event that impresses upon us in the now. Back and forth in an instant as the condition of being here. I imagine myself sitting down watching Sheila and her family ‘coming in’. She said it with such confidence, in such a matter of fact way, that you couldn’t help but imagine them walking in. It was an uncanny feeling; the evocative powers of the imagination were not some otherworldly (or non-proper, non-faithful) human sense but the very real thing that Sheila was impressing upon me: it was the real thing happening, ‘If you come – should have been there in our day – you could have seen us comin’ in.’ I thought, what a wonderful and confident thing to say, an invitation to imagine the possibility of being there, your place now, is being thrown towards the sense of that possibility, *there* because of being *here*, now. Something that Crapanzano evokes, ‘horizons that extend from the insistent reality of the here and now into the optative space or time – the space-time – of the imaginary’ (2004: 14). Yeah, I imagined a family walking along, Sheila as a little girl, waiting by the gidgee tree. Sadie a little

one walking along, two gidgee trees by the old hospital, with her family. These events stretching before us, forwards and backwards now. Sheila continued.

'Every station, he'd go and steal things for us.

'He'd hide you fellas away first,' says GB.

'Yeah, he hide us. We was in the bush and he'd go in, stealing things. And bringing it back.'

'Did he worry for his country,' I ask.

'Oh yeah, yeah. If he was alive he would have been going back.'

'Did he ever go back, once you...?' I said,

Shelia picked up and extended my question, 'No, he went one-way (with sadness), to here. Catch the train for stealing (sent to gaol). Here, *here*, where's the train line?' She looks around for the train line. 'There,' she points, we were sitting right near the old tracks. The old goods shed rusted brown red against the clear winter sky, the clear breeze surround us.

'On the train one whitefella gave him a cool drink.'

'Cool drink?' I ask.

'He thought it was a woma (the name for alcohol but also a traditional plant with similar effects – my sense here is that he thought the whitefella was trying to poison or disorient him); *He split his head!*' GB and Ululla Boss, knowing the event and the story laughed before the punch line. 'We was all waiting here, sitting down here, we didn't think we'd see him again. (He went to prison in the Fremantle gaol, south of Perth). Until one day, until one night, we see him. He walk, from halfway. I don't know the place, one place where he split that whitefella head, must be. He thought he gave him a woma you know, he didn't know he was munjun (unknowing): he come from the desert. He walkin' back.'

'And then he came back here,' I ask.

'Yeah, he come back, says Sheila.

'He walked back, inni?' says GB.

'He walking back,' says Sheila.

‘And there was no other Martu here?’ I say.

‘No. We sit down here, we seen all the Freddy’s come, aunty Wilma, old girl, Wilma. All this Janice (Jones) mob, all that lot come and sit down. We was here for awhile then we went to the mission, out from the reserve. From there we went (with her brothers and sisters) to, um, Karalundi (to school), mum and dad were here, before all the houses come up in the reserve.’

‘That’s when my mum went back bush with my dad, ran away,’ says GB.

‘Yeah, them two,’ says Sheila with a wry muffled laugh, knowing the event. (GB’s parents had ‘come into’ Wiluna in the late 1950s with the rest of the Martu mob, a few years later, her father ‘went and got’ GB’s mother and they ran away to the desert, where they lived for more than a decade and had three children, GB being the second oldest. They were the last family living traditionally, the last ones to come in (in 1976). This narrative unfolds in the final ‘spacing/rhythm’ of the thesis). ‘She (GB’s mother) wanted to go to Karalundi, He (GB’s father) took him back,’ says Sheila.

‘Yeah, ran away,’ says GB.

‘He went back all the way from that place, (Wiluna) way back to the country where they been stay. Old uncle, ngarru,’ says Sheila.

‘That’s a long way,’ says GB.

‘That’s a along way,’ repeats Shelia. (GB’s father was a young man, perhaps 16, not yet initiated, when he took her mother back, it was a ‘wrong way marriage’)

GB continues, ‘He (her father) was telling us, before he got really sick, he came a showed us that place, Carnegie – I was born, my older sister, only two of us – showed us, didn’t want to bring her back (her mum stayed, didn’t take her to Carnegie) ’cause she might run away. Might take off with me and my older sister. He showed us the place and then we went back out bush, back out. We bin travellin’ right up, travellin’ round and round until my older sister, she got very sick...got Boyie then,’ (her younger brother).

‘Ngarru, little Boyie he still coming up,’ remembers Sheila with a chuckle.

‘He used to hunt a lot, dad,’ adds GB.

'Yeah, good hunting,' says Sheila.

'My mum and my dad,' continues GB. 'We was really healthy, we was healthy. You seen that photo?' (There is a photo in the Wiluna Shire Art Gallery of GB's family when they 'came in' in 1976).

'Yeah, you all look good in the photo,' I say.

'Boyie there, little fat one. Yeah, you can get everything,' she adds.

'So, at that time, were there any Martu out there?' I say.

'Nobody, just them two oldies. This one's mum and dad,' gesturing with an open hand to Ululla Boss⁷⁵ sitting next to her, 'and us, that's all.'

Things turned as Ululla Boss talked about the times he went looking for GB's family.⁷⁶ GB translated bits and pieces to me, as he told of his movement in and out of the desert looking for his family. She has told me at different times, that 'Ululla Boss doesn't want to tell me' (about her childhood and about being 'found') but this was a time when he was talking, so I didn't intervene, and GB kept me abreast of what was happening, feeding me little morsels. (As we drove GB down to Kalgoorlie a week later, GB told me of her childhood growing up in the desert; this is the subject of the final 'spacing/rhythm').

⁷⁵ Ululla Boss (Geoffrey Stewart) is the son of Warri and Yatungka, these two are recognised as the last of the Wiluna mob to live traditionally, they came 'in' in 1977. Ululla Boss got his nickname from spending a lot of time at Ululla in the late 1990s and early 2000s: people in Wiluna gave him that nickname because he became 'boss' of the station. Warri and Yatungka were 'the last' of the Wiluna mob to be living traditionally. This is the central theme of W.J. Peasley's somewhat nostalgic book *The Last of the Nomads* (1983). Peasley, with the insistence of a senior elder, Mudjon, an old friend of Warri, mounts, with Mudjon, an expedition, in 1977 into the Gibson Desert (in a year of severe drought) to find and bring Warri and Yatungka back to Wiluna. Warri and Yatungka had married 'wrong way' and had escaped far into the desert (at a time when many other countrymen were 'coming in') in order to maintain their relationship. Warri and Yatungka died two years later after they were taken to Wiluna, a 1000km from their country. Their son, Ululla Boss, when in his late teens, spent considerable time with GB's family. GB talks of her mother and father looking after him, when he was young. Ululla Boss's younger brother Romie also lived and travelled with GB's family.

⁷⁶ Ululla Boss was free to move between his mother and father and GB's family as well as between Wiluna and Warburton. One of the reasons Warri and GB's father (at different times) 'went back bush' as GB explained to me, was because they had married 'wrong'. Ululla Boss seemed to move between his parents and GB's family, as well as being free to move between them and 'town', which he seemed to do on a number of occasions. He came back looking for them a number of times. He told, on this occasion, of coming from Warburton Ranges in a motor car looking for his parents and GB's family, but he couldn't find them.

The talk of GB's home – 'I only got one place really' – of her childhood in the desert, of 'traveling up and down,' prompted me to ask Sheila, later on, what it was like staying at Ululla, staying in someone else's country, not in the 'proper place.' Sheila replied (and I quoted this in full in the opening (p. 13)) that, "It's a bit funny, I think, to stay in someone else's place...But Ululla its alright we stay, good. Oh yeah that's a good place, town no good. We like it in the bush.'

Sheila continues, 'So we might go back, Ululla, when we're finished in town.

'It's too dopey out there with no one,' I say.

'It is,' says Sheila. 'It was happy when everyone was out there, whole lot, big mob of us, all the people come everywhere and visit. It's a good place, alright.'

'*What now?*' asks Ululla Boss.

'What now? We go?' says Sheila.

'You finished?' she adds.

'Thank you very much,' I say.

'Ohh well, same, good, he good one,' says Sheila. 'All right, finished now. You going back what time, to Ululla?'

'Tomorrow,' I reply.

'You come back weekend (pick us up from town), we want to go kuka' (to Ululla).

'Yeah, no worries.'

We got up and stretched and yawned from the little gathering which took us off elsewhere. We opened wide and inhaled the winter air, stood in the sunshine and absorbed its warmth. Later, I thought that a yawn is also the gap that marks a chasm (a 'yawning gulf' SOED), sometimes, in fact, most of the time, I am surprised, in fact overwhelmed, by how much more there is to learn about and try and get a hold of. There is nothing particularly unique about that experience, it is commonplace, it is the kind of thing that happens when others open up and share what they know of their place in the world. In a different kind of way, this is what creates the possibility of thinking and knowledge, its inspiration, if you will, as Nagle demonstrates, 'Certain form of perplexity – for example, about freedom, knowledge, and the meaning of life – seem to me to embody more insight than any of the supposed

solutions to these problems' (Nagel 1986: 4, quoted in Morris 2008: 440). Just the ordinary lot of questions and situations, of experiences that make a contemporaneous experience with others possible; a yawn between us. This is a kind of *question or perplexity* that agitates rather than a determinable answer that is solid and static: or, more particularly, to be with others forces an opening towards the world, rather than its closure. A yawn, a tingling, a 'streaming of electricity' (Bataille 1988).

This, to repeat a theme of my critique of Levinas, is not at risk in the world, but what happens because the world shifts in multiple ways, forwards and backwards, here and there we turn to another who offers another sense of the world. Again, this is not becoming the same as the other, speaking in the place of the other, speaking for the other as if the other is the same, as if the gap is collapsed into oneness, but rather being open to *that* difference, that gap, which is like a clear and bright winter desert breeze that drifts and streams amongst us. The kind of thing that Rose's work pauses and dwells in – that question of community, of what it would mean to be in-common with others, to take this as the work, as the exposure and responsibility to respond to a different experience and sense of the world. Community is the exposure of this fundamental finitude that happens by way of being-in-common. This is the space, the gap, which defines us. We stand together, or in the sun, or by an old goods shed rusted, sighing, yawning in that difference that stands between us and with which we become articulate. Like a passage that keeps us in track with an/other, stretching into the horizon.

articulation.

With our backs against a wall, we look towards space

I argued in the opening (pp. 19-20) that to talk of ‘being’ we need to think about how beings are distinct from one another but also we need to think how they are connected. I quoted Bataille to show that ‘You and I are *discontinuous* beings’ (2001: 12) and that this discontinuity is what makes communication with others happen. Communication here does not ‘abolish our fundamental difference’ but shares out and exposes us to what Nancy calls the ‘shared finitude’ of being. This lack of continuity or completion (in another) makes and remakes community itself. I also argued that the mythic and political claims of community normally thought seeks to overcome or repair this fundamental finitude in order to create a unified social body – what we could call reclaiming the proper identity to overcome difference.

What I want do in this articulation is to think ‘shared finitude’, that is, to let the singular details – the singular events that are encountered in everyday community happenings – do their work; do their work of *unworking* universal or objective reductions. The sense of this is ‘singular’, ‘that is, irreducible to any possibility of gathering, identity, or propriety’ but it is plural in the sense that the singular ‘is also [and can only be] constituted in its multiplicity and relationality’ (Ian James 2006: 103). There is no desire here to transcend the world, to offer a total meaning that would no longer be exposed to the ‘indefinite plurality of singularities’ (Nancy 2000: 35). And as I have been saying, this sense of things happens when we spend time with others (it is so everyday that it is a yawn). Things happen, happen singularly so, and force the otherwise or the unexpected into view and this is what moves thought on; not towards completion or finality but onwards without rest. It is this that I want to try and show now.

We all went out bush Molly and grandkids, Kupsie (Molly's husband), Sadie (Molly and Sadie are sisters), Elanore (Sadie's granddaughter), Trina (Elanore's cousin), Nagata (Sadie and Molly's younger brother), Don and his son Brett. A little community made up only of relations of difference-in-common.



I spoke to Sadie under the shade of an acacia tree, a small rocky hill against our backs, a kind of wall against our backs, I note. I was sitting down with Sadie's granddaughter Elanore, who is about sixteen, and her cousin Trina, who is about twenty-one. I realised, later, all the potential avenues for future engagement; each conversation opens out into something else, another linkage, another point of communication and sharing is opened up. Conversation is not a shelter, not a retreat from the world, but its infinite exposure. Each conversation is another potential, the chance for another sense of things to unfold, to take place, to happen. But, of course, there are themes and ideas that return, that give you a building sense of how people relate and offer up what they know of the world. There is *that* shared sense of things (that is shared differently) that grows and develops, that you 'hook

into’, that you get ‘hooked upon’; you ‘catch upon’ the rhythm of others, fall into that kind of pace and tempo. (A bit like blotting paper, but not in the sense that you ‘absorb’ the marks of others, but more in the sense that I tried to articulate in ‘The work of the goat’ – like smudges that drift across a notebook and bleed into one another).

This is of course the place of ‘research’ – of hooking into, becoming hooked upon, that sense of things that is happening both singularly and generally so. Something like ‘bubbles of sense’ that drift into another (Nancy 1997: 2); captions bleeding into multiple contexts. This is the work of community – a shared sense of things that takes shape over time, with duration, by way of spending time with others. (This does not get us to some ‘higher plane’ of fulfilment or communion, but rather, exposes us to a fundamental finitude that links and differentiates). Here, the singular works amongst the plural; each individual working something different to, yet common with, the general sense of things that a community gives light to trace. In a way, we catch onto that (general) rhythm differently, and this is what community ‘spaces’. That the singular can only emerge plurally so. That the plural only ever has singular articulations.

As researchers, we need to be sentient to both of these ‘senses’: the themes that are repeated as well as the individual work that gives us another sense (again) of what is held in-common.

De Certeau writes in *The Practices of Everyday Life* (1984) (in chapter seven ‘Walking in the City’) that the practice of walking in the city is a spatial activity that is a ‘heterogeneous’ and undisciplined ‘operation’ that fills the ‘the homogenous space of the city’ (107) with ‘turns’ and ‘detours’ (100) that run counter to the management plans developed by town planners, city administrators and political leaders. De Certeau writes that: ‘Things *extra* and *other* (details coming from elsewhere) insert themselves into the accepted framework, the imposed order’ (107). It is this undisciplined creation of singular and collective pathways ‘here well trodden, there very faint’ (97) that work over the ‘functionalist administration’ that

attempts to manage, supervise and control these everyday practices through managing spatial activities – such as people’s movement through, or indeed, containment in, a city (94-95). The link between de Certeau’s argument and my own thesis should be clear: that people work something *extra* and *in excess of* imposed orders. That the city (and community) is not a place of sameness but of a proliferation of multiple styles and ‘turns of phrase’. That the city, while working to order and manage these practices, actually creates ‘cellars and garrets everywhere’ (Bachelard 1964, quoted in De Certeau, 106) that break-with and transform idealised forms of organisation, containment and space. People work a sensibility towards the world that resists and *unworks* totalitarian principles.⁷⁷

But back to Sadie with her granddaughters. Here I think we can listen, ‘get our ears ready’ as Nancy says (1993: 109), for the general sense of community that is only ever a singular ‘turn of phrase’. Here, ‘turns of phrase’ would not progress towards some idealised plenitude, but would expose and expose again the lack of such a destiny; sharing out that sense of multiple pathways ‘sometimes well trodden, sometimes faint’ that make up the heterogenous space of community as a shared experience of finitude. We could think then, that the *in* of being-*in*-common is the space of a relations, relations that articulate, detour and turn through space.

Talking initially with Trina and Elanore.

‘So, you know, Ululla?’ I say.

‘Um I don’t know, ahh,’ laughing. We all laugh.

‘Yeah, Trina,’ says Elanore.

Trina says, ‘I don’t know.’

‘Ululla it’s right, inni?’ says Elanore to Trina. Laughing, ‘It’s right, it’s got everything,’ adds Elanore.

Trina says, ‘talk about Ululla?’

‘What’ve got to say?’ wonders Elanor.

Trina says, ‘say anything.’

⁷⁷ On this point De Certeau writes that: “Totalitarianism attacks what it correctly calls *superstitions*: supererogatory semantic overlays that insert themselves “over and above” and “in excess” of the “univocity” of the system (ibid: 106).

‘Any memories?’ I say.

‘Go bush, that’s all.’

‘It’s right there, in Ululla,’ says Trina.

‘Ululla,’ calls Elanore loudly towards her grandmother (who is hard of hearing),

‘Sadie! Sadie, you like Ululla?’

‘Oh yeah, we are thinking about going back, too much people in Meeka, want to go back.’

‘How did you go there?’ I ask.

‘When you first go? Nana,’ says Elanore.

Trina repeats: ‘When you first go, when you bin first go, Ululla, when...’

‘No!’ says Sadie, ‘We came from Bonbajina’ (a community near Mt Newman). ‘We used to live in Mt Newman there, with Daniel. I met Daniel in Port Headland, town, Coles (supermarket), South Headland, we went to Jigalong, we went to Mt Newman, stay there see. I been working there. Daniel was a chairman there, Bonbajina. I used to work in a shed, cooking with the old peoples – lunch for them, you know.’

‘Keep going,’ Elanore says with a laugh, catching on to the rhythm of research, cheekily to her grandmother. Sadie looks at her with a look of, “gee, you are a cheeky bugger,” and laughs. We all laugh.

‘Then we went, funeral, Bondini (Wiluna).⁷⁸ Bondini for funeral. Long time. We stopped, we been go out to Ululla, for day, you know. Stayed there for a little while and we was coming back, we was going to come back, Newman. I tell em (Daniel): “No, we stop here, we got to stop.” We stayed in Ululla then.’

‘Were the family telling you about Ululla?’ I ask.

‘They tell me about Ululla, you know, they tell me: “You stop Ululla,” so we stayed.’

⁷⁸ This is the name of the ‘reserve’ in Wiluna. Bondini Mission was set up in the 1960’s (although in a different place than the current ‘reserve’) it is 5km from Wiluna. People in Wiluna refer to Wiluna commonly as Bondini. Don pointed out to me once that whitefellas’ refer to Wiluna as Wiluna – a corruption of a Martu word meaning windy place – whilst Martu people refer to Wiluna as Bondini; named after an Italian gold prospector who lived 5km out of town and from which Bondini mission got its name.

‘As a kid, where were you? Did you grow up in Bondini (Wiluna)?’

‘Aye?’ Sadie didn’t hear properly.

‘As a kid,’ interrupts Trina, ‘where you been born?’

‘Oh, I was born in the bush, but that was long time. I was born somewhere. They came from bush (her parents) and there was an old mission there, Wiluna mission.

We stayed there, old people let us go to school, in the dormitories. Then we went from Bondini mission to Karalundi mission. That’s where we went to school.

School there. Mum and dad, they stayed in Bondini. They used to take us on the truck, on the big truck, no bus, back to mission (Bondini –Wiluna) for holidays. We used to go out with the old people, holiday, in the bush – camping out. Holiday finished, truck come back for us, yeah (to take us back to Karalundi).’



‘Did you run away from the truck?’ I ask. Trina and Elanore laugh at the thought of their grandmother, as a young girl, running away from the truck.

‘No! I never,’ laughing. ‘We used to go back. Karalundi, we used to run into the bush when we didn’t want to go to school. Mitadu (Trina’s father) and Sheila there before us.’

‘Nagata?’ (Sadie’s younger brother) asks Trina,

‘No, not yet. I went to school with the Ashwin mob. Some of these people in Meeka, we used to go to school with us, mission. That’s my schoolmates, Meeka.’

‘What about home, where do you think of home?’ Silence. ‘You know whitefellas, they have a house and stop there. Martu people moving around, they don’t stop one place. Do you think of home as one place, or like lots of places?’ I must’ve glanced to Elanore.

Elanore says, ‘Umm,’ with teenage charm, titling her head, ‘Sadie – Nana!’

Sadie says, ‘Nah, this one’s making me laugh,’ referring to Elanore.

Trina, helps out: ‘Where’s your Ngurra (home).’

‘What? Ngurra,’ says Sadie.

‘Where you want to live you life,’ adds Trina: ‘Bondini, Sandstone, Meek...’

‘No,’ says Sadie, ‘I’m going back to thing, Ululla there, too much nuisance in the house.’

‘It’s right there, Meeka, but too much people come to the house,’ says Elanore.

‘They look for drinks, they come knocking in the night.’

‘I was talking to Sniper and he was talking about the feeling of nerves, in the arm, when family is coming close,’ I say.

Sadie replies, ‘When you worrying for your kids, *kids they worry*, you know they’ll think: my mother worrying, like that, when they feel the nerves. They have’em you know. That’s why, when Chris ring up (her son): “Go back to Ululla,” he says to me, you know, “go back home.” Yeah. But nobody in Ululla, see, live there, you know. If there are people there, we can go back see, like that. Chris, he don’t want me stop in Meeka, he tell me: “that’s not your ngurra, Meeka, go back,” – like that. That’s why Rita tell me: we go back, she says like that. They might be finished living in Cue there, stay in Meeka awhile, and then go back to Ululla see.’

‘I want a drink of water,’ says Sadie, she gets up.

‘Trina, Elanore, your turn,’ she adds.

‘I bin say my words,’ laughing, says Elanore with all of her 16 years of spunk. Trina and I join in her laughter.

‘Can we listen?’ says Elanore.

‘Yeah,’ I said, ‘I’ll get the ear-phones.’ We listen back to the conversation in a little semi-circle, swapping the earphones with each other and repeating what was said to the others without ear-phones. Some of Molly’s grandkids come up, *give me a turn they say*. They listen and they repeat the words in our little circle, but in their own little kid way, full of detours and strange ‘turns of phrase’. Laughter ensues through these different articulations, shared out and shared again. We catch on to articulations by way of being-together, played out differently all the time.

Perhaps with out backs against the wall this is what we share with others. Perhaps when pressed, we trace other lines that are faint or perhaps well trodden, but that are always a response to ‘decidedly local turn of events’ and that thus resist homogenisation or ‘the creation of a *universal* and *anonymous* subject’, which is the anthropological construction of the community itself.⁷⁹ ‘The world’, writes Nancy in *Being Singular Plural* ‘always appears each time according to a decidedly local turn [of events] (2000: 9).

Reading back through my Ululla notebook, I imagine Sadie meeting Daniel in the Port Headland Coles (supermarket); her son saying imperatively on the phone, ‘go back.’ Her granddaughter making her laugh, making it hard to hear another pressing question (that wants to find the proper meaning). I think of Sadie going somewhere (to Ululla) for a day and staying for years. Events take hold, others open a site for community to take place. Here, thinking community is a ‘sharing of singularities’ (Nancy 1991: 33), where the ordinary experience of community, is also, always exceptional (Nancy 2000: 10). In this way, the everyday practices of being-with-others is always something other and in excess of imposed orders of meaning. Sure, we have a general sense; for example, that Ululla is one home among others, it is a place to be with family and to get away from town where there are ‘too many people askin’ as people say (too many claims on one’s relatedness (Myers 1986)), that

⁷⁹ The original quote is: ‘the creation of a *universal* and *anonymous* subject that is the city itself’ (De Certeau: 94, original emphasis).

community is always a movement back and forth, leaving and returning, but this general sense, emerges only *in* particular ways. The *in*, the relations, or points of articulation, is what we work as the condition of being in community-with-others, across a kind of 'gap', if you will. Each time, we share difference in common (detours, phrases, styles, events) and this makes the community happen. This is what happens when a little gathering takes place beneath the shade of a tree; trace back, listen again, share out and articulate. With our backs against the wall we look out into space and the things happening there. What makes community happen is that we come to it differently, we come with detours and turns of phrase which are truly our own but that only make sense by being in common, by being shared and shared again with others.

gathering three.

Community



opening.

Community without identity

Because there is no ‘bounded community’, it is necessary to think community without horizon or limit: this is to try and think beyond a limit that would bring the community back to itself (to some generality or archetype). Ululla was always changing from week to week, month to month, year to year; it is never the same; there is always a different collection of people, forces and contingencies working away. The Jackman family have vast regional networks of family that connect to other sites of community: Wiluna, Cue and Meekatharra; Leonora and Kalgoorlie; Warburton Ranges and Alice Springs; Jigalong, Mt. Newman, Port Headland and Cotton Creek. And from these places, further afield again; Perth, Geraldton, Broome.⁸⁰

This extensive nature of relations demands that people travel vastly and imperatively to maintain kin relationships – leaving and returning without rest as a condition of being. This forces us to rethink how we conceive of ‘community’. I have been attempting to think community, anthropology and Ululla (this is a imperfect signifier) within this horizon, that is to say, without horizon; without a limit place that would return and hold the identity of the community to a bounded set of signifiers.

⁸⁰For example, Sadie Jackman, as well as living at Ululla, has spent a lot of her time in Meekatharra, Mt Newman and Port Headland. Her sister Shelia tends to live more around Wiluna and Ululla, while their sister Rita has lived in Cue and Cotton Creek. Rita lived with her family at Ululla for a decade. Their sister Irene grew up in Perth, lived for the most part in Sandstone (140km from Ululla) whilst I was at Ululla, and now lives in Northam (100km east of Perth, but travels regularly north to Wiluna and Ululla). Molly worked at Karalundi (a Seventh Day Adventist Mission 50km north of Meekatharra) for a decade and was living at Ululla when I lived there, and now lives in Meekatharra. Their niece, Georgina Brown (in her late 30s) now lives between Ululla, Wiluna, Warburton Ranges and Alice Springs. Another niece, Gail (in her late 30s) grew up on stations around Ululla and was one of the first, with her sisters, to live at Ululla when she was a teenager. She has lived in Meekatharra, Broome, and Geraldton, she is currently calling Ululla home.

In this final ‘gathering’ I will argue that the project of anthropology rests on the revelation of an ‘internal logic’ or an ‘essence’ that is presented and stands for the community itself. The anthropologist works to bring out this latent essence in the community. This is anthropological work: the uncovering of a determined cultural logic that is presented as the community’s true or real nature. The common way this thinking takes place is through presenting a pseudo-subject that stands for the community in general. (Pseudo: ‘supposed or purporting to be but not really so, false, not genuine’ (SOED)). For example, the common anthropological phrase: ‘The Martu believe that, For the Pintupi, When a ...does this it means that...’ What this thinking of community *as a subject* does, is reduce the community to a logic of identity – to an elemental sameness – implying, in the processes, that there is a ‘common being’ or an ‘essential unity that identifies and underlies the group’ (Norris 2000: 273). Let us not forget that the work of anthropology is to bring this forth: the work of anthropology is uncovering the true identity, which once found, can establish the authority to speak in general. When Myers says that the ‘Pintupi believe that...’ what he is doing is bringing a general anonymous subject forth as the mode to present the community itself, the subject here, in an important sense, is total. What we are made to forget through this process is that a) no universal subject exists and that b) anthropology, nonetheless, puts it to work as the work of anthropology. This thinking of community creates a certain type of anthropological project, one I have been rejecting in this thesis. (We must not forget here, that this anonymous subject is secured by speaking as if beyond the worldly relations that are happening, ‘the other comes to us not only out of context but also without mediation’ so to speak (Levinas 1996: 53). We must not also forget that this is how the anthropologist gains the voice of otherness itself – that anonymous and universal subject comes through the anthropological ‘dimension of height’, as if beyond the world as such).

Norris, with politics and nationalism in mind, commenting on Nancy’s thinking of community, demonstrates that,

conceiving of the community or the state as a subject entails that we understand the community to have an identity that is immanent to it, and that needs to be brought out, and put to work. In Nancy's terminology, the community as subject necessarily implies the community as subject-work. If one's "true" or "higher" or "more universal" self is found in one's shared community identity, it becomes the work of politics to acknowledge and bring forth that immanent communal identity. (2000: 275)

Little wonder, then, that some contemporary anthropologists such as Hastrup are still keen to call the people she works with 'her people' (1995b: 127), her community; the place she works in-order to reveal (to bring out and universalise) that unifying cultural essence. The work here of anthropologists, and here I am usurping Norris's reference to politics and politicians, (leaders that speak for the community itself, on its behalf in an international frame) 'is a matter of discovering the immanent or implicit identity of a group and setting it to work, drawing it out and allowing it to express itself in functional activity' (ibid: 275). Or what we could call gaining or speaking the 'common-sense' of 'the people'. The strange thing here is that, unlike politicians, contemporary Australian ethnographers recognise that no 'bounded group' exists as such (Meyers 1986, Dussart 2000, Poirier 2005), but they nonetheless put it to work in the name of proper anthropological work.

Against this thinking of community and anthropology as putting the subject to work to reveal a transcendental unity, I have been using Nancy to think community not as the presentation of a *common-being*, but *being-in-common*. Hence, being with community is not about finding a common substance, nor subject, but rather, being thrown into an 'activity of interrelation' (Secomb 2000).

In light of this thinking I have been trying to articulate a sense that what we share with others is difference and that we have this in common with others; people at Ululla made me see this. Nancy evokes this sense of things, writing, 'Not only are all people different but they are also different from one another. They do not differ from an archetype or a generality' (2000: 8). An individual is singularly different; this

is shared in common with others. This implies that we are in relation to others, that existence is relational, that it is extensive; that ‘being’ – as what it means to be human⁸¹ – follows the work of others through space, over-time; a kind of dispersal or fragmentation. This is to try and work a place for a thought that another site for community with others is always just taking shape on the edge of the horizon, over time, through space and because of events. That we are impelled towards this: we were living in Newman, but we came down for a funeral, went to Ululla for a day, but people told us to stay. There is no ‘centre’ or absolute essence but only this movement towards another as the community’s work. Of course, this is to abandon a thought that there is a ‘proper community’ that can be recovered and set-right.

Therefore, community is not the presentation of a ‘common being’ but an exposure to being-in-common: the exposure, as I have been saying, to the work of the relation (the *with* of being-with, the *in* of being-in-common (Nancy 2000: 30)), its imperative force to move, to make one sit down, dragging a chair closer to another and looking into the space and light beyond the verandah. We come home and tell our stories to others, share with others that singular sense of things that happens in the world.

The way I want to develop this idea is through a close reading of Fred Myers’s work *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* (1986). I will initially hold back from a reading of this work as ‘putting the subject to work’, but this will gain increasing prominence as the chapter develops. I will initially focus on Myers’s contradictory sentience and avoidance of Pintupi people’s (ethical) work. What I mean here is that Pintupi people force Myers to stay at the (contingent and imperative) level of relationships, resisting objective or abstract explanations (and we might add the creation of a universal subject that could be ‘put to work’). Yet, it seems Myers works to transcend this ethical condition in-order to do the ‘real’ work of representing ‘the Pintupi’ (Rose 1987, Michaels 1994b).

⁸¹ Michel Serres writes in his book *Genesis*: ‘We’ve obliterated the human being, the human being as something specific, as well as the human being in general’ (1995: 3). I am gaining this sense that ‘being’ also raises a question of being-human, from Serres.

The final two 'spacing/rhythms' explore modes of writing that extend without comforting horizon, where fragmentation, story, juxtaposition, in short, the multiple senses that happen, are not simply fashionable but necessary modes that respond to the sense of things going on.

spacing/rhythm six.

Pintupi becoming wrestling with an anthropological destiny: 'the problem' of community or how Myers puts the proper subject to work

The aim of this 'spacing/rhythm' is to do two things. Firstly, I want to offer a close reading of Myers's important work *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines* (1986). Many of the key anthropologists working in the Central and Western Desert have recognised this to be an important and useful text (Munn 1987, Jackson 1995, Dussart 2000). Whilst Rose (1987), Michaels (1994b (1987))⁸² and, to a much lesser extent, Poirier (2005), have offered more critical readings. My reading of Myers will specifically trace the force of the ethical in Myers's account, and will consider how he both 'listens' and 'deafens' himself to this call. What I want to do here is to try and listen to the ethical force that Pintupi people are working on Myers. What is 'their' claim on him and how does he respond to this? How does this enable us to think of the anthropological project in general?

This initial reading of Myers will be close and lengthy, but will not ultimately get us beyond the kind of critique that came in the 1980s with *Writing Culture* and *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*. What I mean here is that anthropological authority, as the 1980s critique showed, is established through objectifying and transcending the 'insider view' of a culture. On closer inspection there is a strange kind of moment here: the 'insider view' is established through drawing on the work of others (seeing it from their point of view) and yet this insider view, once established,

⁸² Michaels originally published his article 'If "All Anthropologists are Liars..."' in 1987 in *Canberra Anthropology* 10(1): 44-64. This was later republished in his (1994) posthumously published collection of essays *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media, and Technological Horizons*, and it is this later publication that I use here.

then enables the anthropologist to transcend and generalise it. The insider view is one's chance to speak with authority about others in general. It is in this way that we can understand Myers's work: that he draws out the ethical imperative of Pintupi social life in order to transcend it, thus making more general presentations possible.⁸³ Initially I want to problematise this movement in Myers's work. However, this close reading of Myers's text will enable me in the second part of this 'spacing/rhythm' to say something rather more interesting. And it comes with a surprising emergence of 'community' in the later part of Myers's text. This is especially so because 'community' is cast as the contemporary problem for the Pintupi.

My reading is a strong and intense one. This may obscure many of the keen insights that Myers's book offers (and that I have draw upon), however, it is through this strong reading that we can examine ways to re-think community.

It is quite common for ethnographies of the Central and Western Desert to begin with what we might call an experience of community – a kind of initial exposure that opens the anthropological work's possibility.⁸⁴ Here, *in-community*, the

⁸³ Clifford's (1983) focus in 'On Ethnographic Authority' is how the anthropologist secures authority by transforming the 'research situations ambiguities...into an integrated portrait' (132). He traces how 'specific authors' [i.e. informants] and individual 'actors are severed from their production' (132). In order to account for this (and to secure authority) 'a generalised "author" [the Pintupi, Aborigines' point of view] must be invented' (132). There are strong echoes of this argument here, although, as we will see, I am interested in how Myers accounts for the experience of community (of being-in-common) by finding and 'putting to work' the common-being – he works to overcome their community at loose ends. Thus I don't think Myers centres his own voice by generalising theirs, but rather he finds the 'proper identity' which they lack; he repairs their discontinuous being.

⁸⁴Dussart (2000) for example begins her account by recalling a series of events that not only forced her to re-think and re-conceptualise her project but also made her sentient to deeper things going on. One of these events is an eviction from the house she was staying at Yuendumu. Dussart asks two 'self described big business women', Judy Nampijinpa and Lucy Napaljarri, if she can move 'into one of the settlement's peripheral camps, where many of Yuendumu's most active ritual performers (and hence many of my informants) lived' (2). This request initiates a whole series of 'lengthy and complex [and competitive] negotiations' that brings deeper social issues to light. She writes that, 'The simple lodging request in effect raised an awareness in me of the plurality of issues I had unknowingly avoided in my early days of research: the interplay of kinship and gender; the nuances of authority, persona, and prestige; the extra-ceremonial obligations associated with ritual land tenure; the function of competition in the distribution of ritual knowledge attached to that tenure' (3). I suppose, initially, we could say that events and the contingencies involved therein are the key to anthropological depth. We could also say that being exposed to the work of others is what inaugurates the possibility of anthropological work. It is the kind of 'in', following Geertz's famous event of rapport (1972), of in-community research. The classic example of this in Australian ethnography is contained in Nancy Munn's *Warlpiri Iconography* (1973). She writes in the 'Preface' that, 'My residence in a camp rather than in a house on the European settlement was, I believe, the most important single factor in establishing a satisfactory role for me in my work with the Walbiri' (xvi). However, when she

anthropologist writes of more provisional and tentative events, politics and contingencies, and often with a sense of the limited and partial nature of the inquiry. Again, on closer inspection, these moments of being-in-common seem to be opposed to the more general authoritative and objective presentations that create the core of the anthropological text and that tend to discuss ‘traditional culture’ written in the ethnographic-present or at least in the ethnographic ‘style’. (The contingencies settle down, the more complete work begins.) Whilst we could argue that the question of community – of how to respond to being-in-common with others – is a question that is very much at the heart of ethnography, what I want to say is that anthropology, exposed to the question or imperative of being-in-common, responds by presenting – as its core, as ‘the real’ and ‘proper work’ – a common-being. In the face of difference, contingency and negotiation, a universal subject is ‘put to work’; the revelation of this common-being becomes the true work, presented through the figure of – the Warlpiri, the Pintupi, the Kukatja – of anthropology.

In the face of difference, singularity and the multiple contingencies of (contemporary) community, anthropologists stand-back and present a common-being. I will argue that this is done in order to account for this interruptive work of others-in-communities. To be in community is to be exposed, not only to multiple and competing sense of a cultural real, but to an experience with others where no unmediated or objective position is possible. Perhaps anthropologists seek to ‘repair’ this experience of finitude by bringing forth a figure that unifies the account and counters the disruption that anthropologists face in community. Is the

first arrived to do fieldwork she was housed in the government settlement, she talks of how her engagements with men, in particular, at this time were not strong. Later on in her fieldwork (March 1957), there was ‘no longer room to house me on the settlement’ and she was forced to leave Yuendumu due to government regulations (white people were not permitted to camp with Aboriginal people) whilst she asks for permission ‘to camp’ (xvii). When she returns (June 1957) to Yuendumu – with permission – and ‘sets up camp’ ‘the Walbiri welcomed me’. She adds that, ‘In general, improvements of my relations with all the people, but especially with the men, was marked’ (xvi). Munn writes that Walbiri men ‘constantly remarked on my new living quarters (a tent), pointing out that I now lived “on the ground” as did the Walbiri’ (xviii). Whilst this narrative of being accepted by community may not have the dramatic character of the event Geertz describes, the end result is the same – the establishing of rapport through shared recognition and trust. There are also strong examples of this in Bell (1983), Rose (1992), Myers (1986) and Poirier (2005). This event of ‘community’ (shared recognition and belonging that enables deeper relationships with others) is key to establishing the possibility of the anthropological project.

singular/plural work of others that we face in community opposed to the anthropological project in general, opposed to its ‘core’? This I what I explore.

Myers in his *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (1986), quickly makes it apparent that ‘the relation’ is the basis of his anthropological work, and of Pintupi society (see 15-17). What is valued above all in Pintupi thought, is overall regional relatedness (296), relatedness that extends across boundaries. Myers writes, ‘in the Pintupi view they “are all family,” and relatedness is not achieved through the integration of units as much as through the relation of all to all’ (296). Michaels (1994b) comments that this ‘egocentric rather than sociocentric...viewpoint... contrasts with most other accounts of Western Desert society’ (130). These accounts have tended to concentrate on analysing ‘key structures’ such as kinship, descent, or territory in order to present social meaning.⁸⁵ Myers rejects this and his claim lies in staying with the relation – its openness, negotiability and effective basis. The ‘reproduction of Pintupi society’ (290) happens through the ‘moral order of kinship’ (104) that obligates individuals (what he calls the ‘cultural subject’) to others across or beyond any bounded discrete grouping. Here, Myers observes that, ‘Pintupi maintain that society, as they see it, is potentially boundary-less, that individual networks and ritual links extend beyond any definable group’ (79). Perhaps this is something like ‘letting the singular outline of our being-in-common expose itself’ (Nancy 1991: 41).

The relation here is extensive and imperative; it moves and obligates without rest; it orients ‘the cultural subject’ at all points. Thus, Myers places emphasis on ‘the politics of selfhood and personal autonomy’ over any reified categorisation (18). This is a politics that exists in ‘complex patterns of autonomy and relatedness’

⁸⁵ There are many exceptions here. Rose (1992, 2003, 2004) bases her work very much in the relation – on the ethical level. Michael Jackson, as discussed in the event gathering, also presents contemporary methods of engagement, as does Michaels (1994a), Samson (1980) and Merlan (1998). Povinelli’s (2002) corporeal conception of Aboriginal labour also argues against normative (patrilineal descent) models of Aboriginal ontology. Campbell’s (2006) *Darby: One Hundred Years of a Changing Culture*, offers a biography of Darby Jampijinpa Ross, who ‘is often referred to as one of the last of the old people at Yuendumu to really know the country, the songs, the names of plants and animals, and to have traversed large tracts of land on foot’ (9). Campbell figures the Tjukurrpa (The Dreaming, but also the Law) as central to Warlpiri understandings, but does not seek to present *the* Tjukurrpa ‘story’. Campbell works instead ‘to give the reader a sense of Darby’s relationship to it and what it meant to him’ (9). Campbell’s relationship to Darby becomes in itself a kind of journey to knowledge (224). His writing is thus constantly addressing and is conditioned on this relationship and he offers a located and engaged reading as a result.

(Dussart 2000: 10), and by doing so, Myers ‘problematizes group formation and cultural identity’ (Michaels 1994b: 130), showing how patterns of extensive relatedness resist any stable or definitive incorporation into a ‘higher level structure’ (Myers 1986: 293). ‘The critical feature of Pintupi politics, Myers writes, ‘is the continuing emphasis on individual autonomy, that sociality is reproduced without an individuals subordination to a higher-order social unit such as “community” (257). I will return to this crucial issue later.

The crucial problem, as Rose (1987) writes in her review of Myers’s book, is ‘how, in a cultural universe in which almost every ‘social fact’ is negotiable, do people manage to produce society and culture through time? (36). Indeed, Myers writes consistently of the difficulty (if not impossibility) of denying the claim that others make on one’s sense of responsibility and obligation: the other cannot be refused and holds the individual and his/her actions and decisions to account. Myers indicates that:

Maintaining one’s relationship with others seemed to be a primary goal in itself. I found that a good deal of politicking and negotiation surrounded almost every action, though Pintupi never discussed their actions in such terms. This was precisely the ethos of daily interaction that I was experiencing. (17)

The problem here, and the place in which Myers inserts his narrative, is that the force of Pintupi sociality resists a finite structural categorisation beyond the ‘immediacy of current relations’ (17). Myers’s work is particularly interesting in the context of the current discussion because he seeks to base his analysis on this ethical level; he works the ethical basis as the possibility of understanding Pintupi society. In other words, the relations with others ‘interrupt the totality that would fulfil it’ (Nancy 1991: 61). Drawing strongly on Bourdieu (1977) and Geertz (1993 (1973)), Myers’s analysis ‘consists of properly situating people’s cultural constructs in relationship to their social reality’ (14), that is, at the level of the immediacy of the

relation without, therefore, an ‘objective’ position that would discretely transcend it. But can he stay with this, this insistence that his Pintupi friends are working?

Myers points out that, for the Pintupi the relation with another is vital, and ‘to be open to the claims by others’ is an ethical imperative that can not be declined (22, see also: 15- 21). Myers self-reflexively engages with this imperative by signalling that his work is conditioned not as a relation to the group, but to individuals.

Individuals who force their ethical work on his own anthropological text, resisting abstract formulation.⁸⁶ Yet, and this is the point, the coherence of his narrative, and the anthropological project in general, lies not in staying with the actuality of the relation – what Myers calls its ‘phenomenological character’ or its ‘immediacy’ (293, 17) – but by transcending it in order to offer a total (or masterful) description of Pintupi society. He suggests below that the production of an enduring structure (on objective totality) is a problem for Pintupi people:

From this perspective, grounded in the level of individual action, I believe that the immediacy of current relations so dominates Pintupi social life that the production of an enduring structure that transcends the immediate and present is a cultural problem for the Pintupi and other Aboriginal people.
(17)

The place where Myers ‘works in’ his anthropological work is not through the specific lessons he learnt from his Pintupi friends – their insistence that he stay with

⁸⁶ While he recognises, at a number of points, that there is no clear concept of ‘Pintupi’ as a bounded group he nonetheless uses it as a general conceptual category. It is worth quoting Myers here. ‘Even their name is an artifact opposed on them by changing conditions. Though known in the area where they came to live as “Pintupi,” most say they never used this label to refer to themselves before contact with whites...the people called the Pintupi do not represent a single social entity, neither as a tribe nor a language group.’ (28, see also 29). On the one hand, he recognises that there is no ‘Pintupi’ as such, yet, on the other hand, he nonetheless ‘puts it to work.’ This signals that the coherence of the anthropological object of study lies in considering others *as if* they constituted a proper group. Michaels (1994b: 129-130) has also commented on this. Myers in his reply to Michaels’ critique writes that: ‘I avoided using the construction ‘the Pintupi’ as much as possible and had to struggle mightily with a copy editor to have his changes of my text returned to more equivocal discussions of “Pintupi say or do this” rather than “*the* Pintupi...”. By this formulation I meant to leave open the question of the status of the descriptor “Pintupi”...’ (1987: 63). It is worth noting that the words that open Myers’s text are “The Pintupi” and there are tens of, if not hundreds of, uses of ‘the Pintupi’ in the text. And I’m not convinced whether Myers’s claim of ambiguity through the use of ‘Pintupi say or do this’ really addresses the issue here.

the relation, with its ethical imperative – but through the general insistence of the anthropological project, which takes as its problem the transcendence of local forms into more enduring structures of meaning. A kind of repairing or overcoming of their ethics.

Anthropology takes as a/its problem a cultural order that does not objectify, one that is not unified by higher-level structures or determinable boundaries. Myers attempts to transcend the relation, and thus perhaps the lesson he learnt from others, in order to work in the anthropological project. Now, we could make a further argument here. In that competing for recognition by the broader anthropological community (the AAA perhaps) demands that its conditions, that ‘consists of properly situating people’s cultural constructs in relationship to their social reality’ (14), be met. In other words, strong objectification, cross-cultural comparison and transcendence of the merely local are the conditions for intelligibility, recognition and prestige. However, this is an argument that will have to remain on the border, calling as it does to that ‘other’ community.

What I believe Myers does is confuse his own problem by naming it as the problem of Pintupi society. He writes that ‘This pattern of relatedness – involves the difficulty of sustaining an authoritative centre that excludes others from consideration’ (22). This seems to me to say much more about how anthropologists work – of how to create an authoritative centre that gathers the diverse experiences and work of others into a definitive (in the proper sense of this word) account – than it may say about Pintupi concerns. What I am interested in hearing here is how the relation – as the condition of possibility of knowing and being in a community – is objectified, is worked out and worked over in order to present the anthropological project. What we see here is not only the sustenance of the ‘as if’ of anthropological work (a pre-condition of dogmatic objectivity), but that the experience of community with others, *the force of their work*, becomes something to transcend on one’s way to more universal claims. The questions here are: how much are anthropologists prepared to stay with the community and at what point do they yank back the lead of others? Indeed, how can Myers forget the insistence of his

Pintupi friends that he stay with the relation as the condition of being and knowing in Pintupi society?⁸⁷

No platitudes here

I find Myers's account perplexing because he makes the reader so constantly aware that Pintupi people resist any universal positioning. The relation for Pintupi people, we could say in a deconstructive move, is not a problem, is not something to be overcome, but is the generative condition of knowing and being Pintupi. Pintupi people, we learn, stay with the face-to-face finite actuality of the relation; there is no universal meta-position beyond the actuality of relations. What there is instead is an emphasis on openness, negotiability and responsibility towards others: this is a sort of condition without question. Myers calls this a 'rejection of systemization in favour of a perspective placing primacy of first-hand experience' (293). Thus, Myers notes that:

Platitudes about Aboriginal people "philosophizing" about kinship are a commonplace of introductory anthropological courses, but Pintupi did not seem interested in reflecting on their organizational categories as an abstract object. People preferred to point out someone's identity in relation to me or to themselves, leaving the overall organization for my reflection late at night. (293)

What is perplexing here is that Myers, on the one hand, listens to the force of others (the Pintupi insistence that he stays with the particularity of relations, he is all too aware of this) yet, on the other hand, Myers deafens himself to this claim (perhaps

⁸⁷Once again, this analysis teeters on the edge of becoming a discussion about what constitutes legitimate anthropological work. Is the anthropological project based on transcending one's position in the writing up in order to create conceptually coherent accounts that situate actor's actions in objective structures? Or, does the dialogical, ambiguous and shifting engagement as the condition of producing ethnographic knowledge with others resist such a project? Would not the distinction between the positivist and post-positivist method be made more complex by the case of the Pintupi? What I mean here is that 'Pintupi' explicitly contradict the possibility of objectivity and transcendence.

because of the silence and dark of late at night), through claiming a universal position (his role of providing ‘overall organization’). This is a position as if outside the concrete actuality of Pintupi social forms. In an important sense, he is exposed to, and indeed he articulates this strongly at times, the ethical condition of engaging with Pintupi people, but he effaces this exposure (to community) because of a demand for a universal claim to meaning: that his job is to unify and to work out that ‘common essence’, put it to work to secure coherence. His claim is to create an enduring structure (an ethnography that unifies the different strands of Pintupi culture into a total account) beyond the insistence of others. Whilst Pintupi people resist this, Myers works to establish it. The condition of his ethnographic project is premised on removing himself, and his narrative, from the ethical insistence of others (Michaels 1994b).

Myers cannot stay with the community, with the thought it makes possible, instead he establishes the legitimacy of the anthropological project in general. Rose has sensed something similar in her account of Myers’s work.

Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self embodies a set of contradictions in which privileged categories of anthropological observation are deconstructed in favour of an exploration into Pintupi values and are then reconstructed in the formal representations of these values. (1987: 36)

Whereas Rose says that, ‘One consequence of this contradiction is that the genius of Pintupi culture is harnessed to anthropological interests rather than being fully explored as an autonomous commentary on the human condition’ (36), I would say that Pintupi genius cannot be harnessed, and indeed cannot be fully engaged with, by this kind of anthropological response. Here, I would rejoin Rose and say that anthropology fails to fully entertain the possibility of being lead into another way of understanding the world (‘an autonomous commentary on the human condition’). To reiterate what I have previously stated: that it yanks back the lead of others to where the master stands; that the anthropologist insulates him/herself from being ‘tipped into another (transformative) paradigm’ (Muecke 2004a). The anthropologist

seeks transcendence rather than being-put-in-question by others. The question, here, is ‘why?’

Why emphasise people’s insistence on staying with the level of the relation – its immediate and imperative character, its *lack* of subordination to a ‘higher level structure’ – but then respond to this by setting to work to reveal an underlying principle that would unify the singular/multiple work of others? Why present the radical lack of any (bounded) group being premised on a logic of identity but then work to reveal the general and universal character of the group itself as if it rested on revealing an immutable identity?

Here, I believe we have an anthropological project that may be facing its own horizon, its own limit. We have a project exposed to its limit, to its finitude, to a question it cannot answer nor resolve. Is this why Myers book is engaging – because of the agitation of this question? His kind of Pintupi becoming wrestling with his anthropological destiny? In other words, Myers is posing the question of what it means to be-in-common with others (the insistence of the Pintupi), whilst preparing the ground to present a common-being (the insistence of the anthropological project). We could argue that he is sentient to the limit but pulls back in order to do the ‘real’ work of ethnography. Faced with a question, with an insistence to stay with the *in* of being-in-community, the *with* of being with-others (Nancy 2000: 30), Myers responds by presenting the immanent (revealing an underlying essence) work of the anthropological project, its revelatory work. He presents the static and unified common-being, the ‘Pintupi believe that’, as a way to deal with being-in-common. He repairs and seeks to overcome ‘finitude’.⁸⁸

Faced with a ‘thinking of being in which any possibility of unity and identity has withdrawn [or is extensive beyond a horizon], and where the multiple demands [people emphasis autonomy and relations that are ‘multiple’] to be thought without reference to any overarching unity or totality’, Myers works in the anthropological

⁸⁸ Norris writes that ‘Our finitude is our inability to contain the world or ourselves. It is our inability to be absolutely self-sufficient. As being in-common we are cast into a condition of plurality’ (2000: 277).

project (Ian James 2006: 3, James is referring to Nancy). No wonder, then that he sees ‘the creation of an enduring structure beyond the immediacy of the relation’ a problem for Pintupi and Aboriginal people in general. But again, I’m trying to hold off on this thinking, I need to move slowly here.

The ethical imperative at work in Myers’s text

Myers writes under the sub-heading ‘Negotiation: Rules and Processes’ that:

My own connection has never been to the Pintupi as a group, but instead to various individuals who have considered me to be a “relative.” To say so is to indulge neither in self-promotion nor in self-revelation. The concrete qualities of being are as central to my learning as to Pintupi lives. As Margaret Mead once said, anthropology has informants, not objects of study. People teach us. The condition of my living in Pintupi communities has always been my participation as a “relative.” Their acceptance has never been based on my research, which they have never been much interested in once they decided I was a friend...Rather, what they expect from me is my human commitment to them as fellow people. This condition has set the tone for my whole research. (15)

What we have here is a self-reflexive ethnography that takes as its condition of possibility an exposure to others – it is one’s concrete relation to others, Myers makes clear, that makes a discussion of Pintupi society possible. Thus, an ethical relation is the possibility of the work. It is important to note that this is not Myers’s own work but what Pintupi people force Myers to see: they force him to follow relations as the condition for being and communicating in Pintupi society. He is at times open and sentient to this force, he listens to its happening. He writes in the concluding chapter, in a move we could call radical in its empiricism, that:

Pintupi insisted first and foremost that I see and experience things, hesitating to present information analytically or schematically. In response to questions,

they were likely to say, “You’ll see it,” or to point out with irritation that “You’ve seen that” (so why are you asking?). I have taken this as a vital form of meta-communication. (294)

What Myers hints at here is that Pintupi are not interested in objective abstract entities, but that the relation with another – of being there, being-with, being shown something, seeing something – of experiencing something with others is what is vital and makes sense in-itself. Rose has noted this (1992: 30). The relation is of absolute importance and must be followed as the condition of one’s sociality. The ‘relation’ here would be an orientation that doesn’t retreat to a centre but extends outward, and without rest (thus infinitely). The relation here is a kind of interruption of retreat or completion, the interruption of a bounded identity, the sharing out of finitude. Or, as Nancy imagines: ‘On all sides the interruption [of the relation in its singular and multiple character] turns community toward the outside instead of gathering it in towards a centre – or its centre is the geographical locus of an identifiable multiple exposition [to others, to relatives elsewhere]’ (1991: 60). This ethical orientation can be seen clearly again in Myers:

For quite a long time in the field, I did not think I knew anything about the usual issues anthropologists discuss: descent groups, kinship roles, territory. Only gradually did I come to realize that I had been learning about what mattered to the Pintupi: the importance of “the other.” For the Pintupi, contact with others and the necessity of response, of visibility and negotiability in all forms of action yield little room for privacy. (16)

The first thing we could say here would be a repetition of what I have argued in the event ‘gathering’; that the anthropologist secures authority by transcending his position, the anthropologist negates the experience of community in order to do the ‘real’ work of anthropology; that the multiple gives way to the general, the singular to a universal pseudo-subject. That is, that Myers replaces his exposure to Pintupi society, to the force of his conditioning, with statements and a methodology that enable him to transcend the relation with others. The insistence that Myers stay with

the actuality of the relation becomes Myers's authority to speak with authority (Bourdieu 1991) about Pintupi people in general.⁸⁹ However, what I want to say to extend this, is to refigure it as 'subject work': that anthropology comes to put a subject to work, to produce a pseudo-subject in order to reveal an underlying unity. Yet this thinking of community as a subject, as a 'common-being', as a common essence that is total, 'presuppose[s] that the common being, as such, be objectifiable and producible' (Nancy 1991: 31). It presupposes that the common-being can be drawn out and 'put to work' in order to reveal the deep or true nature of the community itself, that to bring forth and reveal this common-being, is thus, to reveal the true nature of the community. This is done in order to set right and to make proper this fragmented and disorderly community that is without 'centre'. Meyers turns the community inwards around a common essence. 'Such a thinking', suggests Nancy,

constitutes closure because it assigns to community a *common being*, where as community is a matter of something quite different, namely, of existence in as it is *in* common, but without letting itself be absorbed into a common substance [this conception seems strongly relevant to Pintupi notions of community]. Being *in* common has nothing to do with communion, with fusion into a body [be it individual or social], into a unique and ultimate identity that would no longer be exposed. Being *in* common means, to the contrary, no longer having, in any form, in any empirical or ideal place, such a substantial identity, and sharing this... "lack of identity" (1991: xxxviii)

⁸⁹ The opening chapter situates the Pintupi historically, by drawing upon government patrol accounts (26 -27) explorer accounts (30), government records and reports (33-39), and an anthropological expedition in 1932 (31). We are exposed to a Pintupi narrative 'from an old man' fourteen pages in, and we then have a more recent history of Pintupi movements between Papunya, Waruwiya (41), Alumbra Bore and finally to Yayayi – where Myers did most of his fieldwork. He gets to work to describe Yayayi – a windmill, two trucks – forty-six to fifty camps were provided with canvas tents for shelter' (42). He talks of the composition of the camps, their shelter and structural organisation, and he identifies three basic camps: family camps, women's camps and young men's camps which are rather 'haphazard' (43). He talks of eating arrangements: 'When food is plentiful, one eats with one's closest relatives, especially at one's own camp if married, or one's father's or mother's camp if unmarried. Young men and women whose mothers are widows or elderly and living in a women's camp go to the mother's camp for food.' He then adds a general statement, 'Where people camp often reflects their current choice of inter-domestic cooperation.' This is followed by quoting the significant anthropological literature. (43)

In other words, there is no common identity, no ideal place: community is the ‘subtraction’ of an objectifiable and producible identity (xxxix). What Blanchot calls ‘unwork’; the resistance to totalisation. Community ‘withdraws from the work, and which, no longer having to do with production or with completion, encounters interruption, fragmentation, suspension [of an objectifiable common-being]’ (Nancy 1991: 31).

This work of bringing the subject out and putting it to work as the presentation of the community itself is a common anthropological paradigm. It is why people in cultural studies, history and politics get stuck into anthropology, because anthropology presents static common beings as the true or real nature of a diverse and dynamic communities. But what is startling about Myers’s work with Pintupi people, is that he cannot leave this paradigm despite people’s urgent insistence to do so. To localise this, ‘the Pintupi community’ withdraws from the anthropological work of demanding a common-being, resists being made into a unified and common substance. Instead, people work the singular (autonomous) and multiple (regional, extensive) nature of relations. In other words, they place primary importance on being-with, being-in-common beyond any stable and unified place, institution, or structure: a being-in-common that is extensive and inclusive, and that cannot be centred as such. What people emphasise is what we might be able to call a singular experience of the social, in that conformity, dominance and subordination to ‘high level structures’ are denied at all points. People resist and *unwork* an objectifiable and unified identity; people emphasise relations to others elsewhere. The common-being, it would seem, cannot be put to work. But again, this strange point, Myers nonetheless puts it to work.

A surprising emergence of community

But then something interesting happens, which I now turn my attention to. In chapter six of *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self*, ‘Relatedness and Differentiation’, we not only get the use of the term ‘community’ (which is not used significantly in the previous five chapters) but it appears alongside ‘differentiation’. It emerges also with

examples of violence, conflict and the ‘problem of community’ organisation. This is what I want to gain a sense of now. We also get specific examples involving actual people, which have otherwise been rare in Myers’s account. Because of their rarity, these instances of specific and located analyses seem important points to evaluate especially when they appear with the notion of ‘community’. It is also important to note that this sense of community happens at Yayayi – the place where Myers did *most* of his fieldwork. Most of his fieldwork happened amidst the issues he turns to in the last part of his book, which he turns to somewhat hesitantly. Yet, for the most part, the specific forces of Yayayi living seem not to make a splash in his account up to this point. Is this because this being-in-common that is happening in Yayayi ‘unworks’ the anthropologist’s ability to present the common-being that is being called upon ‘out there’? I want to keep this questioning agitating on the borders of what comes below, but right now, back to this surprising emergence of community.

In the chapter discussed above, there is a real sense of the located and sensitive nature of Myers’s account. This not only shows Myers’s depth as a writer but illustrates his sense of responsibility as a ‘relative’; as a person obliged to understand the complex patterns of relatedness and autonomy that lie at the heart of Pintupi social life. And here, the claims others make on one’s sense of responsibility make judgment and ‘objective’ decisions very difficult. Thrown into complex patterns of relatedness and responsibility in a ‘community,’ Myers, to a certain degree, relinquishes the position of cross-situational observer. He describes events and happenings, without wanting to exhaustively determine meaning and his judgements are far more provisional, working to show the complex nature of actions and consequences rather than authorising definitive statements. The presence of others – their force – is exposed and articulated in Myers’s work in resonant ways.

We see, for example, that Myers shares his food every other week with a family (on their off-pay week), that he bums a pack of cigarettes that later causes a counter-demand of giving up his shoes (170-171). He talks of friends as well as people he is more wary of. What I initially want to say repeats one of the general themes of the

my thesis: that the experience of community, as perhaps a felt feeling of belonging, forces the anthropologist to follow the work of others. His writing becomes responsible for others, for the complex forces this entails, and because of this, he cannot stand back and view from afar, but is thrown towards the work and insistence of others. In short, a sentence to the question or imperative of being-in-common *unworks* the presentation of a common-being. Here, *in community*, he talks of individuals rather than a universal anonymous subject (although this universal anonymous subject is never far behind). Individuals jump-up, the common-being break(s)away for a moment, this happens in ‘community’. It creates another kind of anthropological writing, one attuned, I would argue, to Pintupi people’s insistence that he stay with the relation; that his autonomy as a relative who writes is not sustained through ‘standing back’, but rather, through recognising and responding to the work, force, obligations and demands of others. Thrown into contact, the traditional anthropological project is interrupted.

Yet, I want to try and say something more than this. Why do differentiation, politics, conflict and violence (the key themes of the chapter) enable a sense of community responsibility to be sketched? Why does it take this for us to see the force of Pintupi work on Myers and on his account? Why does violence co-appear with community? Why is community aligned with dysfunction? Myers writes that:

Conflict and intimidation are regular occurrences in Pintupi communities as individuals try to influence others. In my experience, the ability to sustain relationships to others in the face of this possibility is rather a remarkable achievement. This ability is accompanied by a great tolerance for the sheer qualities of individuality. Conformity is not desired, only consideration for others. People are not ostracized for temporary, erratic, or even violent outbursts. “That’s his business,” Pintupi say to the peculiar behaviour their comrades exhibit from time to time. On the whole, motivation goes unremarked and there is no sense that things could be otherwise. (161)

This is followed by a complex narrative of a ‘middle-aged man who sought to have a girl bestowed on him’. The man becomes isolated and violent; over a number of days he ‘wreaked havoc in the rhythms of camp life’ (see pp. 161-162, for the complex reasons for this). He then describes another particularly violent example in the community (162-163). Conflict is a significant theme throughout the chapter.

Myers uses these examples to discuss issues of differentiation, and how the constant threat of this is opposed to ‘relatedness’ as a ‘primary, almost primordial, value’ in Pintupi society (163). But I am troubled by why it takes these kinds of events for Myers to locate his analysis (through specific and complex examples) and enables a discussion of ‘community’ to begin.

What I want to push here, this is my pushing and not Myers’s, is that here we face the dysfunction of the anthropological project, a kind of questioning of it – it is faced with a lack of completion (faced with its ‘fundamental finitude’, perhaps). It cannot present the common-being; it will not do for the singular and contemporary work of others. Without unifying principles and stable identities anthropology grapples with differentiation, tumult, unrest, disorder, the loss of authority and an organisational centre, a kind of *unwork*, that interrupts the proper (orderly, and rightful) representation of the group itself. What I mean here is that community is seen as ‘dysfunctional’, precisely because ‘they’ refuse to put the common-being to work. Community is seen as ‘their’ problem because there is no enduring or universal structure through which complex patterns of autonomy and relatedness could be resolved; there is no point where all would come together as the same. That ‘higher-level’ order is missing, and that, it would seem, is *their* problem. It is in this way that ‘community’ becomes ‘the problem for the Pintupi’.

This can be further developed by moving to Myers’s last chapter, ‘Time and the Limits of the Polity’. Here, he engages fully with ‘the problem of community’ and we return to a concept he outlined in the introduction, and that I previously cited:

I believe that the immediacy of current relations so dominates Pintupi social life that the production of an enduring structure [what we might call ‘community’ normally conceived] that transcends the immediate and present is a cultural problem for the Pintupi and other Aboriginal people. (17)

The argument here appears to be: Pintupi ‘lack’ a notion of community premised on ‘putting to work’ a common-being or communal identity (shared projects, ideals, authoritative institutions, higher level structures of subordination, bounded groups identified with blood and soil, objectifiable identity, stability built on good governance) and this is the contemporary problem Pintupi people face. So rather than re-think notions of community in accordance with Pintupi insistence, as a sharing of difference in-common where autonomy and relatedness rather than conformity are demanded, Myers problematises Pintupi modes of being as stemming from a lack of being able to produce an objectifiable common-being. There is no concept of the ‘common Good’ as a transcendental and enduring value to which individuals would appeal and be subordinate to and *this is ‘their’ problem*. Not being able to put a universal subject ‘to work’, a subject that would speak for all, is the contemporary problem Aboriginal people face. Cast against a communitarian model that privileges a stable and authoritative centre that binds the group together as one, *as what community should be like*, is it any wonder that Pintupi social forms struggle?

But I wonder if something else is going on as well. (This is the most tenuous and thus the most interesting part of my argument.) Myers, referring to Yayayi, suggests how the ‘organizational problems of a large, permanent community remains beyond the reach of traditional Pintupi means of resolution’ (260). Myers continues:

The problem of the community is the limited power of the objectifications through which Pintupi reproduce their social life. Pintupi social constructions are suited to sustaining a regional system through time, rather than stabilizing a permanent settlement. (260)

We could first ask if this is a problem to overcome. And whose problem is it? Let us pause here – ‘the problem of community’ is ‘limited objectifications’. Is this a problem for Pintupi, or the problem that faces anthropologists working *in* communities to reveal an objectifiable order, wanting to create a unified social scene embodied in an essential unity that underlies the group? And secondly, perhaps we could extend this differently: Pintupi social organizations are suited to sustaining a past [‘regional system through time’], rather than the present or the future [permanent settlement]. This is a kind of anthropology of loss and perhaps nostalgia: that ‘they’ have lost, because of history and because of contemporary forces, the ability to enact their ‘proper’ being (things have thus become fragmentary, dysfunctional and conflict ridden in contemporary communities). With this ‘modern’ lack or loss comes something else: the lack of an objectifiable and identifiable commonweal (260). This is something the anthropologist works to set straight through a project that creates enduring structures of unity and authority, high above the immediacy of relations. Here, we have a two-fold problem conceived in loss. Firstly, that the true community has been lost, is of the past; is no longer possible, and secondly, that this reveals the problem of community organisation. At a loss, have become ‘dysfunctional’, because they don’t have an objectifiable and identifiable notion of the ‘common good’; they are at a loss in the ‘modern’ world without a common-being or essential unity to put to work, to stand for the community itself.

What Pintupi people have is being-in-common and this, it seems, is a problem: it will not do; it will certainly not do for anthropology. What we might be able to sense here is the appeal to nostalgia and loss: that the ‘true’ ‘archaic community’ is lost or falling apart – that its identity has fragmented in the face of modern threats of difference. In an uncanny way, anthropologists look to the past to a time when ‘community’ would not have been a problem.

Myers contends that:

The most visible feature of contemporary Pintupi life is the problem of the community, rooted in the way Pintupi articulate the relations among people who live together as *walytja* [family or relatedness]. I have talked repeatedly of the pressures on individuals in a residential group to maintain the smoothly running, cooperative relations of mutual help that recognize shared identity. Our understanding of such Aboriginal polities have been obscured by a positivistic emphasis on geographically based local groups. Strehlow, for instance, grasped that there was no jurisdiction encompassing the segments of the Aranda-speaking area, but his treatment of the Aranda polity still stressed the existence of authority and leadership within the local area...Such a “building-block” view ignores the [nature of the Pintupi polity]...Among Pintupi, the polity is not a reflex of authority and is not identified with a permanent, concrete grouping. It is better understood as a temporary jurisdiction of relatedness among autonomous equals...The Pintupi system of organization places little emphasis on maintaining the structure of any residential group...What it preserves, rather than community integrity, is individual autonomy. But the structure assumes the possibility of mobility among people who live in small and changing local groups. These have not been the conditions of the large, sedentary Aboriginal settlements of the past fifty years. (256-257)

I understand that Myers is trying to account for the dramatic change in social condition – this cannot be downplayed – but it is *the way* he accounts for this, that is my concern here. In short, (contemporary) community has become *the problem* because their proper (archaic) community is lost. He identifies the problem of community as a contemporary lack; a lack he wants to put right by appealing to the proper community – Myers identifies and recovers this common-being (from the present dysfunction) and ‘puts it to work’ in the name of the Pintupi proper.

This can further be understood by considering that Yayayi (the contemporary community where Myers did most of his fieldwork) is the place where Myers identifies violence, conflict, contingency, politics, multiplicity – all the things that are

opposed to the proper functioning of community. What I mean is that the contemporary experience of community is not the proper one, anthropology, however, finds it in an archaic past. Myers finds the common-being which they lack – which they refuse to ‘put to work’, he repairs the cracked social vessel, overcoming their ‘dysfunction’ with his project’s functionalism.⁹⁰

Community as loss and nostalgia

One possible reason for this sense that ‘Pintupi don’t have a workable community’ is a rather nostalgic and archaic sense of community, in that, community is the process of working together towards some projected future, that community works by strengthening social relations into relations of continuity, stability, consensus, sameness and shared identity. It is a common understanding that the community *should* work against perceived threats of difference, fragmentation and the resulting loss of the communal bond by creating an authoritative and immutable centre (core values, common ambition, singular past and so on). The community under this thinking is something to protect and to foster in the hope of a glorious future – or in order to recreate a nostalgic past – in the face of modern threats of difference. The most obvious expression of this is modernist conceptions of the community as something under threat.⁹¹ This is something, however, Nancy, through his conception of community, wants to write against.

⁹⁰Perhaps the ongoing legacy of structuralist-functionalist anthropology is coming to a head here; it is becoming dysfunctional. Edmund Leach points out that Malinowski’s structural-functionalism ‘required us to think of each Society (or Culture, as Malinowski would have put it) as a totality made up of a number of discrete empirical “things” of rather diverse kinds – e.g. groups of people, “institutions”, customs. These things are functionally interconnected to form a delicately balanced mechanism rather like the various parts of a wrist-watch’ (1961: 6). What I mean by this, is that Myers’s thinks of the Pintupi *as if* they constituted a totality and *as if* a proper pseudo-subject could embody the essence of the community itself, and furthermore, *as if* the anthropologist’s role is to describe and order the (proper) functioning of the totality.

⁹¹ Barry Hill, in his book on Strehlow, *Broken Song* (2002), writes that the model of anthropology that inaugurated Australian ethnography is the British Darwinian model as practiced by Baldwin Spencer, ‘whose spell might one day be broken’ (2002: 77). This is more than a back-hand swipe at anthropology, and this spell may have more of a role than we are prepared to recognise. Anthropologists have for a long time been presenting ethnographies with the sense that this is ‘the last of the...true people’ (Michaels 1994b: 127) and this sense of loss and nostalgia may be essentially Darwinian (capturing before its too late the last of a kind). Similarly, Levi-Strauss, in response to a question about ‘the vanishing of cultures’ which is supposedly linked to modernity, says that ‘Did you know that they were saying that back in the eighteenth century? The first scholarly societies founded to study man justified their mission by proclaiming, “We must hurry, they won’t last much longer.”...It is a leitmotif of anthropological research’ (1994: 420). To tackle this argument would be beyond the scope of this thesis.

Nancy points out that conceiving community as something that is lost is a common problem in the West. The idea here is that the true or deep community has been lost (due to threats of difference) and that it needs to be regained, ‘set right’, by setting the common-being to work once again.

Within Australian nationalist discourses this common-being, presented in such figures as ‘the digger,’ ‘the average Australian,’ ‘the working family,’ or my favourite: ‘mum and dad Australians’, is seen as the embodied essence of the past and future of a united community. (This notion is reiterated in such concepts as ‘core values,’ ‘shared beliefs’ or ‘common destiny’ – notions embodied by these figures.)⁹²

Ghassan Hage, in *White Nation: Fantasies of White Supremacy in Multicultural Australia* (1998a), argues that such believers in national stereotypes, what he calls ‘nation worriers’ – invariably white Australians who think ‘think they have a monopoly over worrying about the shape and future of Australia’ (1998a: 10) – become truly concerned about the state of the nation precisely because migrants and *others* (not real or complete Australians) are not *truly* concerned; *they* are not concerned about the loss or the threat to the common-being, this makes *me* (nation worrier) worried. That is, that *these others don’t have* the common-being in mind, they do not want to ‘put it to work’: and this makes me *very* worried. The perceived loss of the common-being is equated with the supposed break down of the true Australian community,

⁹² Michael Mansell, an Indigenous activist, lawyer, writer and the secretary of the Aboriginal Provisional Government (go to www.apg.org.au), writes that, ‘The political preaching of ‘oneness’ by schools, media and politicians must undermine Indigenous identity. The once sharp line that distinguished Aboriginal identity is blurred by widespread use of the politically correct phrase ‘we are all Australians’ (2008: 75). He quotes John Howard’s address to the National Press Club on the 25th of January 2006, to show how Indigenous difference is absorbed into superior level structures – a set of core values – at the heart of the nation’s future and past. Prime Minister Howard spoke these words the day before Australia Day, the day Captain Cook took possession for the British Crown, or what Indigenous people call Invasion Day: ‘Most nations experience some level of cultural diversity while also having a dominant cultural pattern running through them. In Australia’s case, that dominant pattern comprises Judeo-Christian ethics, the progressive spirit of the Enlightenment and the institutions and values of British political culture... We reform and evolve so as to remain a prosperous, secure and united nation. It also means we retain those cherished values, beliefs and customs that have served us so well in the past’ (Howard quoted in Mansell 2008: 75-76). As Mansell puts it ‘Indigenous people’s distinctiveness has never been more under threat’ (75). We could, I think, reverse this and say that it is because Indigenous difference threatens, ‘de-stabilises’ and puts into question these ‘shared values’ that these shared values need to be reinforced and forced on others in such totalitarian ways. And to extend this, it is because Indigenous communities question the commonness of the common-being, that they are seen in need of ordering and management: they lack it (the true common-being), and this means it must be restored or set to work in the light of creating a cohesive social body, in light of the nation’s future destiny or to maintain its nostalgic past.

of its values and shared projects.⁹³ (And indeed, Hage links this emphasis on ‘clarifying the identity’ (my phrase) to the anthropological project in general).⁹⁴ Nancy wants to question, as does Hage in different ways, this conception of community as something that is essentially lost, threatened or nostalgically longed for in the face of difference.

What Nancy desires in his re-thinking of community is to question ‘the breakdown in community that supposedly engendered the modern era’ (1991: 9). ‘In particular’, writes Ian James, ‘he is interested in foregrounding what he identifies as a specifically modern paradigm for thinking about community’ (2006: 175). This modern paradigm is one that considers ‘community’ or the communal bond as that which has been lost or dislocated, as something that has been ruptured, through the production of society (James: 175). ‘The consciousness of this ordeal’, Nancy writes, ‘belongs to Rousseau’ (9). Rousseau, according to Nancy, was the first thinker to conceive of society ‘as an uneasiness directed towards the community’ (1991: 9). The experience of modern ‘society’ (the early beginnings of the nation-state and its proto-capitalist structures) marked for Rousseau an irrevocable loss of the ‘immediate and organic self-presence of communal life’ (James: 175). Rousseau was thus the first thinker to think of community in terms of nostalgia and loss, essentially ‘as that which is lost in the modern experience of the social’ (James: 175).

⁹³ Similarly, Elizabeth Povinelli, in her article, ‘The State of Shame: Australian Multiculturalism and the Crises of Indigenous Citizenship’, explores ‘public anxieties about cultural diversity and national identity’ (1998: 575) through the use of collective feeling of shame. Shame, she argues, is an experience of ‘intimate community’ (577) where a nation collectively defines certain practices as shameful and thus opposed to a modern, liberal democratic state. She initially examines moral panics in the United States and France over clitoridectomies, before focusing on Australia. Shame operates as a ‘common sense’ limit where certain ‘subaltern practices’ never precisely defined or located, are seen as ‘barbaric, uneducated and savage practices that *we* as a civilized nation cannot allow to occur within *our* borders’ (577). This enables the nation, through authorised spokespeople, she argues, to organise communal feelings of belonging not through ‘pedantic argument’ but through ‘passionate dramas’ (577) and ‘pageantry’, where the nation’s true subjects – white and post-racist (588) – are shamed collectively into abhorring the existence of such practices: thus legitimating national action and the nation’s moral fortitude. It is here that morality and the true, or higher values of the nation are organised around collective feelings of shame. This bears relevance to Fanon’s thought, as he writes: ‘the native [or other] is declared insensible to ethics: he represents not only the absence of values, but also of the negation of values (1967: 14). It is this loss or lack of ‘ethics’ that enables the nation to legitimate its higher or transcendental moral claim in opposition to its shameful others.

⁹⁴ In a response to a paper (Pearce 1998) that argued that anthropologists, as a result of the threat posed by Cultural Studies, needed to become more wholly defensive of their discipline, Hage argues that anthropologists are like ‘people worried about the fate of their disciplinary “nation” but feel entitled to set the standards of belonging to it. Cultural studies academics are clearly their “Asians.” Those, to paraphrase Zizek (1991, 1993) who are threatening to steal their anthropological Thing (ethnography), and who are both bludges and having too much fun...’ (1998b: 286).

This has become one of the key ways of community thinking – that it is something that is either lost and needs recovery (thus nostalgic yearning) or that it is something that awaits in the future as a kind of deferred plenitude when differences will be overcome. Nancy renders this proto-nostalgic thinking of ‘community’ when he writes:

The lost, or broken, community, can be exemplified in all kinds of ways by all kinds of paradigms: the natural family, the Athenian city, the Roman Republic, the first Christian community, corporations, communes, or brotherhoods – always it is a matter of a lost age in which community was woven of tight, harmonious, and infrangible bonds and in which above all it played back to itself, through its institutions, its rituals and its symbols, the representation, indeed the living offering, of its own immanent unity, intimacy and autonomy. Distinct from society (which is a simple association and division of forces and needs)...community is not only intimate communication between its members, but also its organic communion with its own essence. (9)

Nancy highlights this nostalgia only to put it into question. In response to this, Ian James writes that, ‘What is being suggested here is that community is not and never has been possible on the basis of an intimate and totalized sharing of an essence of identity’ (175-176). Community, as I have been developing throughout this thesis, is what works against essentialised signifiers of sameness – a common-being – that could present the community to itself. On the contrary, in modernist nostalgic conceptions of community, ‘the loss’ of an (impossible) ‘intimate and totalised sharing of an essence of identity’ is what threatens community’s internal continuity and stability. This is clearly shown below by Selznich in his book *The Communitarian Persuasion* (2002):

Modern government is experienced by many as opaque, distant and oppressive. These and other social trends have generated widespread anxiety and discontent...Of course life goes on. Young people connect, love...the

economy hums...traditions are respected; taxes collected. However, all is under stress...This diagnosis does not deny the reality of progress.

Progressive or not, many modern trends tend to loosen attachments and threaten stability. Under these conditions community – based on interdependence, commitment, and reconciliation – is bound to need healing and restoration. (4)

Of course this conception of community bears no significance to Pintupi social forms, which, as Myers has shown, are maintained ‘not as segmentary units like bands as building blocks, but as an expansive, overlapping set of individual networks of kin’ (159). An extensive, outward looking community that maintains openness to the claim of others without question.

So if something that we could call ‘community’ happens through finite (egocentric) relations that tie people together across time and space (community as the spacing and rhythm of relations) in differing and autonomous ways (that is, that relations are never the same between two individuals), as Myers has so effectively shown, then why would ‘community’ appear as a signifier of a lack of harmonious, settled and stable social relations? Why does community appear in a negative sense (through a sense of lack – ‘the biggest problem for the Pintupi is the problem of community’) alongside the volatile, the distinctive, contested, contingent and indeed the political?

My question here is how can we have such a deep understanding of Pintupi social forms that then seem to pale in comparison to the attainment of more western ‘building-block’ models of community? Myers explains why this model has little resemblance to Pintupi social forms (see chapter 6 and 9); but he then seems to judge Pintupi social forms (and their future) against such a *good* ‘community’ paradigm. (Thinking of community as a problem must presuppose a proper model). Pintupi organisation is seen as a ‘fragile form of integrating individual autonomy into a societal whole’ (258). This is because, ‘Perhaps the most significant social consequence of the temporary quality of the Pintupi “community” is that individuals are not subordinated to a construction of the residential group as a

whole' (258). The 'problem' Pintupi people have is 'that sociality is reproduced without an individual's subordination to a higher-order unit such as a "community"' (257). The 'problem' Pintupi have is that they do not have a notion of community built around binding, stable and manageable signifiers of continuity and sameness. Their model turns outwards, not inwards around a centre. Rather, people work the space for autonomy and difference, for the recognition of an individual's obligations to others (257), which, we gather an increasing sense of this, seems to inhibit Pintupi people from attaining stable and effectively managed communities.⁹⁵

In conceiving of community as a problem not only legitimates the kind of anthropological project (transcending the relation to present an objective-common being) that Myers is entwined in, but also it conceives of contemporary Aboriginal community as *essentially* lacking, at a loss, dysfunctional in the 'modern' world. What we could say is that the ability to present the 'common-being' is not possible; is unworked in contemporary experiences of community. This is a problem that anthropology can't face (it would erode the authority on which it is based, which takes place through centring an identity as such) so it responds by presenting a true or higher value, that deep and infrangible cultural essence, as that which is being lost in the contemporary experience of community. It is almost like the true Pintupi are somewhere out there, or before, not here and now in the place that anthropology does its work.

This, of course, reflects a thinking of community as essentially what is lost or lacking and that therefore needs to be restored, that is restored, we could argue, by anthropological objectivity that exalts an essence, that 'puts it to work' in the name of the true, or deep, community. This does not reflect a thinking of community as that which is happening now. As that which is happening, or that 'happens to us' (Nancy 1991: 11). It appears community, that tight and infrangible bond of communion is lost, of the past, not here now. Community does not happen, it

⁹⁵ Talking of the ebb and flow of outstations and how, after a series of events, including the death of an important leader, Yayayi's population 'dwindles' and 'devolves' (260) – we could pause on why bigger communities are seen as better (are they seen as more stable, unified, more manageable, more evolved?), and this, argues Myers, referring to Yayayi, 'suggests how the organizational problems of a large, permanent community remains beyond the reach of traditional Pintupi means of resolution' (260).

would seem, when we sit down with others and share what we know of the goings on of the world. That is not properly, or essentially community: that community is at a loss, is dysfunctional and disorderly in the ‘modern’ world.⁹⁶

In similar, but less engaging ways than Myers, Tonkinson in his *The Mardu Aborigines: Living the Dream in Australia's Desert* (1991), has a similar return to community as a kind of rejoinder to the main text which is written in a strongly ethnographical style. He also confronts the idea that ‘community’ – Jigalong – is the place where Martu people confront the erosion of tradition, white dominance and ‘insulating the essence of the Law from alien influences’ (1991: 173). Strange, again, that as soon as we get people gathering around a place we also get the word ‘community’ and its ‘problems’. This may just reveal that dominant conceptions of community are built around such notions as stability, shared values and collective action that results in cohesion and stability as *what should be* happening in a community, as *the proper* model. This isn’t the case in a Martu community (Jigalong), according to Tonkinson, and so this community is once again seen as lost, dysfunctional, facing the corruption of their true values; the common direction is lost because of ‘modernity’. There is an unsettling sense of doom and gloom at every turn in this chapter, giving the reader a sense that community, sense and hope ‘is leaking out of so many cracked vessels’ (Nancy 1993: 108-9). In short, the common-being is fractured leaving people directionless. Again, this may tell us more about the anthropological project that wants to ‘set right’ and ‘put to work’ the deep essence of the community in order to reveal its true nature, rather than what is actually happening.

Present imperatives that really matter

⁹⁶ I am not trying to down-play the complex issues that have faced Aboriginal communities since colonisation. But thinking of people as a problem not only implies that we have the proper ‘solution’, but it also fails to engage with the genius of Aboriginal communities (Rose 1987:36). Our projects come to order their disorder, to make proper what is lacking, to create ‘function’ out of perceived ‘dysfunction’, in short, to create communities that are properly and more truly ‘our’ own. Communities that would reflect a better, more unified notion of community. I always think of Don’s mantra here: ‘The biggest problem Aboriginal people have is whitefellas who think they have a problem.’ I realise that this explanation is underdeveloped and inadequate, but what if we could listen to that ‘unheard’ sense of community, to stay with this beyond ‘instrumental control’ (Dallmayr 1997)? What would this make possible and necessary? Obviously I have tried to explore this in my thesis.

Sylvie Poirier's work *A World of Relationships: Itineraries, Dreams, and Events in the Australian Western Desert* (2005), explores, as the title suggests, the flexible, negotiable and contingent nature of social forms amongst the people of Wirrimanu (Balgo Hills) on the northern edge of the Gibson Desert. It can be seen as a classic ethnography, in that its minimal condition is to bring forth the common-being, yet it does this by emphasising how enduring structures are modified and shaped by events, history and contemporary forces. Thus, contingency has a significant role to play within an overarching structure. She writes that:

Amongst the main themes of this book are the qualities of “openness” and “flexibility”...By openness I mean the capacity to introduce new forms, new variants of existing themes, and to suggest new readings of older structures. While these accretions remain true to the founding principles of the Law, they show the potential for transformation, reinterpretation, and reformulation of the structures of permanence. (5)

Poirier's work, drawing on anthropologists before her, such as Stanner and Myers, as well as social theorists such as Latour (1993)⁹⁷ and Deleuze and Guattari (1987)⁹⁸, is interested as much in transformative events, creativity and innovation as the traditional anthropological notion of ‘continuity through time’. Charlesworth in his introduction to *Aboriginal Religions in Australia: An anthology of recent writings* (2005) notes that since the early 1980s, through such writers as Rose and Myers, there has been a marked shift in anthropological approaches to culture. These ‘new’ approaches have emphasised ‘multiplicity’, ‘diversity’ and ‘dynamism’ and have rejected static ‘classical’ models of culture. Poirier's work can be seen as an engaging extension of this shift. She argues in her conclusion that, ‘The mundane, the contingent, and the ancestral are articulated together and feed into one another; they participate together in the dynamic unfolding of the world’ (245). This not only

⁹⁷ She draws on Latour to show that no hard-distinction exists between nature and culture, between the human and non-human worlds (Poirier 2005: 9, see also Rose 2004, 2006).

⁹⁸She uses Deleuze and Guattari to draw out the rhizomic nature of Dreaming itineraries that create ‘networks of relationships’ that extend like lines (of flight) and nodes across the country (Poirier 2005: 248).

leads to an understanding of human agency as key but also to the pivotal role of non-human elements; ancestors and the landscape reveal their presence and claim through dreams, events and effects, things that happen now as a fact of being-in-the-world. The sentient landscape speaks, and speaks in powerful ways (10-13). Poirier understands this agency to be an experience of historicity,

The Kukatja show no interest in history as a continuum. Their sense of historicity rather is one of a reality that unfolds and reveals itself in places and through a dynamic and intricate interplay among events and actions from *Tjukurrpa* (the Dreaming), the human and non-human realms. The following statement of [Tony] Swain's is appropriate here: "The world is not made, but worlds take shape" (1993: 32). Such shaping – or, we could say, unfolding – implies a movement, a transformation, and thus a form of space-time. (59)

The ancestor's travels happen and leave a mark in space; ancestral footprints, fires, sexual activity, and other activities enable the world to take shape (61). These events are not of the past, but are present in the continued presence of those marks in the landscape.⁹⁹ Poirier also notes that the ancestors continue to mark their presence by communicating with people directly (a 'slap to the shoulder' or a feeling a person has) or through the landscape, whereby 'they can send messages through the wind, or assume the forms of clouds' (61). These 'manifestations', she writes, 'will be given meaning and interpreted contextually, in accordance with recent events (accident, pregnancy or death) and with the site where they occurred' (61).

In this way, traditions and enduring structures of permanence are not seen as 'of the past', and thus not threatened by the present, but are relevant and enduring because of their present permanence: that they really matter now. Of course, this is the key contemporary model of culture that anthropologists work with: that the enduring reality of distinctive orientations to the world matter today more than ever (can only

⁹⁹ This is also a key point of Dussart's work with Warlpiri people. She writes that: 'In other words the heretofore merges, or is simultaneous with, the here and now. The Warlpiri are quite explicit in their statements that the past is "true" today' (2000: 24).

matter today) and this is what makes sense; culture is a present imperative that really matters now. In this way, this key understanding of culture would be free from nostalgia and loss: culture is not what is lost but what happens, and because it happens it matters now more than ever.

Poirier's work is not one conceived in loss and nostalgia. In important and insightful ways, it is *contemporary* in that it understands Kukatja ways of being and seeing in the *now* – because of things that happen and are transformed in the present, and this is where the force of a cultural real exerts itself.

However, I have this feeling that I cannot shake: of how community, which she turns to at the very end (and is there in the beginning),¹⁰⁰ *is a question the anthropologist faces* whilst the 'real' anthropological work is a coherent and masterable body of knowledge as if outside and elsewhere and over there. Community is a kind of peripheral question to the proper core. Community, on the one hand, is where one is stretched, troubled, faces questions and limits, becomes provisional and contingent, while on the other hand, the real work is out there, elsewhere: a place where one finds an objective coherence through cross-situational mastery; through an account under-written by appealing to a common-being (i.e. 'the Kukatja', 'Kukatja believe', etc.). Almost like: I know that being-with-others in community collapses distinctions and exposes one to multiple and fragmentary sense of a cultural real (the question of being-in-common), but the true and the real lies elsewhere in a description of a unified and sovereign cultural order that is above and outside the actual forces we are made to confront by being-with-others (identifying and calling upon a common-being). These 'worlds' of anthropology remain, if not opposed, definitely strange companions.

¹⁰⁰ The clearest expression of this is found in chapter one, 'A Place Called Balgo: A Story of Accommodation, Resistance, and Misunderstanding'. Here she outlines how she came to be in the community and describes an ethno-history of Balgo and Yaga Yaga, where she did most of her field work (see especially pp. 33-36). Here, whilst describing what is going on, she is not prepared to take the position of 'cross-situational' observer' – she doesn't offer unitarian determinations – she is unsure how to secure meaning and thus offers multiple and contingent possibilities. Again, it is interesting that this happens 'in community'.

Yet, I feel there is a calling into question that happens in community that the postmodern anthropologist cannot quite shake, that insists, that troubles and remains ‘unresolved’. An experience of finitude, perhaps, where we communicate not to exhaustively account for, but to share and share again. Something is happening in community for which no centring is possible.

With awful clarity, as the final gesture of her work, Poirier confronts the death of young men when she returns to the communities with which she works. She confronts the deaths ‘that had befallen small communities such as Balgo and Yagga Yagga. ‘One “sorry meeting” followed another...I spent those few months in 1994 and 1998 on the road, accompanying my friends to sorry business’ (254). But, before this, Poirier is startled into a question. She wonders why, when she returns in 1994 and 1998, the community has not lodged Native Title claims (250-251). She writes that ‘during my visit in 1998, I was astonished to realize that not only had the Kukatja not yet lodged their Native Title claim, but most of them barely knew about the issues or at least seemed to show little interest in it’ (251). She points out the complex reasons for this: a lack of communication between the community and legislative bodies, that people question why they have to claim ownership for land that is already (and always was and will be) theirs, and that people are distrustful and suspicious of white systems of law. ‘However,’ she writes,

at the time, there was another factor that could help to account for the lack of local interest and involvement in the Native Title issue. All through the 1990s, in the Balgo area and far beyond, local agendas at the individual and collective levels were over-whelmed with a kind of “work” and a set of responsibilities that appear, in the age of late modernity and neoliberal capitalism, rather unproductive from the state’s point of view. These imperatives were for the people to mourn their dead, and to take the time to participate in lengthy mourning ceremonies, as a major responsibility towards their socio-economic order. (251)

A kind of ‘inoperative community’, a ‘dysfunctional community’ in terms of the liberal democratic modern state, that reduces its subjects to their economic ‘productivity’, to that essence which can be produced, and realised, through (proper) ‘work’ (Lyer 2006). Here, the work of mourning takes over. ‘My friends,’ Poirier writes, ‘chose to invest their time and energy in the “sorry business” of death – so that the social networks could be reconnected and life could start anew’ (254). (A ‘slackening in the work of identification’ with the state – with its idol – as Lyer calls it, (2006: 52). These deaths, she writes ‘are a direct result of the clash between their rapidly changing world and the increasing pressure and demands from White society’ (253-254). This is kind of a trauma or infinite questioning, a question that cannot quite be answered or resolved, but that insists, and that forces Poirier to ask a question of how to respond to difference, to differences that would call into question the dominant and ‘accommodating’ paradigm. She writes that:

In this age of globalization and late modernity, the neoliberal discourse around multiculturalism and “the accommodation of differences” gives the impression that cultural differences are recognised and celebrated – as long as these differences do not go beyond “a moral, national limit of tolerance” (Povinelli 1998: 578). The kind of cultural differences that are usually celebrated are “more superficial cultural expressions which can be learned about and mimicked, or read and displayed, in ways that assert tolerance and also offer the stimulation of difference without disturbance” (Cowlshaw 1999: 296). In other words, differences that do not challenge the dominant social and moral order – the dominant society’s epistemological and ontological principles (254).

I am certainly not opposed to Poirier, but I just want to point out that this question is confronted in community. It is a question of ‘difference’ and being-in-relation to difference, of that question that begins and ends the anthropological project, that happens there in community, because of being-in-common where the presentation of the common-being is interrupted, and is put in question. Differences, the work of individuals, shared events, cannot be unified in total ways – one becomes

provisional, a little unsure, one is moved to questions – and one can no longer master the sense of things. This question is not one that insists ‘out there’ as if by way of a position of coherent objectivity or benevolent accommodation, where a universal and anonymous subject comes to stand for the work of others, where singular differences and multiple articulation are worked into an accommodating common-being, but rather, this question happens there in-community because of being-with.

As I have been arguing, particularly with reference to Myers’s work, the anthropological imperative is to present the common-being – ‘the Aboriginal world, ‘Kukatja belief’ etc – and the clarification of this is the ‘real’ stuff of anthropology. It sets this *common-being* to work to speak for the community itself. (I have also questioned the salience of this in light of Pintupi people’s insistence to stay with the contingent nature of the relation, that people emphasise autonomy and difference as the basis of being, i.e. there is no generalisable common- being. This argument would be relevant to Poirier’s work as well). The core of the work is setting the common-being straight in order to reveal a deep and true essence, one that is generalisable, enduring and unifying.

We could say two things here. One, that the contemporary experience of Indigenous communities is unassimilable to the anthropological project in general. ‘Community’ therefore, may be seen as a place of loss and dysfunction (the common-being cannot be put to work to unify the community itself). And, two, if this is the case, why begin with, and return to, the question of community? If the project is so certain, and anthropologists work very hard to establish security and certainty, why be so tremulous at the end (and the beginning) where everything seems to be put in question, becomes political and provisional? What I want to say here, is that the experience of being-in-common – the happening place of community – questions the anthropological work of presenting the common-being; unity is put in question through the singular and multiple claim of others to which one is exposed. Community is a kind of questioning that anthropologists cannot

shake, where the project itself may be put into question. The final pages are not devoted to the reiteration of the argument, but a return to community, and this may strangely bear the marks of being unable to be confident or certain. It would appear in the end, in community, because of being-with, anthropologists look towards the future, and recent events, tentatively, without a comforting horizon to which they could appeal. No longer able to accommodate difference in such unifying ways, anthropology's fundamental 'core' beliefs are be put into question as it faces an exposure to others without comforting horizon to which things could be properly ascribed.

And thus to the next spacing and rhythm

Georges Van Den Abbeele writes in his essay on Nancy, 'Lost Horizons and uncommon grounds: for a poetics of finitude in the work of Jean-Luc Nancy' (1997), that Nancy, 'exposes finitude' not as 'a negativity to overcome, but an event to dwell in and upon' (14). These 'proclamations of finitude...that is the dislocation of stabilizing bounds' does not mark the death (or impossibility) of thinking practices or indeed of sense, but call for the 'urgent' demand of 'thinking anew' (12). The idea here is that there is no comforting horizon in sight, no boundary to which a common identity could be exhaustively ascribed or contained (a *débordement* as Van Den Abbeele writes), and this is what matters today now more than ever. Nancy calls this the 'crisis of sense'. Nancy, in an interview, explains that the

"crisis of sense" signifies that we are coming out of an age in which meaning is guaranteed by certain principles (e.g. God, Man, History, Science, Law, Value) that support the possibility of the accomplishment of sense. What puts this crisis in perspective is the dissolution of such points of view posed as if they were outside and higher than the given world...Sense can no longer be referred to from beyond: that is certain. (Nancy 2005: 161)

This is about sense taking shape on the edge of concepts. This is about trying to do '*full justice to conjunctive relations*' (James 1976: 23, original emphasis), where the 'universal' – that point of identitarian gathering and objectification, that

consolidated point on which the world would supposedly turn – is an unsustainable ‘abstraction’ (ibid: 22), is in other words, not very real, and perhaps because of this, not all that useful, now more than ever. It is *not* that there is loss, or a problem to overcome, nor that there is another side to be recovered, an over-there that when found and worked would bind-it-all-together-as-one-again, but something rather more pressing; that something is happening now that demands thought. This is the happening of sense without a comforting and consolidating horizon in sight.

What I explore in the last part of the thesis, are modes of writing that extend without comforting horizon – this is the experience of community in which we ‘dwell’. It is happening and this is what matters now more than ever. There is no recovery of a proper sense; the true community is not lost or at risk, rather it is happening and forcing our sense of things in imperative and extensive ways.

spacing/rhythm seven.

On being surrounded by directive images: a moment's reading of Nancy's *The Sense of Things*

Nancy writes in *The Sense of Things* (1997):

Not long ago it was still possible to speak of a “crisis of sense”...But a crisis can only be analysed or surmounted. One can rediscover sense that is lost, or one can at least indicate approximately the direction in which it is to be sought. Alternatively, one can still play with the fragmentary remains or bubbles of a sense adrift. Today, we are beyond this: all sense has been abandoned. This makes us a little faint, but still we sense (we have the sense) that it is precisely this exposition to the abandonment of sense that makes up our lives. (2)

The postmodern ‘crisis of sense’, as Nancy points out, is exactly this loss of a common or universal sense, of a sense to which the nature and order of things could be ascribed and consolidated.¹⁰¹ Concepts, essences, and figures such as:

¹⁰¹ Bruno Latour has defined modernity as consisting of firstly, ‘a world outside untouched by human hands and impervious to human history; second, a mind isolated inside its own mind striving to gain access to an absolute certainty about the laws of the world outside; third, a political world down there, clearly distinct from the world outside and from the mind inside, which is agitated by fads and passions, flares of violence and eruptions of desire, collective phenomena which can only be quieted down only by bringing in the universal laws of science...and fourth, a position ‘up there’ that serves as a warrant for the clear separation of the three spheres above...’ (Latour 1997: xi-xii, quoted in Muecke 2004b: 4). Featherstone (1995) writes that the culture of modernity consisted of ‘the development of regimes of knowledge which sought the progressive ordering, control and unification of nature and social life, through capitalist enterprises and state administration...’ (72-73). Featherstone, at this point, traces the counter-culture that developed alongside this ‘grand narrative’ of unification and integration through such writers as Baudelaire who ‘rejected romanticism and traditionalism in favour of the new which refused scientific and technological utopian visions of the good life...’ and Nietzsche who sought a ‘transgressive impulse’ and thus sought to create ruptures in the ordered and rational edifices of modernity (73). One of the early theorists of postmodernity, Jean Francois Lyotard, argues in *The Post-Modern Condition*, that the most vile and awful repercussions of nineteenth century modernity were realised in state based fascism where the desire for integration, unification and ‘totality’

identity, nation, religion, science, philosophy, and community (normally thought, of course!) (Nancy 1997: 2), have lost their hold, and moreover their authority, on our sensibilities towards the world. They have become the site of contest and are thus at stake and in question; they tremble uncertainly – this is the sense of ‘our’ time. The loss, or the questioning of the authority of such total social concepts, does not mean that the world has become nonsensical, as conservative thinkers might want us to think. There is no lack of sense in the world. Obviously, there is still a demand that things make sense and that there is sense in things and in the world. That is, we do have a sense of things, that such a thing could be said, that it could make sense, even today; especially today when determined points of identity have been put in question. Perhaps what came with the critique of modernism, of its idealised signifiers of progress, science, the immanence of ‘the nation’ and ‘the subject,’¹⁰² was a sense of things beyond, or in excess of, universal categories of identity and consolidation; *of that excessive sense that bleeds into multiple contexts*. Rather than seeking to overcome this – to repair it as such – I want to think about what this sense of things, makes possible, what it does to modes of writing and thinking and being (Nancy 1997). And so,

I sit in the State Library of Victoria, in Melbourne, Australia, madly reading Nancy’s book *The Sense of Things*. My partner, Cath, and our 14 month old daughter and I are leaving for Geraldton, Western Australia, in a week or two, to live for a few years and I am trying to read as much as I can before I go. This material may be hard to get hold of over there, or perhaps it just won’t make sense anymore (there is always the chance that by changing one’s lifestyle and orientation to the world that new senses will come along, that they will question previous senses towards the world. This is of course to be welcomed). So I am furiously reading before I can no longer access this sense of things. I am sitting in the newly renovated Latrobe Reading Room (Australiana). Its light-filled dome, majestic and lofty, an acre above me. It is an orb, a sphere that stretches above us. Light seems to defuse through the globe-

reached its ultimate and violent end. He characterises the postmodern age as ‘waging war on totality’ in the wake of the ‘transcendental illusion’ of modernist thinking (1984b: 81-2).

¹⁰² For a succinct discussion of Nancy’s relation to ‘the subject’ – particularly Nancy’s criticism of the ‘return of the subject’ – see Ian James’s (2002) article “The Persistence of the Subject: Jean-Luc Nancy”.

like ceiling – without windows and frames – transparent, skin-like, illuminating the space that surrounds us. The light, the space, *that sense* envelops us like a sound – a sonority – which you strain to hear but which you cannot place. The light is celestial, more white than golden, dare I say it, transparent: equal parts clarifying and foreboding. The work of reading minute and grand at once, in this otherworldly room. I am literally surrounded by imperatives chiselled into stone that encircle the room above our heads – quotation upon quotation of the significant and popular writers of ‘our time’, each letter almost a foot high, flank the walls of the room. Flawless stone worked by some still practising (and thus perhaps archaic) stonemason. I imagine him suspended by hemp ropes and wooden pulleys, chisel and hammer in hand, arms covered in white dust, working away à la Michelangelo. But, like most things these days, these words are prefabricated. Probably organised by a consultant, submitted to a committee, and then probably worked on by some fabulous machine on a dull concrete floor in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, trucked to the library, hoisted in place by some ingenious crane. I read these words that surround us readers and workers, randomly:

Until I feared I would lose it, I never loved to read. One does not love breathing (Harper Lee).

Words on the page are never prisoners of the page (Sonya Hartnett).

Writers speak for those who are kept in silence (Isabel Allende).

A real book is not one that’s read, but one that reads us (W.H. Auden).

The book, library, reading, and its path to light, encircle me in capital letters without rest, like a centrifuge or vortex. I return to Nancy’s text, head bowed. Do I love this reading – do I need it like breathing? Do Nancy’s words escape the page and surround us? Does he speak for our present silence? Is he reading us? Each finite individual around me, content, absorbed in his or her work, working his or her thought out in this shared spacing of a public library. A community, perhaps, who

share this difference in common: sharing their different work together in a sense beyond a common goal or progressive process. We work differently, are exposed to different things and orientations to the world, to these things before us that force thinking and work. This is what we share in common, here, now, we write and read furiously. I read on.

In our time, on the one hand, we are exposed to all the risks of the expectation of, or demand for, sense (as on this banner in Berlin, on a theatre in 1993: “*Wir brauchen Leitbilder*,” “we need directive images”), all the fearful traps that such a demand sets (security, identity, certainty, philosophy as distributor of values...) On the other hand, we also have the chance to recognise that we are already beyond this expectation and demand, that we are already *in the world in* an unheard of sense – that is, perhaps, in the unheard-of sense that precedes all senses, and that precedes us, warning and surprising us at once. (2)

To think, this is the demand here, ‘beyond the appropriation of signifieds’ (3), precisely, ‘to give way to this excess of sense over all appropriable sense’ (2). This is what Stephen Tyler calls evocation over representation (1986: 129), or what Lyotard attempts to do by staying with the ‘it’s happening’ of the event, a sense of things without reducing it to ‘meaning’ and ‘signification’ (1988b: 19). Something else is happening, not quite proper to discourse, an excess created by the fact of being-in-the-world with others; the finite work of others cannot be reduced to some universal sense that would represent all, that would contain like a box or slogan and that could be screwed against a wall. Just like the readers and workers around me doing their own thing, the demand of this, that singular sense that happens in shared spaces; not together-as-one but a being-in-the-world where another turns to the world, to space, to light, singularly so. ‘Listening’ to this sonority, that sense of direction that comes in waves, that resounds and envelops like light that extends in space without determined origin (Nancy 2007).

I go outside, hungry and tired. A Chinese New Year procession marches into the city up Swanston Street, towards the library. Firecrackers go off like gunshots with smoke exploding. The New Year's Lion, its eyes open wide, all seeing, barely blinking. Its tongue lolling, head darting and dancing, tilting, turning, pausing: it moves by being ecstatic in the world; it is awakened, its senses enlivened. The performers stop moving forward and dance 'on the spot' as the head flickers and trembles without rest. We take notice as this Lion takes a stand on its being. A gathering, an event, takes place and spills from the pavement onto the road. Trams are forced to stop before an official ushers people back towards the event, being pushed tighter off the road back towards the pavement. The Drummer, carried on a platform, beating a massive drum – that is almost a world in-itself – reverberates through the streets, interrupted and intensified by the gunshot crackle of firecrackers that keep malign spirits away and that clears the air. It makes sense through touching on skin, smell, sight; sound happening, smoke diffusing and opening sharply into nostrils. People stop, feel the drum against the body, the air thick with reverberations, with the smell of smoke that billows, that does its work of warning and surprise and then diffuses. The performers move on, the gathering disperses. The procession continues further down the street, another site, another intensification of a warning – of the surprise of crackers – spaces another gathering. This event, further down the street, spills again and grows anarchically onto the road, stopping traffic: another official ushers the people closer. I leave the street, the heat, the sunshine, the grass, my lunch, the procession, the performance, the drum that is a world and that reverberates in the people that are gathered, and head back to the library, recalled by sense.

That is, it would recall us to sense as relation *to* or as *being-toward*-something, this something evidently always being “something *other*” or “something *else*.” Thus, “being-*toward*-the-world” if it takes place (and it does take place), is caught up in sense well before all signification. It makes, demands, or proposes sense this side of or beyond all signification. If we are *toward* the world, if there is world, there is sense. The “there is” makes sense by itself as such. We no longer have to do with the question, “why is there something in

general?” but with the answer, “there is something, and that alone makes sense.” (7, original emphasis)

There is something beyond exhaustive determination, this in itself makes sense, or speaks of a sense of the world without (absolute) signification; enlivened, awakened, we become ecstatic in the world. An evocation, a sense of something that makes sense itself. That it is sensible, for example, to say that the process of ethnographic communication creates an excess irreducible to representation (Marcus 1995: 6). That it is sensible to speak of a world without definitive or ‘assured signification’ (5) or, perhaps with the help of William James, we could say that an evermore gathers on the edge of our concepts (1976: 35). That there is a sense of the world without reduction to signification, as Levinas has laboured so passionately to say. An evocation, a sense of something that makes sense (the face that is more than themes or discourse) without absolute determination; that there is a responsibility, an obligation that does not begin in me but that comes from another, that stretches, and spaces and ushers us closer to the happening itself. Now, more than ever, we must take a stand on our being-in-common.

There is a noise in this light-filled reading room. It is full of fragments, of parts articulating with other parts – of people walking on the linoleum floor; shuffling, squeaking; of the sound of doors closing and chairs creaking and hushed voices speaking; and books being placed on tables, thump! People writing, typing, moving and thinking in this shared space. The sound is everywhere and nowhere, if such a thing could make sense. There is a sense of sound beyond any point of determination, origin, destination. It surrounds, envelops, becomes sonorous. Do you sense what I’m trying say by being exposed to the work of another, of another unique turning of the world, of the sense of this, of this being the work – of working this sense? Have you felt it, been exposed to it, has it touched you in this being-toward-the world? This sense that something is happening, that sense happens as if ‘this side of or beyond all signification’.

I am struggling to stay with this sense that is reverberating. I glance at the chiselled directives that encircle me and catch the smile of a tall woman in black, not the black of evening glamour, but the utilitarian black of an urban cyclist; conscious of doing her bit for the world, perhaps? I return her smile, she sits down and begins her work of reading, her slender hands cradling her head as if holding her thoughts ‘in a kind of basket of fingers’ as the Australian author Patrick White imagines in *Voss* (1974: 43). Others pass and encircle the room, their gaze carried to the majestic ceiling; they bump into the obstacles (desks, carrousels, books, shelves, chairs, others working and reading) that fill the floor, that make little passages and tunnels and walkways like ‘cellars and garrets everywhere’ (Bachelard 1964). Their eyes carried upwards, transfixed by the light-filled globe acres above us; people whisper and gasp at its (other)wordliness as they walk with their companions; they point out features to one another (balustrades, cornices, embossments, pillars, the singular detail of things) in a hushed intimacy. Back in the world, I return to the work with renewed energy. Fragmented companions doing their work on desks here and there, little gatherings and spacings of chairs and tables, notes and books and laptop computers arranged in semi-circles or in rows, things stacked neatly or scattered across a desk – all suggesting the possibility of infinite arrangements, and groupings. A sense, perhaps, of being-toward-the-world, of each individual working this together with others, as an opening and turning towards the world, of that sense of the world.

We are in the world, now more than ever, in a sense beyond determination: our books are stacked and scattered across space, like ‘bubbles of sense adrift’ (Nancy 1997: 2). This is the sense of our time. It is not one of isolation or loss (books are not screwed against a wall, packed in a canon) but of movement and force, an awakening to that sense of things to which we tilt, dwell for a moment; a readiness at hand to be taken away, for the world to open, to unfold, to stretch our thoughts. We are becoming fascinated by another turn. It is a sentience to the directives that others, and things, give light to trace,¹⁰³ directives moreover that are not stamped in

¹⁰³ Lingis has explored this in his 1998 book *The Imperative*. He argues that things in the world have a force and a say in life; we do not simply interpret our surroundings but are transformed, troubled and excited by

stone that would act like a kind of centrifuge (being flung to the outside) or vortex (disappearing into the centre) or slogan, but are worked by bodies moving rhythmically, extending in space, doing their work, as a way of being-towards the world, where noise and light and space, spaces, interrupts and trips us towards another sense of things. This matters now, more than ever, as Nancy has taught us.

them. To be-in-the-world (not Lingis's phrase) is to be in the midst of directives and imperatives that are summons for thought (3-4). He writes that, 'sensibility, sensuality and perception... [are] not reactions to physical causality nor adjustments to physical pressures, nor free and spontaneous impositions of order on amorphous data, but responses to directives' (3). Lingis forces us to ask the question, as does Latour in different ways: what if things in the world have a force to move and summons and interrupt intention? What if things themselves have a morality, are directives in-themselves? This is a question that Latour considers in his article 'Morality and Technology: The Ends of the Means' (2002). Here he considers how humanness, and thus morality, is 'indissolubly mingled' with technology (248). This is so 'because all technologies incite around them that whirlwind of new worlds' (250). Technologies create 'detours', 'folds' and 'translations' that 'engenders... new dispositions' (256) and thus (infinitely) heterogeneous ways of being human. The human here is not entirely in control of technology, nor is technology mastering humanity. There is instead, as Latour observes '*no masters anymore*' (255, original emphasis) only the complex field of interactions, 'translations' and 'enfoldings' that emerge in techno-human networks. With a similar sense of things in mind, Stephen Muecke asks: Can a *thing* really make us *think*? (2008: 106), (see his chapter 'Momentum', in his book *Joe in the Andamans: and Other Ficto-Critical Stories*. In this chapter he explores themes around trust, activism and inter-cultural exchange. He is pushed and moved by the forces that gather in a otherworldly Melbourne tram, decorated by Pakastani chamak patti decorators.

spacing/rhythm eight.

To be exposed to another turning of the world

It is at this point that I want to explore some final questions. If anthropology seeks out the work of others *as its work* then what are we looking for in this process? Are we looking for a return of the same? Or are we wanting to be exposed to another turning – another sense of the world that would call into question prior frameworks of understanding, something a bit more exciting and ecstatic perhaps? If we take it that there is a force that the community works on the ethnographer (we could think of Myers and Rose here) then perhaps the work of ethnography is to follow this force, write and expose this force as its condition and *its work*; a turning to the world, to this pivotal movement. This would, of course, resist any standing back as if outside the relation to others, and make the ethnographer sentient (and thus vulnerable) to the force of the work of others. The problem, then, would be how to expose one's writing to this force and to resist the (traditional) anthropological project of seeking categories, themes and structures of total comprehension. This is the force of 'the saying' (Levinas), the 'it happens' (Lyotard), the 'listening' (Nancy), rather than, *this is what was said, this is what happened, this is what it means*. What we are listening to here, what I'm trying to say, what I'm trying to make happen, is that there is a tension, an agitation, a sense of direction and an orientation in another's work beyond containment in a 'said', beyond the extraction of meaning, a kind of 'sonorous attack' that *unworks* the anthropological intent of tying up the loose ends of community into One. Here, again, we have the rhythm, force and spacing of relations as an exposure and sentience – a sharing – of another sense of the world (Nancy 1997). A sharing that is not centred as such, but one whose space is an outward extension, this is a task or imperative that is never complete. Something akin to listening 'toward the opening of meaning, hence to a slash, a cut in un-sensed indifference at the same time as toward a reserve [an excess, a surplus,

‘alterity’] that is anterior and posterior to any signifying punctuation’ (2007: 27). Nancy calls this a ‘sonorous attack’ as the sense of something that is before and after the punctuating points of an apprehending (seizure, arrest, grasp) comprehension. To usurp Nancy’s reference to philosophy and replace it with an anthropological one: ‘Isn’t the [anthropologist]...someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who more precisely, neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can...[anthropologise]?’ (2007: 1).¹⁰⁴ I would like to reiterate the question here: what are we looking for by exposing our work to others? What are we wanting to do, to be exposed to?

From Wiluna to Kalgoorlie with GB (Georgina Brown) Cath and Dusty to see GB’s dying dad¹⁰⁵

It was our last day in Wiluna. GB’s dad was very sick in a nursing home in Kalgoorlie. GB had received a call from the nursing staff to come as soon as possible. GB’s sister, Lily, was coming across from Perth, and her brother who was in ‘lock-up’ in Geraldton was getting a transfer to the Kalgoorlie lock-up. GB had not seen her brother, sister, or Dad for a couple of months; she’d been out ‘her side’ as she says – *out east Patjarr way*, (approximately half-way between Wiluna and Alice Springs) and also in The Warburton Ranges and Alice Springs, away from Wiluna. She liked being out there – away from ‘family’ – where she could be independent, free, do her own thing, *looking after myself...away from people in town who put you in – blame you, for any little thing*. GB knew her dad was dying, that’s why she’d come back to Wiluna. She’d come back two weeks ago, with her fella in a beaten up 1990 VN Commodore station-wagon. She’d come the back-way, through very rarely used roads, roads even blackfellas don’t commonly use. They’d come across one group of

¹⁰⁴ This (I quoted this in the beginning of the ethics gathering) is an appropriation of Nancy’s: ‘Isn’t the philosopher someone who always hears (and who hears everything), but who cannot listen, or who more precisely, neutralizes listening within himself, so that he can philosophize?’ (2007: 1).

¹⁰⁵ A note on the following narrative. Almost a year after this event happened I was able to catch up with GB again at Ululla. We sat outside on chairs positioned in the sun in the early morning. I read through what I had written, and GB provided corrections and adjustments. It was also the first time we had seen each other since her father passed away, and in a quiet, but important way, it was also a moment when GB and I shared out memories and sadness again. She thanked me for what I had written and how I had written it, and I thanked her for making this possible.

whitefellas and their *shiny Toyotas, full-up* (full of gear), in a 600km journey. Both parties were surprised to see one another. But GB was like that, never afraid of much, resourceful, fiercely independent, safe in her country; happy to follow the roads less travelled. GB's dad had been very sick for a long time. She had tried to look after him in Wiluna and Ululla (5 years before; I was living at Ululla at this time), but it proved too much. She was also looking after 3 kids under 5; she was becoming ragged and simply couldn't look after her father whose body and mind were failing. It was hard, watching the stress, concern and worry slowly wearing GB down. Her family, as well as the Wiluna medical staff, agreed that the Kalgoorlie nursing home was the only option. But it must have pained GB terribly. She talked about her sense of responsibility and sadness as we drove to Kalgoorlie, it was the (ever present) unsaid thing that marked our conversation; a kind of unsayable outside that responsibility and experience with others marks and touches us with. There were these moments full of speckled affectivity that punctuated and gave a certain rhythm and space and sense to what we said.

We left Wiluna in the early afternoon, GB wanted to sit in the back, she was exhausted and fell asleep. Cath and I talked as we drove to Leinster, 250km south, a mining town built for the intent of providing a community for the miners. It had an Olympic size swimming pool, flood-lit tennis courts, movie theatre, hair saloon, café, supermarket, school etc., all neatly laid out and organised on a grid. A kind of 'ideal' community built around work and leisure, built of bolted together steel frames and concrete slabs. We stopped for petrol, cheap petrol – what more could Australians want in an ideal community! We had some lunch in the playground of the school that was deserted for the school holidays. We left, GB sat in the front, and talked as we drove on towards Leonora.

Initially, I was worrying that I should be recording our conversation, the anthropologist wanting to hear completely (these anthropological feelings are hard to shake). It was important to get right and I didn't want to leave it up to recollection, memory, affect – those other senses. But I soon realised that sometimes this is the only way to glimpse and sense what lies beyond the present

discussion and that calls us onwards, further, toward others. Perhaps by not having the ‘back-up’ of notes or recordings you strain to listen all the more intently – you stay with what is happening, are thrown into the sense of something – because you realise this is all you’ve got, this sense that is unfolding and that you try and catch on to.

Her words, memories now, traced in glimpses of phrase, the look in her eye, or the flash of her teeth as she laughs. There is a wonderful ‘positionality’ while driving and talking. By not facing each other, by being situated in oblique proximity, by catching glimpses – a sense on the edge of our sight – perhaps we allow the space for the eyes of the interlocutor to wander into the horizon. Released from the demand of holding the other’s attention and gaze, the eyes glaze into the past or future beyond the gathering certainty of the forms that take shape in front of us. We address each other in some negotiated space between our two positions, and it spaces and punctuates thoughts and feelings; there is a rhythm, a mode of contact and exposure to the work of others in this oblique facing.

GB was taken back to the country where she grew up, back to ‘the desert’, ‘the bush’, as people in Ululla say.¹⁰⁶ She’s playing with an armful of dingoes in the sandhills with her sister, her mother is close, her father out hunting. She’s with her sister later, when her sister tells her to *go long, don’t follow*, to leave her alone as she walks away from the family’s camp. Her sister returns later, sick. She lasts the night. GB recalls the terrible night. The family move early in the morning heading for a more substantial rock-hole. Her sister dies on the way, as they carry her: as her father carries her in his arms. GB breaks in, *I still feel that, I have never really forgiven dad for that* – he should have been there, he should have known where she was heading – to a sacred place that she wasn’t allowed to go – but more than this, she can’t

¹⁰⁶ GB was born and grew up ‘out bush’ with her family. Her younger brother, Boyie, was born ‘out bush’, but not long after that the family ‘came in’ to town. GB was around nine years old when her family came to Wiluna in 1976. Her family was the last family to live in the traditional way, and travelled mostly around her father’s country north of Mungilli (850km east-north-east of Wiluna). GB’s father and mother had come in town in the late 50s (GB’s mother is a Jackman) when most of the Martu people had come into town, including the Jackmans. But, GB’s father who was about 16 and yet to be initiated, ‘took’ her mother from Wiluna (it was a ‘wrong way’ marriage) and escaped out bush in the mid 60s where they lived for more than a decade.

forgive him for leaving her sister's body as they walk away in the gathering heat to the rock-hole. *I got so wild with him.* I break in, *but that was the way, what else could he do? I know*, she says. But it accounts for nothing in terms of what GB still feels. I shift uneasily in my seat, GB stares out the window, we do not settle relaxedly into our seats. The cabin of the car circulates in GB's hurt, memories, words. The country unfolds, the motor drones on.

GB still feels the loss of her sister dearly. GB was probably around six or seven when it happened, her sister a couple of years older. She talks of her, like she does her mother (who died in Wiluna in the mid 90s), describing her strength, her vitality and warmth. They come alive through the certain strength of GB's memories. She recalls a time with her mum and sister, her dad out hunting, when her mum climbed a tree and was knocking cockies (cockatoos) down to the ground that GB and her sister were collecting. I imagine two little girls looking at their mother in the branches of a tree as she hysterically knocks scattering and screeching cockies to the ground. I imagine the ecstatic event trailing into laughter. She talks of how her mother gave birth to GB's brother (Boyie) all alone, without any help. GB says it full of pride and amazement for her mum. She talks of her mum's hardships, her loneliness; *She had no help, all the families had left, we were the only ones, just us and Ululla Boss, his mummy and daddy* – but they were elsewhere at the time. Her mother had to endure her father's absence and temper, she was always *looking after us kids*. She talks of her mother with such pride and respect, she tells me how tough and tender she was, GB beams in her memory. She talks of her father, his hunting skills, his patience; *He'd be gone for days with Ululla Boss, come back, we'd have a big feed then*. She told me of a time in the middle of summer when the whole family were hiding behind a windbreak for hours on end. *Boyie* (her younger brother) *only a baby, my mother shading him, settling him*, as they waited for the emus and kangaroos to come and drink – *we had to be so quiet, we were only little*, we could see the emus and kangaroos slowly circling the rock-hole, getting thirsty, slowly they came in; *dad got two*.

Silence folds in the cabin, things rattle and tremble, little levers and winders and switches vibrate. The kilometre markers on the side of the road, with time, diminishing. Losing units of 10 as the stories unfold.

GB interrupts. She talks about how people in town have been talking about taking Ululla Boss's mum and dad, Warri and Yatungka's bones back to their country, so they can finally rest. *I always feel sad, says GB, when I think of them in the cemetery in town, so far from home, theirs was a one-way trip.*

I said, *I never really got the point why they wanted to bring them back to town, only to die two years later so far from their home.*

If they really wanted to look after them, they should've camped with them at Mungilli¹⁰⁷ or Warburton (a station about 500km east of Wiluna)— looked after them that way, said GB. That's my granny and pop, you know.

Yeah, I said.¹⁰⁸

What about that statue they're putting up about Ululla Boss's mum and dad in town? I asked.

He's not really happy, really angry about it, she says.¹⁰⁹

Did they even ask him? I ask.

They spoke to some of his family but not to him, properly. They (his family) said yes, but Ululla Boss is really angry with them for that.

Every time he is in town he'll be reminded that they're so far from their home, I said. It is like their death will always be there, in town, I said.

Yeah, ngarru, (an expression of sadness, worry) she said.

The petrol gauge fell slightly; the windows in their frames were agitating, trembling. I rolled down a little tighter on the handle. I thought about the statue and about the myths we love to memorialise. Here stand Warri and Yatungka, 'The last of the nomads.' I imagined the inscription full of loss and nostalgia. Just around the corner

¹⁰⁷Mungilli became an 'outstation' where people from Wiluna lived, a few years after Warri and Yutungka were 'found'. It is about 700km directly east of Wiluna and about 100km or so from where they were found.

¹⁰⁸Warri is GB's great-grandfather-in-law. Warri's daughter, is M. Jackman (who shares a different mother to Ululla Boss). I have suppressed names here that are not used in public. M. Jackman is GB's grandmother (although GB's mother's mother was a different wife of JJ). GB is also related to Warri on her father's side. Warri's brother's son is GB's father.

¹⁰⁹The Wiluna shire commissioned a sculptor to create a statue commemorating Warri and Yatungka, it is suitably romantic and nostalgic.

from the Wiluna Information Shelter, their deaths become ‘informative’; a way for whitefellas to orient themselves to country. A sense not of duration – ‘that gnaws into the future and which swells as it advances’ (Bergson 1911: 4-5) – but of the commemoration of death. Your introduction to the town containing a map of the streets and a statue commemorating the end point, the last ones; as if everything had passed with their death, as if GB’s memories of growing up were finished as well. I could just imagine the hordes of four wheel drives that come ‘to do’ the Canning Stock Route and the Gunbarrel highway that both start in Wiluna: their introduction to the country marked with a sign that says the last of the true people are gone. I spleen on as we drove towards Kalgoolie and GB’s terribly sick father.

GB saves me from myself, that righteousness which is not mine to feel. She talks about going back to the country where she was born, of getting Ululla Boss to show her and her brother and sister *where they found us*. She’d never seen a Toyota before (the Aboriginal name for any 4WD), she remembers hiding behind her mother, scared, mystified by this enormous thing. Her family had been communicating with the search party for a few days, responding to each other’s fires. First on the horizon and then getting closer, until *we could smell it in the air, my brother* (who was less than two) *would point to the horizon*, she says. The whitefella in the search party had to hide behind the sand-hills whilst Freddy (an elder from Wiluna) went in front and signalled to GB’s family that it was him, that it was alright. Otherwise, GB says, *my daddy might have speared him*, that whitefella had to hide, out of view, until it was alright. I think of him hiding, nervous, waiting for the word, straining to hear that everything is all right and that he can come out from behind the sand-hill. I think of him walking towards the others, uneasy. *But he was good, alright* she adds. *He gave me his T-shirt, a red one. He’s in Rome, now* (on holidays) – *he’s been talking about taking us back to the spot where they found us*.

But as GB said her *dad probably would have never got on (the Toyota) if he knew it was a one-way trip*. He tried so many times to get back to his country, she told me. *But people would stop him, people would call him back* (to Wiluna), *they wouldn’t let him go. It was hard*

for mum, in the bush all alone, but dad always wanted to be there, but I think mum was better in town.

I was so scared riding in that toyota. Mum and dad were alright, they'd seen Toyotas before I was born (when they lived in Wiluna in the late 1950s before they 'escaped'), but I stayed close to mum that whole trip. She had a big mob of quandongs (like a small sour apple) and a goanna. I remember first seeing a windmill too, all the water everywhere. I just stood there and watched it all pouring down, she said.

I thought of GB looking up at the galvanised iron windmill against a blue sky, spinning, catching light in little flickers, shimmering as it meets the breeze. The laboured knocking and clanking, as the spinning head turns round and round into up and down, wind power harnessed for pumping power, little surges of water appearing from below, spilling into a tank. GB says *I'd never seen so much kapi (water), I was scared to go near it, and all the bullocks came in the night – I couldn't sleep, thought it was a mamu (evil presence), I stayed near the Toyota.*

We rolled on through Leonora, we talked about the people we knew there, the Jones mob. GB saw Sandra in her front yard. She stole a cautious glance towards her house. Sandra is Boyie's partner. GB and Sandra don't get along, two vital and strong spirits, protective and stubborn at once, meeting head on. GB tells her side of events. It's getting late, the sun is sinking and the roos are beginning to appear on the edge of the road. *Shall we find a camp. Yeah.* About 20km out of Leonora, I spot a little used track, we overshoot it, we turn around and take it. There is a big sign, slowly rusting, that says - 'Private Station Country, Keep Out'. We ignore it and drive on. GB gets worried, this makes me worried – *look they've been using it*, she says (the station mob) – there are tyre marks less than a few days old. Cath says, *stuff em', they won't come.* We go on a little further and find another little track, we take this. We stop in a nice little clearing and get out. We are relieved because we see the remnants of a fire pit, long and rectangular – somewhere where someone has cooked goannas and a kangaroo in the ground. GB points out little kid's footprints. The campsite immediately warms and we relax; this is not a station boss's camp.

Might be the Jones mob, they come out here, says GB. GB heads off, in the descending dark to follow an echidna track. Cath and I unpack the swags, roll them out on the ground. Dusty loves this moment, free from the car, she throws herself excitedly across the still warm folds of the canvas, burying her body in the blankets and pillows; she has her little unfolded space marked out underneath the stars.

GB comes back, we make a fire, cook dinner. Dusty goes to sleep, it takes a while because a few weeks ago she found the stars and now she stares up in amazement. Cath goes to bed and reads. GB and I stay around the fire and talk. GB translates a recorded conversation with Ululla Boss, a few days ago (with GB and Sheila) where he tells of one of the Dreaming tracks that crosses Ululla. Sheila was there too, and she's never heard the story. She was quite surprised to hear it, in fact we all were. GB knew the story, Wati Kutjarra (Two Brothers), but only out her way – Patjarr side, where they go into the ground near Docker River in Northern Territory. At times, as she was translating, she would whisper, taking the earphones out of her ears, *that's a law place he's talking about*. She'd then look around behind her back, into the dark, beyond the light of the fire, *can't talk about it really*. I'd turn my head in the direction in which she was intimating. I'd look uneasily and be happy to return to the intimacy with another around the fire, happy to move on to the next event. She stoked the fire with a dead branch, sparks flew off into the night like meteorites burning up on entry into our atmosphere, leaving traces glowing in the night. Dusty, and Cath, now asleep, were lit up in surges and soft folds of reddish-orange glow. Flickering light slowly retreating to the fire as the log settled down, they slept just beyond the light, but not yet in the dark, on the edge of each they breathed in rhythm. The conversation GB and I were listening to moved on, another place, another happening, another story took place. Ululla Boss's voice, my thumb on the pause button, GB's translation, my hasty anxious scribbles trying to catch her words (which were catching on to Ululla boss's), were spaced on the edge of the other; on the edge of each, huddled around earphones and a retreating fire, they fell into an interrupted, syncopated rhythm. We strained to listen as the story of Wati Kutjarra went into the ground on the edge of Ululla country. Ululla Boss signalled its re-

emergence, further east, another happening, another story, but for later. We took the earphones out of our ears and leant back straight again after our huddling.

When I first got back, she began again, the Bondini (Wiluna) kids used to tease me and Boyie, they used to say "you're from bush." Big mob of them (kids). She had to rescue her brother countless times from fights with other kids. She remembers mean and cruel kids making fun of her. She was sent to Cue, a town 250km south west of Wiluna, to a hostel, a mission boarding school. I asked why. She said: I don't know, they just made me go. She was in her early teens, all alone, separated from her family. She was locked in at night and got a 'cruel hiding' when she ran away to Meekatharra from the boss. She talked of how isolated, lonely and oppressed she felt. I tried to imagine GB as an early teen, locked in dormitories, always thinking of escape. She told of how she fought back whenever she could. One time, she began again, me and a friend took off to Meekatharra (100km north), we travelled through the night. I was good for walking, but my friend couldn't walk like that, she didn't know. They camped away from the road during the day, I had to do all the hunting, getting goanna and lizards, my friend nothing. She'd cook them, when it got dark, and then start walking. We almost made it, but they picked us up on the road. They took us back and we got the worst hiding ever. Yet, the light from the fire, more than anything else, showed her steely independence; her stubborn spirit smouldering, full of light. She stared into the fire, the embers and cinders and traces held her gaze, but took her off. You always got the feeling with GB that she was 'good for walking.' She could have always made it by herself.

Silence descended, I shivered from the cold. We stared into the fire, thoughts linking up with other times. They slept just beyond the light, but not yet in the dark, on the edge of each they breathed in rhythm and awakened. That sense, beyond, before, on the edge of our little huddling.

How you feeling about tomorrow? She began talking about wanting to see her brother and sister, having the family back together again, feeling those binds coming closer.

Mara-punka-punka-ni, I said. *Yeab, here*, she points to her arm. This is a term people

use to describe tingling nerves in the arm, which signals that family is coming close. She began talking about her father, but trailed off into the fire.

We are left with the saying of our thoughts that cannot be said. We sat for a few minutes and silently went to bed. Each shifting, drifting off, finding our rhythm... elsewhere. The world slowly turning, we drifted on its axis.

The morning came, we rustled up the fire and GB cooked a damper. We were packed up and gone before six am, none of us could believe it was so early. We rejoined the highway and watched the roos scamper back into the bush. GB wanted to sit in the back, where she talked and played with Dusty. Cath and I talked about things and turned around, leaving the road for glimpses to keep Dusty entertained. GB fell asleep. It caught on, Cath and Dusty as well. I drove on, the kilometres slowly sinking towards Kalgoorlie. I thought of everything GB had said yesterday and last night, catching glimpses of her life. I thought of the sadness and sense of togetherness that waited in Kalgoorlie, the nerves that tingle. I couldn't help think of Cath's dad dying two years ago, watching him fight as his body slipped away. I looked at Cath as she slept and remembered her family's grief that brought everyone on the edge of their grief a little closer. Mourning is infinite because death cannot be grasped (Critchley 1997: 73). There is no proper account, no grasping of death as such, death extends beyond knowledge, is unknowable and thus we mourn infinitely for that which has no proper account, for that to which our only response is 'the speechlessness of sobs' and murmurs trailing into silence (Lingis 1994: 113). Shared finitude uttered on the edge of grief. There is that sense, its touch, which retreats.

Blanchot says in the *The Unavowable Community* (1988) that, 'it is in life that the absence of someone else has to be met' (25). It is through 'life' that we are exposed to death. We confront death in life. At the heart of life is an exposure to death, to the 'inexorable finitude' of ourselves and others (1988: 17). We cannot walk away from the death of a loved one, it still burns infinitely, really: it cannot be accounted for. To speak of death, writes Derrida, is to 'traverse speech at the very point where words fail us' (2001: 210). Thoughts trailing off into embers and burning traces, we

stammer and fumble with desolate sighs and murmurs; tears form when there is too much to say, too much that we cannot say or that can be said, that overwhelms and envelopes and consumes our very being.¹¹⁰ Tears form in the voice (Derrida 2001: 201), leave one gasping, fumbling for words. What is said in death has no hold, as Lingis takes up and extends below:

“It’ll be alright, Mom” which you know is a stupid thing to say...she does not reproach you for what you said; in the end it doesn’t matter, what was imperative was only that you say something, anything. That your hand and your voice extend to her in accompaniment to the nowhere she is drifting on to, that the warmth and tone of your voice come to her as her own breath gives way... (1994: 109)

In Aboriginal custom, the name of someone who has died cannot be said, and their things; clothes, bedding, the house in which they lived, photographs, are either burnt or abandoned, or safely secured to be brought out many years later once present memory has stilled.¹¹¹ People are ‘too sorry’ to utter the name or to see the belongings of their relative. Something of the person remains in the name, the belongings, the image; their presence too close, it still dwells too much, people are too sorry to be reminded. It is not that people want to forget, to be done with the dead and move on, but that one cannot be done with those that have died, that their mark on one’s life still burns and aches infinitely so, that their life is still too close to one’s presence: another still moves in death. Thus the belongings and images of deceased people represents this inexorable mourning – the too close pain of this – that says too much, that consumes all too strongly one’s life, one’s relation to the death of others.

¹¹⁰ Blanchot (1988) writes in the *Unavowable Community* that: “The basis of communication is not necessarily speech, nor even the silence that is its foundation and punctuation, but exposure to death, and no longer my death, but someone else’s, whose living and closest presence is already an eternal and unbearable absence” (25).

¹¹¹ Jackson writes, drawing on his work with Warlpiri people, that ‘not to speak a name is to avoid singling out the individual whose loss you grieve, so assimilating him or her to mythical time, to the Dreaming. A particular death thus comes to define the lived past’ (1995: 129). He adds, in a later work, that: ‘To remember a name has the opposite effect. By putting a ‘forgotten’ name back into circulation, the essence of all those who carried the name in generations gone by is now brought back into existence’ (2005: 85-86).

The sun climbed higher in the eastern sky. Massive mine tailings dumps banked up, white and desolate against the sky; like some apocalyptic statue of our time. Single men in reflective clothing in Toyotas and groups in buses drove past us, with their orange safety lights flashing, their 2.5 meter high visibility flags attached to their bull-bars bending against the accelerator. It felt like another era, not of the past, but some desolate future piling up against the horizon, that awaits us. Middle aged white men with beards and overalls and steel-capped boots, flashing warning orange lights, travelling up highways in generic white Toyotas. (The characters that appear in studded-leather-pants with arse cheeks cut out in *Mad Max 2* are strangely more comforting; at least they have a sense of fun in their post-apocalyptic environment!) I remember talking to DJ (Dean Jones), a few months ago in Leonora and asking him about the mines, as I was shocked at their impact on the landscape when driving down to Leonora from Wiluna. He said *Well, this all mining country*. He said it in such a way that it was like he was saying, ‘What do you expect, you’re in the goldfields, this is mining country.’ Too obvious to mention. But perhaps I imagined something different, something not so stark and shocking. It reminded me of being at Ululla and asking people about community and connection to others, people seem to direct my attention not to what community is (as if it could be defined through certain objective characteristics) but would give examples of how community takes place, how it *happens*. People would tell stories, stories would happen and take place, people forced me to listen to this as an imperative. It was sometimes like ‘Hello? You’re here, what else do you expect, this is how it is, this is what happens here!’ This *is it*. Sort of like ‘stay with what surrounds you, this is what its like.’ Or, as Nancy puts it, ‘the touch of the world, being-together...no secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the with of co-existence’ (Nancy 2000: 13). But a *with* that extends outwards, that encounters others, their work and thoughts and sharing, moving us along, being exposed to other turnings. A rhythm, an inclination, a spacing that extends into the world, and that moves (Nancy 1991).

I was with these thoughts as the others slept. The cabin of our car was like an iron lung, bellowing and deflating in the others’ exhalation as we went down the road,

my thoughts drifting and extending, being taken out into the landscape, beyond, and back again, as the force of life itself. Murmurs and cooing and other touch-your-heart stuff came in sonorous moments. It left one straining to listen, bent towards an origin, a destination, a rustling, a fading trace. A sense beyond certitude, an ungraspable sense befalls us, picks us up, takes us off again, extends, retreats in surges and folds, burns like embers, but a sense *that is in the world* that does not come ‘from any “beyond” of the world whatsoever’ (Nancy 1997: 3).

The motor droned on. The tyres rumbled. Switches and handles and gauges rattled, trembled, fell and rose or teetered on the edge of doing something – as is their way. The force of motor, trajectory, ground and articulation points gently agitated the occupants. Slowly we woke. *Where are we? About one hour out of Kalgoorlie. How long did I sleep? One hundred km’s or more. Wow, things have changed!* We had left the open spaces of marginal desert country, the mulga gatherings and salt lake exposures, the rocky red breakaways and eucalyptus fringed creak-line retreats. We were now in gentle undulations and well treed gimlet, salmon and wiry gum extensions.

Our excitement grew as we adjusted ourselves to the new landscape, to its spacing and style. The road was even shaded in parts. We stopped for a pee. We got back in, shifted in our seats. Cath drove, GB was happy in the back. I turned awkwardly to obliquely face GB, the seat belt and action of gravity straining against my neck. She was self-reflective, turned to the window, sitting not side on, not front on but in-between those two positions, oblique. (Remembering the car trip to Karalundi to see Rita with Molly and Sadie, I thought that this oblique turn to the landscape is a kind of uniquely Martu disposition. Meeting the landscape not head-on, not side on, but sitting up right on the edge of the seat so one can turn to face the landscape from the side at 45 degrees – one eye on the future, one eye on the past if such a thing could make up a present). I watched her eyes flicker across the landscape holding something on the road’s verge, like a gauge that rapidly plummets across a field of view. I turned to Dusty and engaged her smiles and sounds. We neared Kalgoorlie. We arrived in the back blocks and were soon in the town. GB looked

out for 'who was around' but hid herself in the process. She told us to have 'a spin,' so we went up and down a few streets and then parked in the main street.

We got out, excited. GB clutched Cath's arm and awkwardly hugged her in the clear winter light of Kalgoorlie's iron, glass and brick main street. We hovered around the car, looked down at ourselves and tried as best we could to rearrange the red dirt and car-travel crumples from our person. Everyone else here was so clean and neat, the smell of shampoo and deodorant trailed like an afterburner after another's passage along the main street. It was so orderly; none of this seemed very real. We plucked up the courage, looked at our little group, and with thoughts like 'stuff em' we joined the pavement. We found a little park with a water fountain in the main street. GB found some people she knew. We got something to eat, had a coffee and had a look at Kalgoorlie.

GB was anxious to see her dad. We drove to the nursing home. GB wanted us all to come. We asked several nurses, and finally found one that knew GB's dad. We walked through the linoleum hallways, bowing our heads, not wanting to look into the rooms that held frail bodies and blaring televisions. We got to GB's dad's room, Cath took one look and couldn't go in, all she could see was her own dad. The 'speechlessness of sobs' took over. GB and I went in. GB spoke to him, told him who it was, *it's me dad, I'm here*. He slowly turned his head and acknowledged. GB kept speaking to him, told him of how Lily and Boyie were coming to see him. The television was screaming, garish, obscene, it flickered fluorescent light, heightening the sense of death. It was foreign news in French on full volume through plastic speakers. We turned the fucking thing off. We stood either side of GB's dad and held his hands. His head strong, raging against his retreating body. Cath was in tears outside, just beyond the doorway. I couldn't look at her without choking, she couldn't look in without streaming. GB kept talking and reassuring her father, her voice cutting through, keeping us all together. I listened to her, as if that was all I had. I felt awfully exposed when she was silent. GB kept wiping her eyes, looking at her father, keeping his attention, their eyes did not waver. She told him about all that had been happening, where she'd been, *out our way*, of where the family all were.

GB told of all the places, names, connections and movements that spaces the family. We stayed, GB talking. GB told her father that she had to go and see Boyie (in prison), and that she would come back with Lily, who was coming from Perth in the afternoon. He started to go and 'come to' gently. We huddled in the doorway, spoke softly, and then left. As we passed by an old woman sang out, she sat in a chair next to a window. We went over, *where you mob from?* She told us about herself, she was from Kalgoorlie, this is her country. Her energy and spunk lifted our departure and she thanked us for 'sitting down' with her for a few minutes. We found the exit. And were outside. We exhaled, breathed the clear crisp winter air, and spoke in a little huddle and held each other's eyes.

We drove around while GB organised accommodation. We went to the prison to see Boyie, and found out when Lily got in. It was late afternoon by the time we got back to the nursing home. GB was worried about being all alone, she was saying this as we arrived at the car-park of the nursing hospital, but Lily was due soon. We were just saying our good-byes when Lily arrived in a taxi. We greeted her; GB and Lily waved to Dusty as they went inside.

Cath and I left Kalgoorlie, drove one hundred km's in silence as Dusty slept. It took us a while but we found a camp. Dusty crawled excitedly, throwing herself on the still warm folds of the canvas swags as we unrolled them. We had a fire, cooked dinner. I sat down and tried to write about the things that took place.

We received a call a few weeks later (we were back in Melbourne) to say that GB's father had died. GB, Lily and Buoyie were there with him. His funeral was three weeks later in Wiluna.

This cannot account for death, sorrow, grief. But perhaps there is a sense that relationships with others are the life force itself; what we share with others is this exposure, this opening towards life and death. Death does not mark life's limit, but shares out again, burns again an infinite exposure to the force of life as a vulnerability and sentience to others; we face the death of others in life, in this

world with others. A sentience that works, wounds, re-calls another's stubborn, tender vitality at the heart of being. A swelling of duration in life and death (Bergson 1911).

This is something awkward, not quite proper, has less to do with articulacy and comfort 'with the material' and more to do with a sense that cannot be grasped, but is there, that is happening, that happens to us in those moments of life and death. Couze Venn evokes this, 'Something of the world remains untranslatable, harbouring alterity and testifying to what exceeds representation' (2006: 84). This is what Derrida calls, in *Dissemination*, 'an undecidable syntax of the more' (1981: 43). Levinas, gives a sense of this, as he (awkwardly) tries to say, this is 'to think of what withdraws from thought' that 'there has to be a "thought" that understands more than it understands, more than its capacity...to think of what withdraws from thought' (1996: 76). This is the kind of responsible moment in Levinas –ethics as first philosophy – in that there is a responsibility that extends beyond account or justification, that begins because we share time and space with others. A surplus, that which exceeds grasp, and is more than themes or representations; an extension outward with no definitive return, the moment of death bears this out, exposes our finitude in infinite ways.

The opening that bears the end

Something happens when we share time and space with others that exposes and shares out an absolute lack of continuity or sameness. What we share instead is difference, our different exposure and experience of the world, its turning and trace; this is the mark of the world and others in each of us. Nancy has helped us here. We may have to tell our own story to talk of community, but this is a story that is made up only of points of contact and relatedness to what others show us about the world, a kind of point of articulation where things may be joined but are not fused, where the multiple senses that happen fracture the possibility of a singular narrative. An 'indefinite plurality of singularities' says Nancy (2000: 35). There is always the turning of the leg of a chair ready to face another; another little gathering takes place

by a fire, or in the shade of a tree, or on the back of a ute, or because of travelling with others to Kalgoorlie or Karalundi. I have tried to work in that place where we are prepared to be interrupted, where we cannot stand back but are thrown towards others in community, in infinite kinds of ways. To not be prepared to do this is to invite a kind of totalitarian objectivity where others become the same, are reducible to some common substance or essence, where points of differentiation weld into nothingness. This is how a unitarian sense, what we might call a kind of mastery of others, takes hold.

People at Ululla have shown me something else and have worked a place for community where the point of connection is one's readiness to be taken away, to be interrupted and shown something else by another; to be prepared to turn towards another without rest. A community that is open to the claim that others make; a community that is therefore restless, not complete in-itself, that is not fulfilled by itself, but is always ready to be moved, and to respond to others. Both here and there, both near and far, from now and long ago, in life and in death. A community that, as I have argued, 'interrupts the totality that would fill it' (Nancy 1991: 61). A community that works the time and space for interruption (the interruption of political projects, self-centedness, total abstractions, 'objectivity') to happen and take place; always getting ready to be taken away by others, to extend one's-being-in-common that is extensive beyond any boundary or absolute resting place. A constant attention to the otherwise perhaps, *that more* that gathers on the edge of concepts. What we are left with are possibilities, ethical challenges, a sense of direction perhaps, rather than explanations and meanings (Stewart 2003b: 1). This maybe one way to be attentive to a community that extends in open systems of relatedness as anthropologists say, or as Nancy says, this is to try to gain a sense of, 'a network...that is reticulated and spread out, with its extension for an essence and its spacing for a structure' (2000: 28). A community

that is thus not an absence [nor a dysfunction or "problem" to be managed], but a movement, it is unworking in its singular "activity," it is the propagation, even the contagion, or again the communication of community

itself that propagates itself or communicates its contagion *by its very interruption*. The contagion interrupts fusion and suspends communion, and this arrest or rupture once again leads back to the communication of community. Instead of closing it in, this interruption once again exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities. (1991: 60, original emphasis)

Thus, the question of thinking community rests in maintaining the space for interruption, of being ready and prepared to breakaway. This is about being prepared to break with those projects and forms of representation that have the intent of ‘closing it in’, of ‘gathering it towards a centre’ where one could stand back and no longer be able to face the interruption that is the experience of community. We must remember that (ethnographic) communication happens *not* because others (and ourselves) are easily and categorically understood, but that trying to understand and engage with others (and ourselves) is never complete or determined or finished. Communication is thus not completion, or transparency, but exposure to another sense of things. We seek this in others; there is an experience of being human there – we can not be done with others, enough cannot be said, time, space, the world, events, modes of articulacy, these things that happen with others, takes care of that.

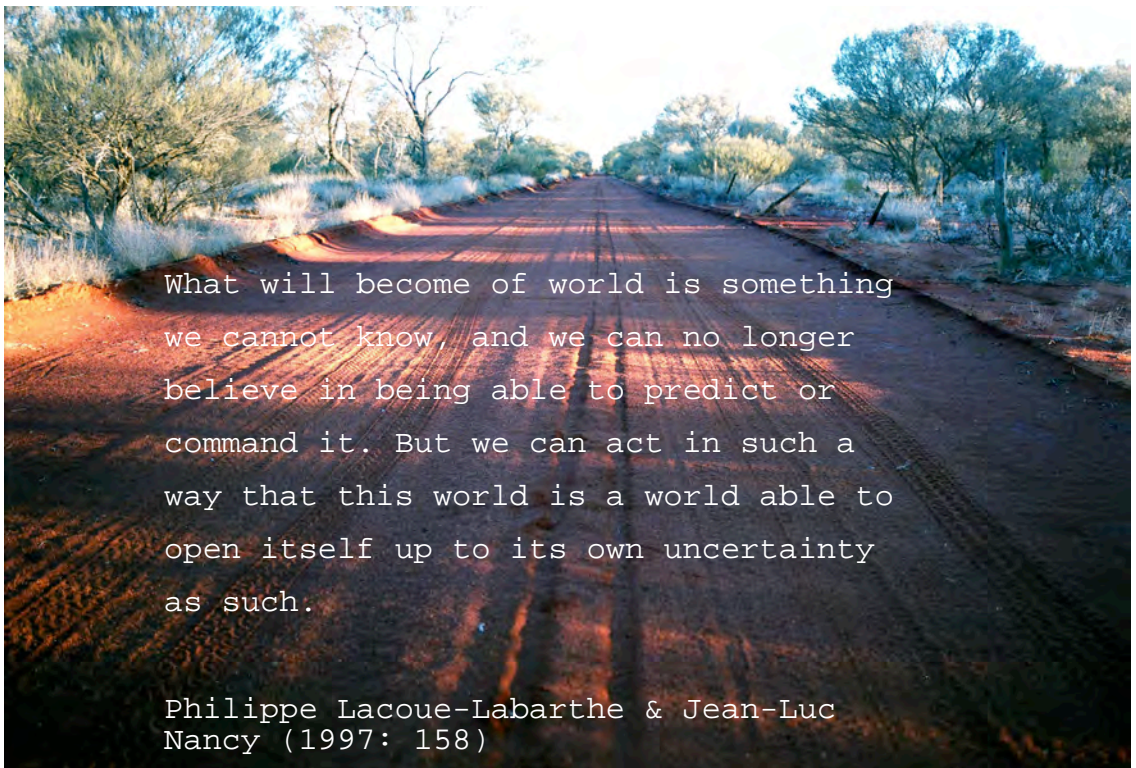
But surely this must say something, some kind of troubling or agitation or passion can be sensed there – that what we seek by being-with-others is not completion or closure, but an infinite exposure to another turning and sense of the world – that we seek this for ourselves and because of others and because ‘we are all in it together’ (Stewart 2003a: 439). We seek out another chance to listen to something different, to something else that happens and affects and takes one away without rest as a mode of *ex*-istence; maintaining a readiness-at-hand for the work of another. (Is this absolutely banal or quite radical and interesting? I’m still not sure, and hope that I never am. It is always the questions that agitate and trouble, and are the stuff of thought and being-in-the-world.)

The chance that this thesis has turned upon is one where community would be this space of interruption, a space where the traditional anthropological project of revealing an underlying essence and ‘putting it to work’ in order to reveal the underlying unity of the group (Norris 2000) can be confronted, and, I hope abandoned. Because under this formulation, that sense of being-with-others, becomes something to transcend, *to work out*, it becomes an object ready-at-hand for classification and determination. I have been trying to think of community as something to dwell in and think about and stay with as something that happens – through a spacing, rhythm and sense of things – when we sit down and gain a sense of what others give light to trace. Not as something that is lost, nor nostalgically longed for, nor even what is threatened, but something that happens to us now more than ever. Community as a kind of place where we catch on to the pace of another (Lingis 2007: 13), that happening that hurries us along or pulls us up, that kind of interruption, and spacing, and energy. Something like a ‘current or a kind of streaming of electricity’ (Bataille 1988: 94), like a ‘yawning’ on the side of the tracks. Banal? Radical? Maybe both at once and hence the opening of a tension that is the sight for communication. But, if this is so, then community is a kind of place where another breakaway comes along and gives us the sense of something else going on, leading on elsewhere, to some other ecstatic gathering, sparks arcing across the gap.

breakaway.

Across the flat

Last night it was beautifully cool and still, the moon was up and shining. Everyone had eaten their dinner. We were all sitting outside, the earth still and warm, dogs lying in the dirt. Dogs baring their chests to the moonlight, outstretched, basking, and then flopping to their sides. *Anyone got any story?* asked Trina. *Nah, I got nothing*, said Shelia. *Hamish, you got any story?* asked Shelia. *Nah I got nothing either*, I replied. *Listen to them mob*, said Trina. That was Sniper's camp – they were laughing and chuckling, talking and telling stories. *S-n-i-p-e-r*, Shelia called out across the flat, her voice hoarse at those decibels, *'Come and tell a story!'* No response, just the quiet. Soon Trina was yelling across the flat beneath the moon too, her voice as she projected it, a little shrill. But nothing, only the muffled sounds of their camp returned after a brief lapse. *Abh we want a s-t-o-r-y*, Trina complained loudly while returning to her 'wire story' – stories written through symbols of kin relations, country and events inscribed and tapped in the dirt with a bit of 'No. 8' fencing wire. She brushed it aside with her foot and began again. Only brief snippets came our way of that night-time murmuring from Sniper's camp, of which we all wished we were part. The rhythm of their discourse punctuated and spurred on by laughter. Sniper's deep chuckling, thick and hearty, making us all smile and be a little envious, tuning our ear across the flat beneath the moon. Our little gathering floated in its gentle waves as we strained to listen to the things that came with eruptions of laughter and soft rumblings of discourse. Perhaps from our distance we longed to be part of that discourse that came in waves and that seemed to show up our present silence. We strained to listen, to gain a sense of what was happening, as if all we could do was 'to echo the vibrancy of things' (Lingis 1994: 96) that came from elsewhere. Our little circle, ears stretched across the flat, was resonant in this 'chance exposure' (Fynsk 1991: ix).



What will become of world is something we cannot know, and we can no longer believe in being able to predict or command it. But we can act in such a way that this world is a world able to open itself up to its own uncertainty as such.

Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe & Jean-Luc Nancy (1997: 158)

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