Audition Colorée

(Hearing Colour)

Implications arising as a result of the diminishment of linguistic and cultural diversity: Supplementary analysis, issues, research parameters and creative strategies informing the film Audition Colorée.

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CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

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I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the 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

The disappearance of many of the world's 6000-9000 languages is occurring at a rapid rate, with a language estimated to become extinct every two weeks, and fewer than 600 expected to survive into the future. With each language representing a unique subjectivity and worldview, embodying systems of memory and experience since the beginnings of its parent culture, the loss of cultural diversity that follows language loss should be considered in terms of its impact on all human cultures, including speakers of dominant culture lingua francas in 'advanced' or economically dominant lingua franca nations. Language loss should also be analysed in the context of the increasing diminishment of biodiversity, and the extinction of certain types of experience, in particular those connecting culture to the natural world, especially via oral language traditions. This dissertation expands on key themes examined in the film *Audition Colorée* (Hearing Colour), a fictionalised poetic essay film utilising experimental and 'anti-documentary' techniques to examine the large scale loss of linguistic and cultural diversity and the problem of representing positions of cultural Otherness in language. While documentaries have been made on the question of language loss, the dissertation contends that more experimental approaches are required in order to speak beyond the discursive limitations of journalistic and documentary genres. These 'factual' modes embody ritualised practices of production and consumption which re-enforce the West's assumed ownership of instrumental reason, objectivity, and scientific rationality, projecting the values of Eurocentric/Western hegemony on to the cultures they attempt to represent. Both dissertation and the film *Audition Colorée* not only acknowledge the challenges—if not impossibility—of representing the 'other' that is embodied by linguistic and cultural difference, they also argue the subjectivities of lingua franca cultures in advanced technocratic economies are, like every language and culture, limited by blind spots and the metaphors they live by through their own cultures. The dissertation examines philosophies of language from a range of disciplines including phenomenology and the emerging field of ecolinguistics, offering perspectives emphasising the significance of linguistic diversity and linguistic relativity, and posing questions about the limitations embedded in western assumptions of superiority in our cultural, technological, and scientific thought. Both the film and dissertation pose the question: while many eschatologies and predictions of humanity's decline exist in popular, scientific and critical theory, could the cause for concern be present at a more fundamental level—the limitations of our own languages and cultures, and the resulting disconnection to diversity as it historically applies to human evolution and experience in relationship to the natural world?

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Introduction

> Language is the most massive and inclusive art we know, a mountainous and anonymous work of unconscious generations.
>
> —Edward Sapir (Sapir 1970, p104)

> Generally speaking, you can only be a foreigner in a language other than your own. Here it's a case of being a foreigner in one's own language.
>
> —Gilles Deleuze (Deleuze 1995, p38)

> No, film won't have a second century. That's all.
>
> —Chris Marker (Cited in Lupton 2006, p2728/4427)

This exegesis provides additional and supplementary perspectives to key themes examined in the creative work *Audition Colorée*, an essay film focusing on the large-scale loss of linguistic and cultural diversity, and the potential implications of this loss for all cultures in the context of globalisation. While *Audition Colorée* should be considered a creative examination of these themes that stands in its own right, and the primary work of this Doctoral submission, this exegesis additionally outlines research pathways which have informed the genesis of Audition Colorée, and expands on concepts and ideas that were highly relevant but could not be included in the final 52 min film, either for reasons of timing or because their expositional nature would not suit intended film approaches.

It is essential to note that the nature of creative practice and exegetical research necessitated a deliberate departure from the standard approaches of a research thesis. Typically that is: defining a question narrow enough to allow for manageable specificity, with the resulting exegesis structured according to chapters outlining findings/conclusions. Central to this project however is the desire to acknowledge the limits of dominant lingua francas, which are often embedded with western biases, with academic writing also a carrier of metaphors and assumptions of Eurocentric supremacy. It is also important to acknowledge the breadth of competing and disparate philosophical perspectives on language itself, which, beyond the basic acceptance of language as a system of communication, can vary widely. As such, this thesis shares, along with the creative work, a deliberate strategy of bricolage—defined by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus*

(1977) as being a mode of production characteristic of the schizophrenic producer. The exegesis should be read as a text constructed to further support questions asked by the film Audition Colorée, a generative 'opening up' of inquiry and possibility, rather than an attempt to answer a narrowly defined single question, as is most often the case for a longer form doctoral theoretical exegesis.

Whilst not a conventional exegetical question, the general research parameters informing this exegesis and creative project *Audition Colorée* are framed as follows: What is lost when languages become extinct, or, where so few native speakers of a language remain, that the ability to express the originating culture embodied in that language is profoundly challenged? What does this loss entail, not only to speakers within these cultures, but to those citizens of lingua franca cultures like our own that dominate market-driven globalised space? If we accept that diversity is intrinsic to human experience then what cost is exacted on the functionality, intellectual depth, cultural memory and diversity of humanity more broadly?

Both exegesis and creative work also ask: what assumptions of superiority and failings in western systems of thought exist that have allowed us to disavow the possibility that minority and endangered languages and cultures, which are largely oral, could inform our own, as we stand by and watch them disappear?

The exegesis also serves to outline influences that have been critical to creative technique and strategy, in particular the creative possibilities of essay film production, notably in related techniques pioneered by Chris Marker, in films such as *Sans Soleil (1983),* a work *Audition Colorée* pays direct homage to.

The film's title *Audition Colorée,* translates as 'colour hearing', and refers to early scientific studies in synaesthesia. Synaesthesia is defined by the Oxford Dictionary (2006) as the condition where 'A sensation in one part of the body is produced by a stimulus applied to another part'.

For example a smell or taste might inspire a specific image or evoke a colour impression in the mind of a synaesthete, and early studies on the

condition included research into which languages elicited colour and visual sense impressions in those with the condition. Some early neurologists went so far as attempting to establish colour scales for different languages: German being brown, Russian yellow, and so on.

Audition Colorée has been selected as a title because the concept of 'hearing colour' offers a metaphor for being able to *sense* the Other, and the cultural difference and linguistic diversity they embody—through non-linguistic means. Synaesthesia is therefore an experiential conduit for encountering difference via the sonic properties of different tongues, and for traversing the liminal zones that exist between languages in the spaces of attempted encounter/translation.

The film takes the form of a fictionalised travelogue, inspired by Chilean Filmmaker Raul Ruiz's (1995) conception of cinematic imagination, as outlined in his *The Poetics of Cinema.*

> [As] an eye to those who use the cinema as a mirror, that is, as an instrument of speculation and reflection, … as a machine for travel through space and time. (Ruiz 2005, p6)

Audition Colorée is, in a play on science fiction technique, set somewhere in the second half of the 21st century, the 'X-End'—a moment in the future that is represented as open-ended and undefined, but imbued with apocalyptic or doomsday allusions.

It is both liberation and catastrophe; ennui, rapture and totalising banality; the collapse of the hollow ideologies following the fall of market-based consciousness and the metaphors of western humanism; the failure of instrumental reason and capitalism's dream of infinite expansion. It might also be the idealised end of history, the Fukuyama vision of experience following the total triumph of free market ideologies, or a site of pre-conceptual experience that lies on the far side of the dominant discursive systems, languages and techno structures of the 21st century. It might even be a place beyond language itself, the zone where humanity approaches its own cognitive limits.

One failure that has led to the 'X-End' is linked to the inability to understand diversity as intrinsic to humanity and life. In the future, massive linguistic and cultural loss has induced a condition of cultural amnesia, compartmentalising subjectivity within the limits of a few homogenised languages and systems of thought.

A travelogue, *Audition Colorée* moves in time from the X-End, to the start of European colonialism and back to the start of the Voyager mission (1977), when NASA aimed to explore the deep space beyond the heliosheath (the edges of our solar system where the sun's gravitational influence ceases). NASA's dream of the conquering the infinite, the film argues, is built as much on fertile imagination and culturally produced metaphors as it is on the objective rationality and value-free assumption of scientific inquiry.

The ideal of seeking and inventing new worlds (NASA's outwardly focused vision of the scientific sublime) is contrasted with a lack of interest in preserving the diversity that already existed on earth, the worlds embodied by the many subjectivities within our earthly languages. Languages and cultures that, while misunderstood and disappearing rapidly, are ultimately more accessible worlds of potentiality than the abstract and largely mathematical realms of empty, vast, and decidedly non-human space.

The Voyager mission, which begins as a metaphor for faith in human transcendence over the natural world and indeed the infinite, instead becomes a metaphor for the limitations of western discourses and human thought.

Traversing across time, from the birth of colonialism in the middle ages until the late 20th century and the X-End around 2050, *Audition Colorée* argues the modern cultural and economic logic of late capitalism driving our current level of global dominance has entrapped humanity within a suite of fatal seductions and fantasies. Scientific imagination and technocracy, while delivering many advantages to a privileged few in globalised space, has also diverted us from what makes us human, providing the technological and philosophical basis for the 'extinction of experience'—the rupture of a specific connection to place, the natural world and biosphere, and the failure to recognise our own limits in the context of finite resources.

Referencing the work of phenomenologists and language theorists such as David Abram, key notions about our relationship to language, and the west's assumed ownership of rationality and objective reason are challenged. Most importantly, philosophies of language that do not portray language solely as the domain of a mechanical scientific rationality, but as intrinsically connected to our relationship with the natural world, as a product of human senses mingling with living beings in biospheres past and present, will be examined.

I do not propose an argument against scientific rationalism that is absolute. A highly significant degree of objectivity is of course achievable in very meaningful ways within our own cultures via the consciousness our own (lingua franca) languages provide; there is much that is tangible in scientific objectivity and indeed much to be celebrated in the scientific imagination. The question asked is not whether the possibility of scientific objectivity exists, but can the assumption of an *absolute state* of rational, detached objectivity within a dominant language such as English remain unchallenged, accepting that scientific inquiry and rationalism too, are practices that cannot live outside of, or independently from, the cultures in which they originate.

Critically, dominant languages such as English embody a view of the world that some theorists argue may prevent the understanding of other cultures (Maffi, 2001). We are trapped by our language and culture and the limits those subjectivities place upon us. The true vastness of human thought may remain unknowable even if our own language is connected to other languages via a wider, historically complex ecosystem of linguistic evolution.

In considering the creative work, several concepts of the sublime will be examined, in particular two specific ideas of spectatorial/experiential identification proposed by Jean-Francois Lyotard, informed by earlier conceptualisations of the sublime by Burke and Kant, as well as ideas of the technological sublime and the rhetoric of the technological sublime, more closely aligned with the technology economy and the function of the scientific imagination.

The additional aspect that relates to ideas of the sublime in the subject matter is the magnitude of losing what is unknowable, when we begin to sense the nature of massive linguistic and cultural loss, when taking a profound cognitive shift away from the meta-narratives of western progress and infinite expansion.

Audition Colorée investigates the paradox of representing this 'unknowable' loss, an absence that exists due to the removal of something (meanings within other lost or dying languages) that was never in our possession. Entering this space of 'unknowable', *Audition Colorée* employs a range of alienation, and experimental filmic techniques, referencing the work of filmmakers such as Chris Marker, Alexander Kluge, John-Luc Godard, and contemporary film practitioners such as John Akomfrah and Hito Steyerl.

The exegesis will also investigate issues regarding language preservation in relation to the protection of biodiversity, and the relatively new field of ecolinguistics, examining the role and significance of language to the challenge of maintaining biodiversity. As research in these emerging fields demonstrates, unique language systems in oral cultures often demonstrate a far more complex relationship to place through language, sometimes falling outside of western scientific recognition, both in terms of linguistic and biological understanding; a lack of understanding connected to the structures and possible subjectivities of lingua franca languages themselves. The exegesis will also look at analysis of modern lingua francas, and how global discourses are perpetuated through the manipulation and normative uses of language, with the result being diminished visibility of language loss, and a resulting lack of awareness and action. The particular consciousness or subjectivity available via our own languages in the context of contemporary global space could arguably be seen as one of *the* major obstacles to resolving current global societal and environmental challenges.

The research will also further examine critiques of scientific and linguistic investigation, highlighting how western modes of cognition and information gathering, however well-intentioned or rigorous, can be insufficient when trying to understand the different modes of thought embodied in minority,

and especially minority oral languages, and therefore fail as the vehicle attempting to protect them.

Personal meditations

> This, then, is the reason why I felt compelled to apologize that I have written this text in English – the global lingua franca which is one of the clearest expressions of the pervasiveness of Western hegemony. (Ang, 2002, p816/ 6333)

A question naturally springs from Ien Ang's quote above and demands to be asked: Is it possible, creatively or theoretically, to examine the question of linguistic diversity in only one language, and especially, from within a monolingual English worldview?

Many scholars of diversity consider or assume English the enemy (Pennycook 2010). It is after all, a tongue associated with the most dominant homogenising forces, and was historically spoken by missionaries, invading armies, colonising administrators—all destroyers of diversity, whether deliberately or unwittingly.

> "I only have one language; it is not mine." Or rather, and better still: I am monolingual. My monolingualism dwells, and I call it my dwelling; it feels like one to me, and I remain in it and inhabit it. It inhabits me. The monolingualism in which I draw… (Derrida, 1998, p1)

And as per the quote above there is no escaping the fact that I too am a 'monoglot'—a monolingual speaker, albeit from multilingual heritage.

In researching this broad topic it is useful to consider the very research questions from this very vantage point, and question whether being a monoglot offers any particular limitations—or possible advantages—as a vehicle for creative and conceptual inquiry into the topic of language.

The genesis of this film lies in a personal fascination with language, conceived as a result of having lived in cultures other than my own as a child for extended periods, and, while growing up in Australia, hearing but experiencing a sense of disconnection to, the European languages and cultures of my own heritage.

I spent formative years in environments where other languages where spoken but I was not in a position to learn them, and certainly not understand them, experiencing an ongoing state where their very presence in my personal

sensual (sonic) sphere highlighted an absence of meaning, a superfluity of difference, while also fostering an understanding that language is power— and its absence powerlessness.

My mother is Dutch but was taught to speak competent German, Italian, and French, with an English level akin to that of a native speaker. My father was a refugee arriving in Australia with no English skills at all following the 1956 Hungarian uprising. He taught himself English alongside other migrant labourers working on the Snowy Mountains scheme, taking evening classes, and eventually attaining a higher education degree. As someone whose formative years were spent in a soviet-influenced communist country, he was competent in Russian, a language forced upon him by Hungary's soviet occupiers, which he refused to ever speak (I would later discover that many Eastern Europeans growing up under communism resented being compelled to learn Russian, and would often claim to not speak it at all). He also spoke reasonable German, which he had taught himself in Budapest, as a language he imagined might be the most useful to master should he one day escape communism. In Australia he came to learn English with near native speaker fluency, including a healthy repertoire of working class colloquialisms, while retaining a strong accent as clue to his cultural background.

Whilst these languages are not under threat and belong to countries whose cultures are firmly connected to what we would consider globalised space, my link to these tongues (or lack thereof) foregrounded a tenuous understanding of language's connection to diasporic identity at a very early age.

My sister and I were encouraged to excel in our educations generally (a common aspiration for families of most cultures) but always in English speaking contexts. Growing up in the setting of Australia's first great multicultural experiment, the Snowy Mountains Hydroelectric Scheme in the small and diverse town of Cooma, it was common for our school classmates to attend lessons connected to their parent culture after hours at 'Greek School' or 'Italian School' or 'Chinese School'—but there weren't enough Dutch or Hungarian speakers for this to be a possibility.

As my parents spoke to each other fluently in English, learning one of their native languages was discussed (not as a familial communication necessity given conversations were in English), but they couldn't agree on which of their own languages we should learn. Learning both would be a burden, especially since neither were fashionable or particularly practical languages to learn.

Ien Ang (2002), in *On Not Speaking Chinese*, has written extensively on the complexity of her own identity, separated from the language of her heritage across generations, and her feelings of identification with China, sometimes culturally imposed upon her on the basis of her Asian/Chinese appearance.

> What connects the diaspora with the 'homeland' is ultimately an emotional, almost visceral attachment. The relationship is, to use Amitav Ghosh's (1989) term, an epic one. It is precisely this epic relationship which invests the homeland myth with its power: it is this epic relationship to 'China'. (Ang, 2002, p866/6333)

However, one does not necessarily feel an 'epic' relationship to homeland if that distant homeland is Holland or Hungary, as proud as one might be of either culture being part of one's heritage. Nor is this connection imposed because of appearance and cultural expectation, as Ang describes her experience as appearing ethnically Chinese. For all intents and purposes all the members of my family looked like Anglo-Australians and were thus less likely to experience xenophobia or any cultural expectation based on appearance.

Dutch and Hungarian were languages not considered essential to acceptance in our own homes or Australian culture, and of little importance to my sister's or my own future. In a fairly cosmopolitan sense, both parents seemed aware of how small their languages were on the world stage, and for their children to learn either would have been nice, but not essential.

One of my highly educated Dutch uncles would joke in English: 'Dutch is not a language, it's a throat condition', demonstrating the alacritous wit and self-reflexivity the Dutch are known for, a playful self-mockery that makes sense considering how multilingual most Dutch typically are, and the opportunity this affords to step outside their own language to poke fun of it.

My father on the other hand, would say: 'When a higher form of life descends upon the earth they will think Hungarian is the perfect language. Until then, nobody will ever understand us,' which offers insight into the lack of linguistic relatives the Hungarian language has in its immediate European surrounds, and the feeling of isolation (and in some cases siege mentality) Hungarians can experience as a result. However, to consider the obstacles to my learning either language in practical terms, with no other Dutch or Hungarian family members in Australia, to whom would I speak? With Dutch so close to English and the Dutch themselves such proficient multilinguals, and with only 10 million speakers of Hungarian, a language with few linguistic relatives–would it not be more a pragmatic choice to learn Spanish, French, German or Japanese? Esperanto even?

The rationale of my parents in not encouraging me to speak their languages is a common but less consequential example of the approach of many trying to adapt to the challenges of migration or colonialism the world over. While they may deeply value their own culture and language on a personal level, they may see it as expendable, an impediment to assimilating or achieving their aspirations, or even a marker of lower status, sometimes even a shameful signpost of lower socio-economic status that can follow the early stages of the migrant experience.

It must be noted that not learning the languages of my heritage is of no consequence for the health of either, and was not a shackle on any possible aspiration I may have had in Australia. Nor did I feel any sense of shame in this cultural heritage, and I only ever experienced minor forms of prejudice.

In so many parts of the world however, especially where conditions for daily survival are much harsher than cosseted mainstream Australia, the situation for minority language speakers and the problems facing the generational transmission of their language and culture are profoundly harsher.

In Mexico a Spanish speaker is referred to as a 'persona da rason' (person of reason) whereas speakers of Indian languages are not afforded 'person of

reason' status (*Voices of the World*, 2005), exemplifying an inbuilt bias that a Mexican Indian language was a roadblock on the path to social or economic ascension.

As another example, in Africa, not one of the 1200 Indigenous languages is officially used as a formal language of instruction in secondary schools (Crystal 2002). Learning the languages of their former colonial masters, a global lingua franca such as English, or a local one such as Swahili in East Africa, is more likely to lead to opportunity.

As a child only speaking one language, albeit the most dominant global lingua franca, I was happy to take on the de facto status of Anglo Australian, thereby skating over the complexity of a truly diasporic form of identification. I still often found myself however, in environments where I was alienated by my inability to speak or understand the languages around me. This was a world of sonic impressions comprising a music of 'no meaning', helping to pique curiosity in, and open my senses towards an experiential awareness of language.

The sound of my parents talking to speakers of their respective native tongues forced open a completely new space that I was not a part of – the musicality and guttural exclamations of Dutch, the more staccato harshness of Hungarian, which so often trailed off into open-ended vowel sounds – sounds I could only imagine trying to reproduce by distorting my mouth, envisaging a tunnel that continued to contort and twist as the sound shifted through complex tones.

I also was lucky to live amongst other cultures as a child in Europe and Africa, and with the exception of learning some Dutch during a four month period of attending school in a small country town in Holland, never learned those encountered languages comprehensively.

In the 1980s our family moved to Kenya for 18 months into a mostly English European colonial community. My parents view was that none of these African languages were 'significant' enough to invest the time required to learn them. In fact, it would be fair to say that I knew of no other

expatriate child or adult who *was* learning any local African languages at the time.

Within the bustling soundscape of the street markets of the coastal town of Malindi, I was exposed to a range of languages on the Swahili Coast of Kenya at the age of 9 and 10. While I could recognise Italian, Dutch, German and French, the sounds of the mostly oral languages of Africa were another sense experience altogether for a young child. In the markets, beaches and streets of Malindi I would hear Kikuyu, Kigiryama, Kamba, Maasai—as well as the Kenyan and Tanzanian lingua franca Swahili, a mix of coastal Bantu languages and the original trade language of the Swahili Coast, Arabic.

It is a condition of childhood that we experience an array of sensory information with limited ability to decode, draw patterns and catalogue from these experiences. Encountering the sensual or sonic qualities of language with no access to the meaning of those sounds, provides a parallel to the feeling of alienation or wonderment experienced when immersed within a culture that is not our own.

In those settings, there was no possible way to engage with the sounds of these words or the meanings they represented: I could hear rhythms, speech patterns, inflections and tones–only the musicality, the *colour* of language.

As outlined *Audition Colorée* literally translates as 'colour hearing', and refers to one of the most familiar branches of early synaesthesia studies, sensory responses evoked by sound, often the sound of languages. (Gage, 1993)

Synaesthesia came to prominence in early modernist literature, and is the subject of the French symbolist Rimbaud's poem, Voyelles (vowels.)

> A noire, E blanc, I rouge, U vert, O Bleu, voyelles …
> **Black, white, red, green, blue, vowels …**
> (Rimbaud, 2000, p2793/8134)

The poem does not translate, as it is the sounds of the accentuated individual vowels (capitalised) the author proposes evoke the colour that follows them.

I do not claim to be a synaesthete, but the condition and the title *Audition Colorée* functions as a metaphor for linguistic difference, and a phenomenological understanding of language as a sensual and bodily process.

According to phenomenologist and language philosopher David Abram, synaesthesia is a feature of oral languages, which evolved in a symbiotic relationship within the environments of their culture, imbued with mysticism and animism. He argues also that synaesthesia also remains central to our experiential connection to language, pointing out that the very act of reading is an evocation of differing sense impressions from words on a page. (Abram, 2012, p139)

Later, as an adult, the experience of having my 'foreign-ness' foregrounded in Asian cultures where I have lived or spent time such as Japan, China, Korea, Vietnam, Taiwan, Tibet; the European cities of Prague, Budapest, and Bucharest, as well as some Indigenous speaking regions of Australia has meant this question has remained close, highlighting an intuitive awareness of the uniqueness of language itself, and offering an openness to more sensual encounters with language.

Looking back at my personal experiences of being in locales dominated by languages I could not understand, I always regard this with a sense of loss. The loss I refer to is the absence of something that was never in my possession; an alienation from meaning that can never be reclaimed in the original setting in which it occurred. This I feel foregrounded a feeling of disconnection that related back to my own linguistic heritage, a sense of having had and then lost some potentially infinite thing, a broken connection to memory that can never be recalled.

I agree with the view of Ien Ang (2002), that diasporic communities should make the most of a complex and flexible positioning their identity

affords them, between host countries and their homelands, what she describes as a 'critical diasporic cultural politics' (Ang, 2002).

I would argue that in my own experience, a diasporic connection to language can be a marker of global *non-citizenship* as it is any a signifier of particular cultural or ethnic identification.

In this sense I support Ang's suggested model of diasporic identification, with 'Where I'm at' a more important statement of identity than 'Where I am from'. However, while the former is fluid, the latter is fixed, in my blood so to speak, but somewhat distantly removed and tenuous. I am not truly 'diasporised' by the two different cultures in my immediate background due to separation from either language—but I'm not 'one of them' either.

The consensus amongst the citizens of Budapest I encountered, and indeed my extended Hungarian family, was, you can't be a Magyar (Hungarian) without speaking Magyarország (Hungarian). My elderly great Aunt, at a family engagement, so could not believe that I had not learned anything other than polite traveller Hungarian, that she literally began to speak louder and louder at me, eventually shouting directly a few inches from my face. 'How can he not speak Hungarian! It will come out of him. I will make it!'

On the Dutch side, there is no point even attempting to speak Dutch for general communication purposes while in the Netherlands. On my most recent trip I attempted to practise my Dutch only to receive responses in perfect English, sometimes accompanied by a knowing smile that cheerily expressed the thought 'I will always speak better English than your Dutch, so don't bother. Sweet of you to try though,' reminding me again of the limitations of my own monolingualism.

My experience of being a monoglot, and the sense of lack it engenders when in the company of polyglots, is not unusual when belonging to the most powerful cultural and linguistic group in terms of global influence—English speakers. Within the subset of Australians I also don't easily identify as Australian, however complex and diverse a post-colonial Australian identity

is in and of itself. My parental diasporic identification, therefore, is still present.

A monoglot's curse

English is the dominant or official language in more than 60 of the world's 185 nation-states recognised by the United Nations (Nettle 2002). English is the language most commonly translated from, and the least commonly translated into, with the difference overwhelmingly favouring the translation of English texts into other languages. (Venuti, 1998)

It is widely agreed amongst linguists that English has the largest vocabulary of any language at between 750,000 (Oxford Dictionaries 2014) to over one million words (Global LanguageMonitor 2014) largely because of its historical collisions with and appropriations of other languages, and its claim to the scientific lexicon. Despite common assumptions, it is no more sophisticated than other languages, which are all roughly equal in their degree of complexity, despite significant room for differences. (Crystal, 2002)

While I have lived overseas extensively and speak rudimentary Mandarin, Dutch, Czech and Swahili, ultimately I am still very limited by my English monolingual worldview. While I acknowledge this perspective is the starting point from which the research inquiry and the film itself begins, rather than a limitation, monolingualism might actually represent a useful position from which to ask questions on the significance of language loss on a scale much more universal than personal.

The formative experiences which inspired a connection to language, alternating senses of alienation and wonderment that illuminated the question of cultural difference, are relevant precisely *because* they highlight the condition of monolingualism and its limits.

To sense the value of language, to hear its sonic properties, to be exposed to its 'colour' and synaesthetic power, but not to have access to the meaning it embodies, this is a state that is analogous to questions I am investigating

surrounding language loss and the mass depletion of linguistic diversity—the creative starting point for the film *Audition Colorée*.

I have to warn readers that the exegesis and film do not shy away from uses of language that border on or even exceed the profane. I make no apologies in proceeding from the belief that a living language is *sensed*, visceral in its corporeality as the phenomenological view of language I choose to reference demands. So often analysis of language comes from a genteel literariness, or a scientific interest (or disinterest in the detached rationalist sense) in the underlying mechanics of language, so that insights range from prudish, reductionist, dryly analytical, or an obsession with what is quaint—such as the number of Eskimo words for snow.

'The rotten is the laboratory of life'—Marx said of history. So too language is a product of a constantly regenerating environment. Its substance is the fecundity, dirt, detritus, beauty and filth of the earth—just as much as pristine and ethereal abstractions that come from our desires to conform language to our idealisations.

As a student backpacker hitchhiking through the Transylvanian mountains of Romania in the late 1990s, I was offered a ride by a group of university students on holiday. They were so very generous in fact they took a massive detour from their own travel plans to spend a week showing me hidden parts of Transylvania, some off-the-map Bukovine monasteries and Romany music bastions deep in the mountains. They were boisterous and would play pranks routinely. When it came to playing pranks on me, they would ask me to shout out, for their amusement, bawdy insults in parroted Romanian at the drivers of giant blue trucks, the snail-slow communist era coal haulers that held us up for hours, in those rare instances when we had the opportunity to pass them on treacherous winding mountain roads. I would scream 'Futa La Luna' (Go Fuck the Moon), or any variety of insults involving lewd sex acts, the heavens, farm animals, or former communist dictators. My father's expletive of choice was 'Isten Baszd Meg'. Translated literally from the Hungarian it means the most profound form of exasperation one can imagine in 'I have been fucked by God'—another example of a tragicomic form of Hungarian fatalism that may be offensive to many, but

something I understand explicitly and smile wryly at every time I hear it—a mark of how Hungarians became attached to their suffering and pushed the theatrical imaginings of that suffering to the very limit.

In my research I have come to form the view that there is a poetry in the rawness of the profane, and in this rawness, as we examine phenomenological philosophies of language, further evidence of its sensual ontology.

Mastering only English makes me perhaps the luckiest form of monoglot there is, I intuitively assume the world beyond English is prepared to meld to my own tongue, as for most English speakers, the world so often does. This is the reason why, according to many linguists, those who speak English as a first language are so often monolingual.

> Isn't multilingualism the curse of Babel? Wouldn't the sharing of a common language lead to better understanding? Monolingual English speakers are usually unaware of the fact that their circumstances are NOT the norm in a world that has long been and is still predominantly multilingual. (Nettle and Romaine 2002, p317-319)

It is the monolingual speakers of English, and the five other official languages of the United Nations (Arabic, Chinese, French, Russian, and Spanish) and perhaps a handful of other dominant players, who need the most prodding to understand the position of privilege they occupy, the awareness of *difference* their own subjectivity is missing, and the limitations of our assumed linguistic supremacy. None more so than lingua franca-speaking monolinguals, because our state of linguistic sameness and hegemony is *not the worldwide norm,* entrapping us within a single, hegemonic world view.

Linguistic diversity and cultural difference

> The loss of language is tragic precisely because they are not interchangeable, precisely because they represent the distillation of the thoughts and communication of a people over their entire history. (Mithun, cited in Crystal 2002, p38)

For reasons to be outlined when the creative approach to *Audition Colorée* is discussed further, the project's themes are best examined via a strategy other than conventional documentary film.

Its goal from the outset is to subvert and re-invent techniques and problematise types of spectatorial identification common to what are termed 'factual' storytelling practices (including documentary) and necessarily avoid what is expositional in these genres, and which is better-embraced in this exegesis.

While the creative and representational strategies in film technique will be highlighted in later chapters, it is necessary to outline key background issues and define concepts central to debates around cultural diversity and language loss in this supporting exegesis.

It is important first of all to acknowledge that I am not a linguist, cognitive scientist or a philosopher of language. I am a filmmaker, writer, musician and sound designer embarking on a creative project, with a grounding in film, arts and cultural theory first and foremost.

It is therefore not my intention to wade into complex and unsettled debates about the essential nature of language, which remains a hotly contested interdisciplinary space charged with competing viewpoints, disciplines and discourses.

In this exegesis I seek to acknowledge those differing views of language, but also outline working definitions and conceptual parameters that support the creative strategies of *Audition Colorée*, including some key theoretical positions on language.

It is often claimed that language contributes to the shaping of thought, and that different languages do so in different ways. This idea is referred to as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (or sometimes simply Whorfianism), after the linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf.

There are two versions of this hypothesis. The stronger version (linguistic determinism), asserts that thought is completely determined by language, while the weaker version (linguistic relativity), asserts instead that ways of thinking tend to be partly shaped by language. Linguistic determinism leaves little space for the creative thinking that might transcend the limitations of language, and as such linguistic relativity has achieved greater acceptance.

> ... the 'linguistic relativity principle,' which means, in informal terms, that users of markedly different grammars are pointed in different evaluations of externally similar acts of observations, and hence are not equivalent as observers but must arrive at somewhat different views of the world. (Whorf 1956, p221)

> Indo-European languages can be roughly calibrated-English, French, German, Russian, Latin, Greek, and the rest; but when it comes to Chinese, Maya, and Hopi, calibration, says Whorf, is structurally difficult if not impossible. Speakers of Chinese dissect nature and the universe differently from Western speakers. A still different dissection is made by various groups of American Indians, Africans, and the speakers of many other tongues. (Caroll in his forward to Whorf 1956, pV)

> **And;**

> To understand Einstein's relativity a Westerner must abandon his spoken tongue and take to the language of calculus. But a Hopi, Whorf implies, has a sort of calculus built into him. (Caroll in his forward to Whorf 1956, pVIII)

Many linguists see language as a vehicle for the expression of thoughts that already exist entirely independently of the words and grammatical structures that express them.

One example is the theory of Universal Grammar, proposed by Noam Chomsky. A hypothetical Martian anthropologist is described in the writings of Chomsky as one who, upon studying the world's languages, would conclude that they are all dialects of a single language embodying a 'universal grammar' reflecting a hardwired, genetically determined linguistic module inherent in the human brain. (Hauser MD, 2002, p1569)

A similar ontology of language framed by scientific discourse (specifically cognitive science) and following an equally mechanistic and universal model of language is the Language of Thought Hypothesis (LOTH) championed by American philosopher Jerry Fodor. Fodor describes thought as represented in a 'language' of the mind (sometimes known as Mentalese) that allows complex ideas to be built up by combining simpler thoughts in various ways. In its most basic form the theory states that thought itself follows the same rules as language and includes syntax. Mental language (Mentalese) describes elementary concepts operated upon by logical rules establishing causal connections to allow for complex thought. Syntax as well as semantics have a causal effect on the properties of this system of mental representations, all of which represent the essential language, rendering the actual languages spoken as subordinate to the structure of Mentalese. (Lamarque and Asher, 1997, p68)

It is not the goal of this exegesis to deconstruct or challenge a theory of Mentalese or a Universal Grammar that presents the case that all languages are interchangeable codings, but acknowledge the wide range of competing conceptualisations regarding the nature of what language is as a cognitive process and how it functions as a system of communication.

However, a universal theory that defines language occurring structurally at the cognitive level, seemingly undermining theories of linguistic relativity could also be read as a variant of one the primary metaphors underpinning scientific discourse—that the universe is a matrix of rules and that mastery of the universe simply requires discovery of those rules. A mentalese or structuralist approach to language could thus be read as a possible over-extension of scientific discourse and rationality, a desire to make language conform to a particular theory of science.

The structuralist view has been attacked by scholars who argue far fewer underlying structural similarities exist between languages than is often assumed, resulting in no clear case for Mentalese or a Universal Grammar.

> A widespread assumption among cognitive scientists, growing out of the generative tradition in linguistics, is that all languages are English-like but with different sound systems and vocabularies. The true picture is very different: languages differ so

> fundamentally from one another at every level of description (sound, grammar, lexicon, meaning) that it is very hard to find any single structural property they share. The claims of Universal Grammar, we argue here, are either empirically false, unfalsifiable, or misleading in that they refer to tendencies rather than strict universals. (Evans, 2009, p429)

While the fundamental nature or ontology of language remains in a contested philosophical (and scientific) zone, conceptions of language that are most relevant to *Audition Colorée* are those that allow languages to be considered in the context of cultural difference.

Mechanistic and universal models of language have also been critiqued as a means of imposing western models of language on other cultures, carrying on a tradition of Eurocentrism that diminishes difference and perpetuates assumptions of Western supremacy.

This exegesis takes the position that most theories of language do link it inexorably to culture, and therefore, cultural diversity and linguistic diversity remain symbiotically enmeshed. This, I argue, necessitates accepting a position that language, even if a series cognitive codes which are endlessly interchangeable in theory, have a very different real-world presence than those codes, and *are* intrinsic to cultural formation and cultural diversity.

American translation theorist Lawrence Venuti describes language as being:

> … never simply an instrument of communication employed by an individual according to a system of rules—even if communication is undoubtedly among the functions that language can perform … I rather see language as a collective force, an assemblage of forms that constitute a semiotic regime. Circulating among diverse cultural constituencies and social institutions, these forms are positioned hierarchically, with the standard dialect in dominance but subject to constant variation from regional or group dialects, jargons, clichés and slogans, stylistic innovations, nonce words, and the sheer accumulation of previous uses. (Venuti, 1998, p21)

And while I would not argue a fixed or absolute degree of linguistic relativity, in my view it is clear that difference is present in the link between subjectivity, worldview, and the language someone speaks. This conception of language provides for an open-ended examination of its connection to diversity—cultural, linguistic and ecological—and is the basis from which the creative work and exegesis commences.

I also support also viewpoints such as Abram (1997) that understand language as formed sensually from our relationship with place and other living beings, as is the standpoint of many phenomenologist language philosophers, as well as linguists working in the emerging field of ecolinguistics, which I will examine in greater detail later.

It is also important to provide some working definitions and survey prominent concepts that frame both culture and cultural diversity, while acknowledging that such issues can be also subject to interpretation and contested by a variety of scholars. An exhaustive definition of all facets of culture could, for example, comprise several doctorates or indeed careers, so I will provide a working definition here.

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (2006) culture is 'A particular form or type of intellectual development. Also, the civilization, customs, artistic achievements, etc., of a people, esp. at a certain stage of its development or history.'

Culture provides the framework wherein humans learn to organise thoughts, emotions, and behaviours in relation to environment. Although people are born into a culture, it is not innate. Culture is learned. Culture teaches how to think, conditions how to feel, and instructs members how to act, especially how to interact.

Cultural diversity can be thought of in a variety of ways, via its historical cultural differences, or nascent forms of difference arising from changes in cultural, geopolitical, media or technological contexts.

It is almost impossible to think of the concept of cultural diversity outside of ideas of the 'global' or ongoing processes and systems related to these ideas of globalisation. In this exegesis, I will make repeated references to 'globalised space', which applies to regions of the world dominated by the discourses, ideologies, economic practices, and technologies (particularly communications technologies) of neoliberal or market capitalism, what is

referred to commonly as the 'West' or 'North' or the 'advanced', the most influential nations in economic and geostrategic terms.

Globalisation itself is often described in differing ways, in terms of its historical precedents and its contemporary particularity.

> While Steger (2003) suggests that globalization can be mapped more or less against the entirety of human history, others, such as Robertson (2003), describe successive waves of globalization starting with the era of European expansionism. For Mignolo (2000: 236), although the scope and speed of current globalization is without precedent, it is 'the most recent configuration of a process that can be traced back to the 1500s, with the beginning of transatlantic exploration and the consolidation of Western hegemony'. (Pennycook 2010, p514)

To these mapped points in time I would add another, the fall of the Berlin wall and the collapse of communism, which opened the space for neoliberal market ideologies to expand largely unopposed since the early 1990s.

Although arising global inequalities of poverty, health, education and the challenges facing the preservation and maintenance of linguistic and cultural diversity remain primary concerns, it is more useful to see globalisation as complexly related to these than as entirely synonymous with their cause.

> International relations of trade, commerce, pollution, interaction and intervention are fundamentally inequitable, but it is not useful to reduce globalization only to a term that reflects such inequities. This diversity of concerns can be captured in part by Appadurai's (1996) formulation of 'scapes'—ethnoscapes (the new mobility of tourists, migrants and refugees), technoscapes (new technologies), financescapes (flows of capital), mediascapes (global media) and ideoscapes (ideas and values)—and the various additions that have been made to them, including sacriscapes (religion) (Waters, 1995), eduscapes (global educational movements), and of interest to the theme of this paper, global linguascapes (languages). (Pennycook 2010, p514)

For the purposes of this exegesis, I argue that most oral language cultures exist outside of globalised space, even if these cultures are marginalised by the forces of the global or at direct risk because of them, or when its speakers straddle a space between their originating culture and a/the global dominant one(s).

It is important, I feel, to regard this form of diversity in different terms, as most scholarly analysis that exists on the question of diversity, in my view,

focuses on diversity *within* globalised space and is written from perspectives framing issues of diversity within dominant nations.

Media and cultural theorists often focus on cultural diversity within '1st or 2nd world' nations, where there have been new shifts marked by a range of political, economic, and cultural transformations. In particular, a form of 'atopia' is sometimes willed into being, one that does not fit within the discursive scopes of national identity and the nation state.

> This can be seen in popular and academic discourses that often identify two interlinked phenomena primarily, the first being globalisation and the multivalent material and symbolic de-nationalisation processes it jump-started, followed by the expansion of the technological environment that made "digital" and "digitalisation" everyday. (Christensen, 2013, p2401)

In positivist media theory terms, this has led to redefinitions of historical ideas (and ideals) of cosmopolitanism—'the belief that all humanity is of a simple community' facilitating an interplay of diversity mediated by new technologies and instantaneous communications. It is an ideology (or idealism rather) that links people together no matter what race, culture or section of the world they are originate—'uniting and dividing, experienced simultaneously as both a near and distant possibility' (Christensen, 2013, p2402).

However, these sometimes romantic conceptualisations of common ground between all cultures, and the diversity that is created by their interplay, only really apply to those cultures, by and large, that have attained a functional status and participatory standing in the global market economy. Even still, it is highly questionable whether the idealism of the more positivist notions of cultural diversity embedded in concepts like cosmopolitanism are delivering, or are capable of delivering, on their purported potential for diversity.

As will be examined in greater detail later in the chapter looking at the role of English, technology and transnational media, the impact on diversity has been far from cosmopolitan for cultures removed from the dominant global sphere—or even many *within* globalised space.

A first-world-favouring, 'market consciousness' arising since the fall of the Berlin Wall has attained an almost theological authority in perpetuating economic rationalist discourses, cultural homogenisation, and the privileging of certain discursive traditions driven by mass media and mass market systems leading to what American author Jonathan Franzen has described as a structure where commercial imperatives reign over all others.

> The world of the present is a world in which the rich lateral dramas of local manners have been replaced by a single vertical drama, the drama of regional specificity succumbing to a commercial generality. (Franzen, 2002, p872/3937)

I would argue concepts akin to cosmopolitanism have given many in advanced technological global space the sense of possible connection to rich diversity, which is a seductive illusion, a sophistry born of a consumerist meta-discourse. Consumption of cultural products is not necessarily culturally empathetic: listening to Reggae does not necessarily imply awareness of the complexity of West Indian history, nor does watching Wayang Kulit puppetry on holiday in Bali truly provide an insight into what it means to be Balinese.

Another cosmopolitanism standard-bearer is the celebration of appropriated hip-hop styles and hybridised language uses in non-western locales. Where this occurs in contexts where existing traditions attached to previous cultures are disappearing it may have many benefits, which are of course best judged from within those cultures and communities.

However it also has to be asked if the difference that existed before the hybridisation of local flavour with an imported, commercial musical style, is greater or more significant than the difference that existed *before* the arrival of this western force. This assumed state of cosmopolitanism that is largely a privilege of, and exported from the West, perpetuates a blindness to the diminishment of existing difference, which in turn places greater pressure on linguistic diversity, foregrounding the dominance of a limited few languages.

> The language of the global village (or McWorld, as some have called it) is English: not to use it is to risk ostracisation from the benefits of the global economy. (Nettle and Romaine 2002, p473/3332)

What happens within globalised space is visible to academic debate and critical and cultural reflection. What happens outside of it is often missed. One could argue that this is partly to do with the commodification itself of pedagogy and research culture, and the need for academia to align itself with market practices.

Acknowledging these factors I argue we should see cultural diversity as being the qualities of diverse or different cultures *in opposition* to, or marginalised by, the monoculture of the global—the process of homogenisation of cultures of late capitalism which can be considered as a gradual whitewashing, a slow decay of difference and the extinction of particular types of experience invisible to the subjects of dominant cultures.

Not all cultural specificities are innately valuable or worth defending. Prejudices exist in many cultures, sanctioning violence against minority groups, or the mistreatment and oppression of women for example, or enacting prejudices against those embodying ideas of Otherness to their own cultural singularities.

Diversity must also be conceptually understood as a system that provides for the mutual respect of cultural differences relative to each culture, whether they be western or non-western, developed or developing. Taking these basic parameters, we can enhance our definition further to include the 'density of difference'—with this density and degree of difference considered on a global scale, reflecting historic as well as contemporary diversity, within *and* outside of globalised space.

And with this question of diversity, it is useful to consider analysis on the question of diversity's intrinsic significance to all cultures.

Philosopher and psychologist William James saw diversity as the basic condition of life, one which humans, like all species, are born from and which forms the very substance (or rather function) of consciousness. If consciousness is what makes us human, says James, it then follows that diversity makes us human.

> The human species did not evolve in a world of drab monotony. Our brains, the consciousness function they produce, and the cultural variety expressing that function, have evolved over millions of years within a lavish, enveloping environment of biological riches … conversely, the natural environment has been widely transformed by differentiated human action. We are, first of all, born to diversity: "Consciousness, from our natal days, is of a teeming multiplicity of objects and relations … From then on until the day we die the mind is forever choosing to attend to one thing or another, but "few of us are aware how incessantly" this faculty is at work because it is the very substance, and therefore not often also the object, of consciousness. (James cited in Maffi, 2001, p55}

This view of diversity challenges the assumption that language loss occurring outside of globalised space is of no consequence to those who speak lingua francas only; those whom, like myself, enjoy prime position in terms of economic privilege, and the concomitant advantage that comes with the assumed superiority of our own language, its purportedly invincible discursive traditions, belief systems, logos and objective scientific rationality.

Just as evolution depends on genetic diversity, linguists argue that the intellectual evolution [and I add possible preservation] depends on diversity and the cross-fertilisation of thought that multilingualism provides (Crystal, 2002, p34).

Another definition that deserves re-examination is the widely used term 'language preservation' which is imbued with an almost archival semantic. It suggests a rear-view perspective on what is already lost, as if linguistic surveys cataloguing vocabularies could preserve language in its living form; and so for the purposes of this exegesis the term, 'preservation of linguistic diversity' will be applied, with the term assuming the ongoing and active maintenance of language and cultural traditions by native speakers, whether in a traditional sense, but also inclusive of hybridised forms which do not result in the decay of the original culture.

The significance of language loss

> Each language constitutes a certain model of the universe, a semiotic system of understanding the world, and if we have 4,000 different ways of to describe the world, this makes us rich. (Ivanov cited in Crystal 2002, p36)

Around half the known languages of the world have vanished in the last five hundred years (Nettle and Romaine 2002), but the rate of loss is increasing dramatically. Estimates surmise the existence of at most 18,000 languages when the first Europeans set off to explore, define and dominate the new world. For example, the number of languages spoken in Brazil in 1500 AD has been estimated to be about 1,175 (Crystal, 2002), and is now less than 200.

The number that currently exists globally—estimated at 6000 up to a possible 9000—will halve again throughout the course of this century, with only 600 to survive over the longer term.

It would not be a bold conclusion to make that loss of linguistic and cultural diversity (or even biodiversity) is often simply accepted as part of the inevitable metanarrative of progress—a necessary price paid by some cultures to keep the West rich, or the cost paid for the beneficial transition from 'developing' world to the more desired status of 'developed' world.

Few would argue that those in less wealthy regions of the world should be denied the economic advantages those in advanced economies take for granted, solely in the name of preserving their cultural singularity. Many of the greatest challenges many minority language speakers face in terms of health and education for example, on a prima facie level at least, could be assuaged by a greater capacity to integrate economically with the global market and access services we in the West take for granted.

We must also be careful not to project onto cultures outside our own any paternalistic idealisation of the western imagination in the 'noble savage' or other romantic traditions, limiting their opportunity to enjoy the flexibility to develop and assume a role or within the economic opportunity offered by a globalised world, or any cultural identity they may wish to assume.

We must also acknowledge, however, that the path taken to achieve global integration does not always allow the freedom to learn and speak whatever language, or adopt or retain any cultural practices, people might wish to.

Within the never-stopping performativity and self-contained logic of globalisation itself, little thought is given to the price exacted on the totality of human thought of language loss, or credence given to the idea that all people might benefit from diversity provided by cultures outside their own.

The ideal would be for any speaker of an endangered language to have the right to retain any aspect of culture and identity they choose, as well as access economic opportunity and any level of wider cultural engagement and interaction that might be desirable to them. And if this were to require mastering a lingua franca while retaining the freedom to speak their own, so be it.

However this requires a far greater commitment of resources, and more considered policy settings and cultural support than is currently offered by the dominant nations of the global economy, or global institutions such as the United Nations that claim to speak for all cultures.

Given oral cultures, the largest groups representing diversity are so often the least wealthy in monetary terms, and may exist in a state of precarious survival or economic isolation, often because of first world pressures such as habitat destruction, the chances for many of these cultures to enjoy this idealised flexible positioning are minimal. This is before we even consider the complexity of the causes of language loss in the context of free market rationalisms and rapid industrial and technological change, as well as many other factors that trigger cultural erasure.

In most regions of the world multilingualism or bilingualism is a fact of life with multiple language acquisition occurring within a family or cultural setting (in Africa and Southeast Asia, for example).

With at a minimum 6000 current languages and 200 nation states, despite rapidly diminishing linguistic diversity, multilingualism remains healthy in many parts of the world. (Nettle and Romaine 2002)

In traditionally monolingual cultures, such as those of Britain, the US and contemporary Australia, the learning, to any extent, of a second or other language is usually an activity superimposed on the prior mastery of one's first language and is a different process intellectually from learning languages organically in a multilingual, cultural diverse environment.

> The human brain has the natural capacity to learn several languages, and most members of the human race live in settings where they naturally and efficiently use their brains in precisely this way. Half the human race is known to be at least bi-lingual, and there are probably half as many bilinguals again in those parts of the world where there have been no studies, though cultural contacts are known to be high. People who belong to a predominantly monolingual culture are not used to seeing the world in this way, because their mindset has been established through centuries of being part of a dominant culture, in which other people learn your language and you do not learn theirs. (Crystal 2002, p45)

For those English (or other lingua franca) speakers who have learned another language it is nearly always another global lingua franca, and this is where a realisation of the significance of linguistic difference can first emerge. We can on a minor level marvel at linguistic difference when considering differing concepts, ideas and language between these dominant languages, but this is only a small step to understanding the significance of sensing the significance of difference between languages, and language loss, on a much wider scale.

In many Standard Average European (SAE) languages or other global lingua francas there are concepts, words or languages uses exist which, while not entirely defying translation, highlight notable differences in language use and conventions.

In Gaelic (Irish) there are no words for 'yes' or 'no', the answer to a question contains a repetition (as in Latin) of the verb, either with or without a negative particle. Russian and other Slavic languages have no use of the articles 'a' or 'the'. There are also concepts that are unique to languages. 'Saudade' in Portuguese is an intense concept of nostalgia and melancholy (for what might have been) that the Portuguese consider culturally specific,

and linked to the Fado Portuguese love song tradition. The formerly nomadic and marauding horseman Hungarians still have two hundred different words describing the breed and colouring of horses.

Beyond that, there are many culturally specific language uses and expressions. In Slovak, you don't heavily perspire—you 'sweat like a donkey in a suitcase.' A few others examples if words with a direct English equivalent include:

> **French: demi-monde [der-mee-monhd]** (noun) A half world, hidden from the mainstream and usually kept secret. It can describe a group of people on the political or legal margins of society. (Moore, 2005 p354/ 2020)
>
> **French: jolie-laide [jol-ee-led]** (idiom) It literally means 'pretty and ugly' but describes the type of feminine beauty that is human, and not manufactured. (Moore, 2005 p380/ 2020)
>
> **German: Korinthenkacker [kaw-rint-em-kak-er]** (noun) A 'raisin pooper'—that is, someone so taken up with life's trivial detail that they spend all day defecating raisins… an irritating pen pusher or filing fanatic.(Moore, 2005 p440/2020)

These examples however, are all largely drawn from lingua francas and dominant languages in themselves. They all have a longstanding written tradition, and while they may have significant variances from English and their own proud forms of cultural singularity, they are far closer to English than oral languages, the languages which comprise the most significant degree of diversity, and are most at risk.

Of the many languages that make up the family of human cultures, only around 20 play a role of significance, and even fewer dominate the complex of market and technological experience that has become increasingly homogenised in terms of power, ideology and influence, in our understanding of the global.

Much of this diversity is diversity that we will never directly encounter from our position of privilege.

> Europe has only 3 per cent of all languages, and China, despite having 21.5 per cent of the earth's population and 8.6 per cent of its land area, has just 2.6 per cent of the world's languages. The greatest biolinguistic diversity is found in areas inhabited by Indigenous peoples, who represent around 4 per cent of the world's population, but speak over 60 per cent of the world's languages. (Nettle 2002, p52/3332)

The greatest diversity clearly occurs in regions where there has been the least cultural and linguistic effort from the West to truly understand this difference and its significance. In Papua New Guinea, the most linguistically diverse country in the world, linguists Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine reveal only a dozen of its 800 languages have been described in any detail. (Nettle 2002, p441/3332)

The historic scale of oral language loss is also so great there is simply no truly accurate way of calculating exactly how many languages have disappeared in recent centuries as a result of many reasons—linguistic depletion and attrition arising from colonial domination and introduced disease being some historical factors amongst many.

Some oral languages have number systems we can't recognise, are rich in concepts that don't exist in lingua franca languages, encapsulate stories, meanings and seeming abstractions that defy the western imagination, or have unique ways of describing environment, embracing different temporal and spatial connections to reality itself.

And critically, while language is a system subject to dynamic change, it also reaches back into history, acting as a repository of memory since a culture's first inception, relying on linguistic heritage to be maintained for these systems of memory to be kept alive.

The degree to which individual and collective cultural subjectivity is determined by the language of a given speaker remains a contested issue, however there is little dispute that the centralisation of linguistic power as a result of advanced technological capitalism and market-focused consciousness is further creating a barrier between ourselves (speakers of lingua francas in 'advanced' economies) and all of the other cultures and languages which have evolved alongside our own.

Linguistic change—as opposed to linguistic depletion or extinction—is common to all languages and occurs in varying rates. In China, more than 50 distinct language groups exist, but Mandarin is the language of government,

education and business, and is now imposed across the nation. However, it is worth considering how much Mandarin itself has changed. David Abram points out that a 1716 a dictionary listed 40,545 distinct characters in traditional Chinese, now there are around 8000 in use. (Abram, 2012, p1779/5728)

Only 200 years ago, French was not the mother tongue of the majority of people born in France, whereas today, non-French-speakers living in France belong to a small and shrinking minority. (Muhlhausler, 2001, p159)

Additionally, only four hundred years ago, the idea that English would be the dominant global language would have been thought of as impossible, due its lack of fashionability and perceived inferiority.

Most linguistic diversity occurs in small societal groups or tribes, with some evidence that increased environmental diversity (flora for example) may indicate greater linguistic diversity, which will be examined in more detail later.

Studies indicate that the highlight of human linguistic diversity was in the Neolithic era was around 10,000 BAC. The ultimate conditions for linguistic diversity it is argued, were small societies, in a sociolinguistic milieu much like the upper horticulturalists in the upper Amazon or Papua New Guinea today, where hundreds of languages are found in relatively small areas, with numbers of speakers ranging from the hundreds to 10,000. (Maffi, 2001, p175)

Many linguists agree, that when a language dies a vision of the world dies also, with often no true means to resurrect it to a 'living' state. While endangered tongues can be written down and recorded, languages are performative systems that need to remain in active states to truly be considered alive. This often also applies also to speakers of a language who are no longer able to apply their language in its initial context. For a speaker of the Northern Territory language Walpiri, an oral language, how would the complex understanding of songlines, specific to environmental and coded cultural contexts be re-affirmed through daily life in an urban setting? What

would it mean to displace a language of continual spiritual connection to a specific topography and cultural history, and apply it to the urbanised grind of commute, work, and consume?

Theorists in the relatively recent field of Ecolinguistics eloquently provide of examples of, and instances where, specific subjectivities relate to place, time, and cultural memory. Phenemonologically based models also argue language relates to lived experience and sensorial knowledge within environment. Both disciplines not only challenge core assumptions of structural and mechanistic views of language, but assist also in linking linguistic diversity to biological diversity.

Considering biological diversity and linguistic diversity in tandem there are a number of immediate parallels between the two concepts. Present day diversity is the outcome of processes that took a very long time: millions of years in the case of biodiversity, and up to 100,000 years in the case of linguistic diversity. Once this genuine diversity is lost, it cannot be easily restored.(Muhlhausler 2001, p160)

A second, equally important similarity is that linguistic diversity and diversity in the natural world are both functional. The 6-9,000 or so languages that exist today reflect necessary adaptations to different social and environmental conditions.

Language is not just a marker of cultural difference and diversity; minority languages join our own in forming the true totality of human thought. Each language lost is not just a collection of words that can be archived and easily understood when extracted from the vault, language is a dynamic way of viewing the world, a continually regenerating performativity.

There are countless examples of difference. A brother calls his sister 'sister' and a girl calls her brother 'sister' in some Aboriginal languages in Australia and other languages in Melanesia. The same word is used to refer to both grandfather and grandchild. In these instances, having the same label usually means getting the same treatment.

In Aiwo, a language spoken in the Solomon Islands, all words referring to useless objects have to be given a prefix indicating uselessness. One could only wonder how this practice might affect consumer society—positively, one might suspect. (Muhlhausler 2001, p161&162)

Evidentiality systems exist in many languages—but not English or French for example—with an entirely different way of dealing with the expression of truth, very unlike our own approach to understanding and verifying facts. Evidentiality systems have built into them concrete rules for supporting the truth of a given statement, so that deception cannot easily be achieved by ambiguity. (The degree to which ambiguity is the linguistic vehicle for the public relations industries of the West to 'spin' political messages and manipulate media and public opinion could form the subject of another exegesis entirely.)

Death in traditional Polynesian languages is described by a number of words, ranging from initial permanent unconsciousness to the ultimate disintegration of the body. The practice of 'reburial' reflects this linguistic distinction.

The influence of certain semantic distinctions may be so strong that it leads languages to interpret reality in very different ways, which may be described as either event-dominated or object-dominated. Many standard European languages can be regarded as object-dominated because of their strong tendency to convert processual verbs into abstract, object-like nouns. For example, the subject matter of linguistics is not perceived as the activity of speaking but as an object termed 'language'. One of the consequences for this area of enquiry is that, while speaking always involves people, and a spatial, temporal situation, the abstract term language itself suggests an object that can be analysed as something self-contained. (Muhlhausler 2001, p161-163)

Equally important in Western languages is the very strong presence of causality. Verbs such as 'to teach' or 'to cure' can be paraphrased as 'to cause to learn' and 'to cause to get better'. However, there is a very different, equally valid way of looking at what goes on in the classroom or in a doctor's

practice, as seen in languages such as Wintu, an American Indian language spoken in California, which favours comitative, or 'being with' interpretations. In a Wintu's perception, the doctor takes part in the patient's recovery and the teacher shares the learner's learning progression (Muhlhausler 2001, p165).

Languages also differ according to the metaphors their speakers live by. One Western metaphor is that of 'rule', the idea that there is an abstract ruler of the universe who has laid down the rules of nature. So deeply entrenched is this metaphor that scientists believe that it is literally true and are convinced they can discover the rules of nature, a belief that has only recently begun to weaken as a consequence of discoveries by chaos theoreticians (Muhlhausler 2001, p165).

The 'Universal' and the 'Global'

It was only recently that the United Nations sought to construct mechanisms within UNESCO that would serve to underpin the future preservation of cultural and linguistic diversity. The 2001 Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity states:

> Cultural rights are an integral part of human rights, which are universal, indivisible and interdependent. The flourishing of creative diversity requires the full implementation of cultural rights.... All persons have therefore the right to express themselves and to create and disseminate their work in the language of their choice, and particularly in their mother tongue; all persons are entitled to quality education and training that fully respects their cultural identity; and all persons have the right to participate in the cultural life of their choice and conduct their own cultural practices, subject to respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. (UNESCO, 2001)

Whilst the declaration clearly foregrounds linguistic diversity's contribution to cultural diversity overall, critics point to the fact that the UN and its most prominent institutions were simultaneously created on the ideals of the 1944 Bretton Woods conference, the meeting at which 44 nations met to agree upon a series of new rules for the post-WWII international monetary system. The two most significant legacies of Bretton Woods were the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The very forces which spearhead the diminishment of cultural diversity, linguistically and otherwise, are therefore sibling organisations in operation alongside their far less powerful familial member UNESCO.

It is these market-based institutions which had a more profound—and decidedly homogenising influence—on global culture than the protection and promotion of cultural diversity that would be within the remit of UNESCO. UNESCO's 11th hour declarations forewarning of diversity loss, while well-meaning, are dwarfed by the holistic realities of an organisation which champions the influence of market economics and the suite of ideologies and power relations that accompany it.

Within nation states the universal adoption of a single language is often seen as a precondition for national identity, modernisation, and economic integration, particular in the discourse of globalisation and the ability of

'developing' nations to access the promise of the global market. (Muhlhauseler, 2001, p160)

With the high rate of language loss (a language disappears every 1-2 weeks) it is not enough that languages can in some cases be written down and recorded prior to their disappearance, although of course, linguistic surveys, and the work of many passionate and concerned linguists have contributed greatly to the understanding of language loss. (Crystal, 2002)

Language is however, a performative system, continually changing and evolving, and requiring constant reiteration. As Baudrillard suggests culture cannot be stockpiled and kept for emergencies, only existing in the act. (Baudrillard, 2003)

There are examples however of successfully resurrected languages such as modern Hebrew but such a remarkable feat is not the norm, but perhaps only possible because of Hebrew's extensive written tradition (arguably the first alphabetically written language), not to mention the particular, nearly unique resilience of Judaic peoples to maintain traditions in exile and enforced states of diaspora. (Lamarque & Asher 1997)

For oral languages, often spoken in far smaller communities with very different traditions for retaining memory, and with the very act of speech connected to a specific environment, it is almost impossible to imagine a similar situation occurring.

To add to the complexity of the preservation of linguistic diversity, the very nature of communication, community, and memory, is evolving at a rate faster than at any time in history within the cultural singularities of lingua franca nations in the first world.

While the historic pressures on linguistic and cultural diversity arose from a range of forces, mostly linked to the rise in colonialism from the 15th century onwards, the homogenising influence of globalised, liberal market economic ideologies and a technological paradigm shift altering nearly all contemporary

living spaces and cultures, now diminishes all others as a cause for language loss.

One might argue that widely accepted human rights and humanitarian ideals, often championed by organisations such as the UN and UNESCO and independent NGOs, are all active agents at the service of diversity. However, it is questionable whether these ideals can exist in realisable form, independently of the forces of the market.

> We are consumers of the ever-delightful spectacle of poverty & catastrophe, and of the moving spectacle of our own efforts to alleviate it. (Baudrillard 1994, p24)

Baudrillard (2003), in his introductory chapter to *West of the Dateline*, highlights the complexity inherent in the metaphors driving humanitarian ideals, proposing a profound oppositional tension that exists between two concepts he defines as the 'Universal' and the 'Global', and the overpowering prominence of the latter.

According to Baudrillard, the Universal and the Global should be seen as opposing yet overlapping, with the global finally devouring all before it, including the universal.

> Globalisation pertains to technologies, the market, tourism and information. Universality pertains to values, human rights, freedoms, culture and democracy. Globalisation seems to be irreversible; the universal on the other hand appears to be disappearing, at least in so far as it constitutes a system of values for Western modernity with no counterpart in any other culture. (Baudrillard, 2003, p23)

The Universal is a western construct (incorporated or imposed) that claims to speak for all cultures and their difference. It does not think of itself as a 'relative' construct, but as a western ideal that claims to speak for all cultures and their difference.

In Baudrillard's view, any culture that makes itself Universal loses its singularity and gradually dies. This is true of both assimilated cultures and the West itself, with the West also dying from a loss of singularity and the extermination of its own values.

> When the dynamic of the universal as transcendence, as ideal, and as utopia becomes reality, it ceases to exist as transcendence, ideal and utopia. This is because the universal is itself globalised, via a process of homogenisation, fragmentation, and re-assimilation. (Baudrillard, 2003, p24)

According to Baudrillard, the outcome of this process is that there is no longer any difference between the global and the universal. The universal is itself globalised; values such as democracy, human rights all circulate through exactly the same channels as any other global product—like oil or capital.

We too readily assume that NGOs are always an independent force for positive change, taking on crusades on our behalf, acting as proxy agents for our own (or generally worthy) ideals, in support of causes that might include the preservation of linguistic and cultural diversity. However, delving deeper into theories and critiques of NGOs in operation and histories of human rights reveals a less idealistic function, one that suggests that Western states, and the images that signify release from suffering and poverty's tyranny, are used merely to brand and sustain NGOs. In other words, to allow their brand to function in the marketplace and compete for funds.

Hence it is easy to question the final efficacy of UNESCO's Instrument for Cultural Diversity, and other international efforts to maintain language continuity and diversity, however well-meaning they may at first appear to be.

In any case, there would seem to be few major organisations outside UNESCO or academia that are taking up the cause of the preservation of linguistic diversity, accept at a community level.

In my own city of Sydney, I have met some community leaders who are speakers of two of the Sydney basin's first languages, Dharug and Dharawal. There are possibly 6-10 speakers of each language, and several community members expressed a direct concern that the preservation of these Sydney basin languages, while receiving some academic and community support, is largely a labour of personal passion, carried out at their own expense on their own time.

Given these languages represent a mnemonic record of the tens of thousands of years of human settlement in the region, I find it personally staggering that those working to reconstruct whatever records exist and keep their languages alive, do so in near isolation, sometimes without any public funding or support.

The value of this longstanding and irreplaceable cultural heritage is, like everything else, determined by the market:

> … triumphant globalisation is levelling out every difference and every value, ushering in a perfectly indifferent (non) culture. And all that is left, once the universal is gone, is the all-mighty global techno structure on the one hand and singularities that have reverted to the wild and been left to their own devices. (Baudrillard, 2003, p26)

While Baudrillard is often criticised for the totalising nature of his insights and attendant pessimism, it is clear the implications for promoting greater acceptance of cultural difference and maintaining the survival of languages invisible to globalisation are grave. Edward Said agrees when he says ' … the marketplace acquires the power to auction the right to speak differently'. (Said cited in Carter 2005, p243)

Paul Carter (2005) takes Said's position further, highlighting the devaluation of the language of instrumental reason, and noting Said's renewed call for its renaissance.

> The main goal of the dominant discourse of [global capitalism] is to fashion the merciless logic of corporate profit-making and political power into a normal state of affairs, "as if to say, that is the way things are", in the process rendering rational resistance to these notions into something altogether and practically unrealistic, irrational, utopian. (Carter 2005, p241)

While Said argues that resistance to this logic involves recapturing the language of instrumental reason in order to counter the language of the market on its own terms, Carter himself disputes the renewed call for instrumental reason precisely because, he argues, the language of rational resistance and instrumental reason replicates the styles of language that underpin global discourse. Therefore rational or instrumental reason *cannot* adequately represent a poetics of difference *or* resistance. He therefore

suggests alternative, allegorical, or what her terms 'parabolic' modes of communication are needed.

The limits of instrumental reason I argue, extend to conventional techniques of documentary production and storytelling. The influence of Carter's ideas on the techniques employed in *Audition Colorée* are explored further in the chapter outlining strategies for the film.

And while histories, geographies, and cultures become increasingly measured in terms of their exchange value in the international market, the proliferation of digital information systems also has implications for the preservation of linguistic diversity.

While emerging communications pathways, digital delivery techniques and storage platforms enhance the capacity to disseminate and store information that might be used to maintain threatened languages; it is arguable whether the total effect of these technologies will ultimately benefit the preservation of linguistic diversity.

Lingua nullius and the confusion of tongues

> Empire is not a weak echo of modern imperialisms but a fundamentally new form of rule. (Hardt and Negri in (Pennycook, 2010, p514)

> The power to control language offers far better prizes than taking away people's provinces or lands or grinding them down in exploitation. The empires of the future are the empires of the mind. Winston Churchill—Harvard University, September 6, 1943

As previously cited, the idea that English would become a world language was not seriously entertained at the dawn of the age of European imperialism. Its prominence as the world's most dominant lingua franca is now commonly accepted.

While the focus of this exegesis is largely on the influence of English, it must be acknowledged that a view of globalisation as the historical continuation of only European imperialism can focus too much on the influence of English (or other European languages). This in turn can perpetuate the traditions and biases of Eurocentrism, overlooking the role of other empires such as the Ottoman, Chinese, and Japanese, amongst other possible examples. (Pennycook 2010)

One of the more outspoken critics of the global role of English is Robert Phillipson, who contends that English is deeply connected to particular forms of Western culture and knowledge, asserting that Linguistic imperialism: 'dovetails with communicative, cultural, educational, and scientific imperialism in a rapidly evolving world in which corporate-led globalization is seeking to impose or induce a neo-imperial world order.' (Phillipson cited in Pennycook 2010, p514)

According to David Crystal, several mythologies project the idea that a single human language represents a harmonious ideal of uniformity. The specific imposition of European and English cultural values includes Judaeo-Christian theological assumptions that underpin a negative view of multilingualism that originated in the Book of Genesis, 'where the proliferation of languages was a penalty imposed on humanity, the reversal of which would restore some of its original 'perfectibility.'' **(**Crystal 2002, p27)

According to the story of Babel, a united humanity of the generations following the Great Flood, speaking a single language and migrating from the east, came to the land of Shinar. People there sought to make bricks and build a city and a tower with its top in the sky, to make a name for themselves, so that they not be scattered over the world. God decided to punish them for their presumptuousness in erecting the tower and made them speak different languages, the *confusion of tongues.*

> And they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth. "But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the Lord said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." Genesis 11:4–9

Multilingualism is thus a direct wrath of God, and its eradication sanctioned by relatively literal biblical interpretation and a desire to 'civilise' Indigenous and non-Christian peoples wherever Christianity took hold.

Colonial assumptions of supremacy include lingua nullius—the idea that no civilised language (or culture) was present, often providing the claimed moral authority for invasion and subjugation (Phillipson cited in Pennycook 2010).

Colonialism itself is arguably the greatest single cause of language loss, and the desire to oppress through language an essential part of colonial politics. According to Derrida (1998), all language tends toward becoming 'One', reducing the heterogeneous nature of reality, to what he terms a 'homo-hegemony.' This 'homo-hegemony', argues Derrida, makes all language a colonial practice, albeit in a complex power relationship that is not fixed. The first trick is the master's (coloniser's) tendency to apply his language/culture onto others …and *uphold* the fantasy that he possesses language.

> The monolingualism imposed by the other operates by re-lying upon that foundation, here, through a sovereignty whose essence is always colonial, which tends, repressively and irrepressibly, to reduce language to the One, that is, to the hegemony of the homogeneous. This can be verified everywhere, everywhere this homo-hegemony remains at work in the culture, effacing the folds and flattening the text. To achieve that, colonial power does not

> need, in its heart of hearts, to organize any spectacular initiatives: religious missions, philanthropic or humanitarian good works, conquest of markets, military expeditions, or genocides. (Derrida, 1998, p40)

The association of multilingualism with pernicious outcomes is still with us. Rupert Murdoch's speech on Australian radio in 1994, argued that multilingualism was divisive, and monolingualism, cohesive. Multilingualism was in his view the cause of Indian disunity, and monolingualism the reason for the unity of the English-speaking world. (Nettle and Romaine 2002, p 362/3332)

Subjugation through linguistic domination was a standard practice in the colonial tradition. In his essay, *On Not Being Milton: Nigger Talk in England Today* David Dabydeen discusses how the first act of slave traders was to separate slaves who spoke the same language, so they could not organise any collective acts of resistance. (Dabydeen, 1990)

Regardless, the reach of English has also ensured that it has been appropriated, localised, re-invented and returned to bite its colonial masters.

Resistance within the conqueror's own tongue

As the dominant colonial language on earth, it is no surprise that English contains residues of resistance within it; traces from the languages and cultures once conquered, varying according to the site of colonisation.

> In the many different contexts in which it exists, however, it [English] has markedly different incarnations. Indeed, it would be difficult to identify with any certainty the essential properties which unite these disparate varieties, other than maybe the appellation itself. And even then there are pidgins and Creoles which do not share this name (Tok Pisin, for example, or Krio), as well as certain historical and regional varieties (the Inglis of 13th century Scotland is one, as are recent coinages such as Singlish in modern day Singapore). In addition, grammar varies from one variety to another so that identical forms can have divergent meanings, while the lexicon too presents ample opportunity for misunderstanding, allowing for scores of books dedicated to the recording of awkward discrepancies (Mencken's The American language (1947) is a classic example). As such, perhaps Wittgenstein's concept of 'family resemblances' (1953) would be the best way to group the many different codes that are often included under the term English; there are amongst them several points of overlap, be they in grammar, lexicon or history, but the diversity is the result of constant change in all directions.' (Seargeant 2009, p7)

Dohra Ahmad, in *Rotten English*, points out that expression voiced through minority English dialects, or what she terms 'vernacular' dialects, is born in response to the imposed languages of British colonialism, in contrast to the sometimes rigid formalities of dominant Standard English, often producing a vivid language use that is organic, dynamic, and confrontational.

An anthology of writing in non-standard English from the reborn languages left in the wake of empire, *Rotten English* offers a range of literary examples that show how post-colonial dialects have returned to break the colonisers fantasy of possessing language, or the one 'true' language (in Derrida's words).

According to Lawrence Venuti (1998), the imposition of colonial languages eventually led to hybrid literary forms where native authorship encompassed subversive varieties of translation.

> In West Africa, Europhone novels have occasionally been characterised by a 'translingualism,' in which traces of the Indigenous language are visible in an English or French text through lexical and syntactical peculiarities. (Venuti, 1998, p4004/5553)

Audition Colorée will include filmed performance poetry work by the American poet Queen Sheba, who argues that fragments of African culture and performative techniques have informed her creative praxis. This is despite, like most African Americans, her having no direct knowledge of what language her ancestors spoke.

In an interview not included in the film (2011), Queen Sheba discusses the evolution of an oral style of performance common to African Americans, which she argues evolved from the slave spiritual tradition and the fact that many African Americans were denied basic literacy, so mastery of a performative type of oral expression gained prescience, fostering genres and styles in both music and spoken word that still inform contemporary hip hop.

Her poem, *Ike*, which she performs for the film, exemplifies this interest in her style of performance and her linguistic heritage.

The problems of translation

The issue is subject to debate, but many linguists such as translation theorist Lawrence Venuti (2010) propose that translation can faithfully convey meaning between all languages. It can also be argued that significant value can be added in translation—or in the attempt to translate—in contrast to the more widely held view that translation is a process that exacts a loss of meaning or necessarily produces a failure of understanding.

The capacity for translation to allow for the understanding or transmission of meanings from minority languages certainly exists, but the theoretical ability to translate languages does not necessarily result in a free and even distribution of translated texts (or ideas) between all languages.

The principle of universal translatability may apply in varying degrees, particularly amongst written languages, but it must also be accepted that translation does not equate to lived experience and the attainment of subjectivity and the cultural memory achievable from the perspective of a native speaker.

However significant translation can be as a tool of cultural understanding, translation is not neutral as a practice, particularly when occurring within politically charged or commercial contexts. American linguist Lawrence Venuti (1998) points out that translation often domesticates foreign texts and languages, marking them with the linguistic and cultural values of the most powerful languages.

> [A] process of inscription occurs at every stage in the production, circulation, and reception of translated texts. It is initiated by the very choice of foreign texts to translate, always an exclusion of other foreign texts and literatures. (Venuti, 1998, p1560/5553)

Clear examples of this lie in the scarcity of texts that are published in dialects, creoles, pidgins, or patois: or the fact that translation occurs overwhelming in the direction of dominant lingua francas into other dominant languages. English to German for example, as opposed to Farsi to Mandarin, or Tok Pisin into English.

For oral languages, the possibility of translation is even further removed, as the process of transcribing an oral practice to a written form, if it has even been done, must occur prior to a translation. Remembering that most oral languages are spoken in smaller groups, and that the usual economy of translation is usually a flow between dominant languages, or from dominant to less dominant languages, this translation process may occur but only in limited numbers. The idea of a new cosmopolitan world based on the free, equal and open exchange of language based on translation, becomes a challenge to imagine in actuality, resembling an idealistic hope at best. In a subsequent chapter on machine languages and artificial intelligence the possibility of meaningful machine translation is examined in more depth.

Linguistic diversity, media and technology

> Theoretically, it draws upon two tropes, geopolitics and cosmopolitanism, which provide paradigmatic tools to reflect upon technological, spatial, and cultural dimensions of flows. (Christensen, 2013, p1)

Pre-history posits that around 50,000 years ago humans first left Africa en route to settle every continent with the until-recent exception of Antarctica. The precursor to this exponential evolutionary curve was the arrival of language at around the same time as the emergence of what historians term a shift away from the most 'primitive' of technologies, around 75,000-100,00 years ago (Deacon, 1997, p371).

Just as language is often described as our unique differentiator to the animal world, integral to human ontology, so to is technology. Technologists and futurists contend that the first moment humanity truly stood apart from our primate family (although I will argue this idea of individuation in opposition to the natural world is culturally biased) was the moment when one of our ancestors picked up a stone or branch, and fashioned it into a tool more complex than a simple battering device, around 2.5 million years ago. According to Terrence Deacon (1997), data from fossil skulls suggests vocal skills exceeded the capabilities of other primates around 2 million years ago, with the trend towards larger brain sizes evolving language capacity continuously up to around 200,000 years ago (Deacon, 1997, p251).

The Hominoidea family of apes arrived 28 million years ago, with the first primates to roaming the earth 75 million years ago. The confluence of language and technology advancing rapidly within the last 100-200,000 years, as a chronology relative to the scale of our evolutionary ancestry, represents a very recent happening, a mere wink in the story of our species.

The human brain itself has not evolved significantly since the evolutionary leap forward prior to the African exodus. According to Noam Chomsky language ability was present in all humans then and has not evolved significantly from this time (*Is the man who is tall happy? An animated conversation with Noam Chomsky*, 2013). Instead the brain developed the ability to change

within a lifetime to match environmental conditions and social and cultural need, according to the principal of neuroplasticity.

With technology and language evolving alongside each other and presumably informing each other's development, culture and various manifestations of civilisation have advanced dramatically since our forbears wandered beyond humanity's first continental homeland. More recently, language began to be coded within new, vastly different environments and contexts, heavily influenced by a quantum progression in technological advancement over the last 100 years.

Technology and language now

Technological possibility in a contemporary globalised world offers a privileged group—those in the 'advanced' economies—the promise of boundless potentiality and consumerism in which to indulge. However, the consciousness embedded in technological dispersal mediated within digital information flows, is primarily a platform for the *diminishment,* not maintenance of, linguistic diversity.

The rate at which technology increases now far surpasses other forms of cultural or intellectual evolution, absorbing diversity into dominant cultures that treat cultural diversity as potential commodity at best. Moore's Law, which asserts that computational speeds roughly double every 18 months, does not apply to the human mind, its immense capacity for language, or the cultures that have taken tens of thousands of years to evolve prior to the mass information flows of digital autobahns.

It is not possible to consider the question of contemporary linguistic diversity and its likely future without also examining another realm of technology—the media environment that comprises globalised space. Technology impacts the flows of, and interactions between nodes of power and powerlessness, constructs hierarchies of discourse—reinforcing dominant cultures in a world increasingly defined by a neoliberal economic ideology, an ideology that *is* the lingua franca itself.

It is often assumed that the information-vast digital sphere that is the Internet is building a beneficial global village in which all the cultures of the world are within reach and all languages are to greater or lesser degrees accessible through translation, with the process of translation itself enhanced by constantly improving technologies.

The manifestation of digital technologies however, represent a generative site of myths, according to technology historian and cultural theorist Vincent Mosco (2004).

> It is a story about how ever smaller, faster, cheaper, and better computer and communication technologies help to realize, with little effort, those seemingly impossible dreams of democracy and community with practically no pressure on the natural environment. (Mosco 2004, p596/599)

Cultural theorist Mark Dery agrees that the technology economy and its imagined future deserves more critical reflection.

> Cyberspace mythologising forms what Leo Marx has called "the rhetoric of the technological sublime"—hymns to progress that rise "like froth on a tide of exuberant self-regard, sweeping over all misgivings, problems, and contradictions". (Dery 1996, p5621/7688)

Of course it's not all mythology and hyperbole, the Internet does provide a wealth of resources and greater amounts of information on different cultures and languages than has ever existed before—offering free and unfettered access to the largest reference library the world has ever seen. Surely this offers promise for the maintenance of many forms of diversity, cultural and linguistic? While it certainly has this potential, is this the ultimate result? Or is real-world diversity subordinated (along with everything else) to the seductive idea of a future built on fantasised technological potentiality, determined finally by the marketplace?

Media theorists argue that a technologically driven borderless state—an atopia—is emerging that is beyond national borders. It supports notions of cosmopolitanism in a highly idealised form—an oppositional force against the logos and hegemonic power of oppressive nation states, market ideologies, and abuses of corporate power.

This idea of cosmopolitanism is often defined as a 'counter network' of power resisting the much narrower, limited self-interests in the discursive practices of global media players and economic forces.

> Cosmopolitanism, then, taken here in its simplest sense, implies a culturally open disposition—an invitational stance and hospitality to the world and to the Other. As Delanty (2006) suggests, when opposed to notions of globalization and universality, and plurality and particularism, "the cultural dimension of cosmopolitanism consists more in the creation and articulation of communicative models of world openness in which societies undergo transformation." (Christensen 2013, p2401)

While media theorists debate and generally welcome new media forms and their potential to introduce greater plurality of voices into the global mediasphere, there is little to suggest that languages and their diversity, outside a core group of dominant cultures, constitute any meaningful presence in these vast and intensifying global communication flows.

In theory, new media and digital technologies provide new and expanding means to record the sounds, structures and vocabularies of language, and digital platforms provide more pathways to communicate the experience and tongues of many minority cultures in ways that we might all learn and be enriched by. There are many excellent examples of cultures, organisations and activists using technology in this way, but usually on a small scale.

However, while this ideal of cosmopolitanism may add to the diversity of experience and political agency *within* globalised space and its technologies, it is difficult to see how it might operate beneficially outside of it.

Cultural and contemporary arts theorist Paul Carter argues that the communications revolution primarily serves to increase the pressures of centralisation in favour of dominant discourses. (Carter 2005)

Minority written languages—let alone oral languages—are not the medium for the transmission of information through the Internet, they are not the language that underpin electronic market interactions, drive software languages and codings, or have a presence in global mediascapes.

Engagement with and economic survival within the exponentially expanding realm of digital information most commonly necessitates the use of a lingua franca, and this is increasingly English, Spanish in Latin America, then roughly follows an order built on previous colonial or current economic dominance.

The digital sphere is expanding the volumes of communicative activity and information, involving an ever-greater number of web users engaging with each other in new and diverse ways, but ultimately offering much lower diversity linguistically than non-virtual worlds.

As an example, the cultural practices of some peoples occur in specific environmental contexts related to place in the natural world, following specific customs and ritualised practice. Imagining how these practices of language might be transferred into the realm of hyperlinks on glowering screens offers a daunting pragmatic challenge.

The Internet itself provides an obvious example of the constricting diversity: while there are around 20 lingua franca languages (depending on how this is defined), the overwhelming volume of Internet communication is based on a mere 10 languages—a far greater concentration of linguistic hegemony than globalised space in physical or real-world terms, with around half of all web pages estimated to be in English. (UNESCO, 2005)

Modern Hindi with half a billion native speakers, and Swahili, spoken by nearly 50 million people in several African regions, are both virtually absent from the Internet. This is in spite of the fact that in Hindi's case, India is playing an increasingly prominent role in the evolution of the technology economy itself. These are languages that are under no immediate threat compared to the thousands of others that have no cyberspace avatar, digital future, or cache in any marketplace globalisation cares to recognise.

Our technologies then, despite their (in many cases) potential to sustain linguistic and cultural difference, foster a law of diminishing returns. Only those who enter our linguistic zones fluent in our tongues can incite an

exchange, usually receiving only our own ideas and discursive positions in return.

The technologies of oral language cultures from a western standpoint, are almost universally assumed inferior. But rather than having been left stagnating in the wake of western ideals of technological progress, it is more useful to consider these technologies as having reached a level where they are in balance with the environments in which they originated.

It may not be a conscious choice, and we must be careful to avoid 'noble savage' idealisations, but in survival terms, these technologies achieved an equilibrium relative to the needs of their societies, and therefore did not *require* the rate of change that societies in globalised space experience as part of a digital post-industrial economy.

This approach to technology is vastly more common than our own in human terms, and far more longstanding. Advanced industrial—and more recently technological—civilisation, fuelled by abundant cheap energy, is barely 150 years old, compared to the 50,000 years heritage of continuous culture that some peoples can claim. Which begs the question, how do you measure the success of a culture, or construct hierarchies of possible cultural worth, technologically advanced or otherwise? Surely the ability to survive would have to offer an excellent starting point.

In French theorist Paul Virilio's understanding of the concept, these technologies and cultures are without the *speed* that is the hallmark of globalised space, meaning they are in possession of *nothing*.

For Virilio speed is conceptualised via his idea of dromology. Dromos (the Greek word meaning race course), is taken to mean the activity of a race and from which 'dromology' is defined as '… this government of differential motility, of harnessing and mobilizing, incarcerating and accelerating things and people.' (Bratton in Virilio 1986, p8)

Dromology is important in his view of the structuring of society in relation to modern media, as the speed at which something happens may

change its essential nature, and that which moves quickly comes to dominate that which is slower. Whoever controls the territory possesses it. Possession of territory is not primarily about laws and contracts, but first and foremost a matter of movement and circulation. (Virilio, 1986)

This idea of being left behind the Dromos is supported by Lyotard, when he argues the goal of the post-industrial economy is to produce, in the first instance, not material goods but information, with this information serving to increase the complexity and performativity of the system as a whole. (Carter, 2005)

Intensely focused on maximising profit, the system seeks few external influences, except those that might illuminate pathways and means to further profit, allowing diversity to exist only where it can be commoditised and monetised. Business models such as ‘exotic’ cultural tourism or the pharmaceutical industry’s drive to commercially exploit the genetic codes of hitherto unmapped life in species identified by traditional medical knowledge are examples, but it is difficult to find many more that might suggest cultural diversity itself is a market-valued concept, especially when it comes to the preservation of linguistic diversity.

Marshall McLuhan’s 1967 pronouncement that electronic media has spurned a breathless ‘world of all-at-one-ness’ where information ‘pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously,’ sometimes overwhelming us, is truer than ever.‘ (Dery, 1996)

> … the curious pathology of our century—the almost sexual desire to become one with our technology—is at its heart necrophilic. (Dery, 1996, p.3983/7688)

The intensifying performativity of this system brings us to the question of the speed of communications and our experience of time, which, changing in lockstep with the advance of technological civilisation, is varying at ever increasing rates when compared to the sense of time that forms the basis of experience for many oral cultures and peoples.

The language of machines

One of the most pervasive ideas enmeshed within the rhetoric of the technological sublime lies in an assumption of a soon to arrive machine or artificial intelligence (AI). This computational intelligence, foretold as inevitably surpassing our own in the near future, will have the power to render the struggles of humanity redundant, or make humanity itself obsolescent. The most common narratives involve humankind becoming liberated by—or subordinated to—the confluence of digital memory and immense computer processing power. One of the more enduring cinematic visions to date being the spaceflight supercomputer in Stanley Kubrick's *2001 a Space Odyssey*, the HAL-9000 or HAL.

Despite its continual re-appearance as a trope in science fiction, the idea of AI started to first make a re-appearance beyond science and fiction and popular culture in the 1990s, forming part of the technoscapes and technofuturist visions that arrived in lockstep with the first wave of possibility heralded by the Internet and its emerging networks.

The key to true machine intelligence is language, and critics argue language is much harder a feat for binary machines to emulate than the technofuturists, AI researchers, and venture capitalists might have us believe, meaning truly intelligent machines will remain in the realm of science fiction for the foreseeable future at least.

It is worth noting that Alan Turing, the great mathematician whose work in allied counter-intelligence helped cracked the Nazi Enigma code, foresaw that the ability to comprehend language (natural language processing) would be at the core of any possible form of machine intelligence.

In his 1950 paper *Computing Machinery and Intelligence,* Turning proposed a simple experiment for judging the possible intelligence of machines, which would become known as the Turing test. It involved having a person, the 'interrogator', sitting at a computer terminal engaging in a typed conversation with two other people, one an actual person and the other a computer. If the interrogator was unable to distinguish the computer from the

real person, then the computer, argued Turing, could be considered intelligent (Carr 2010, p3481/4856).

Turing's foresight in predicting that machines can only be intelligent if they gain the power of human language (and assumedly consciousness) has proven central to the possible realisation of AI.

However, much of what is branded as AI is in fact simple database matching, from voice recognition to machine translation to pattern recognition and text scanning. It becomes more convincing as computational power gets faster, with each advancement posited as proof truly intelligent machines are just around the corner.

An early example includes Joseph Weizenbaum's Eliza (M.I.T 1964-66), a computer that convincingly emulated the very limited language repertoire of a Rogerian Psychotherapist, creating seemingly intimate and convincing responses to simple patient concerns and discussion. Eliza's simple code is still replicated extensively as proof of early AI. (E.L.I.Z.A Talking 2014)

More recently IBM'S Watson has garnered significant attention, primarily for trumping human contestants on the television trivia game show *Jeapordy*, prompting technofuturist and former *Wired* editor Kevin Kelly (2014) to predict the age of AI was again around the very next bend.

> This perfect storm of parallel computation, bigger data, and deeper algorithms generated the 60-years-in-the-making overnight success of AI. And this convergence suggests that as long as these technological trends continue—and there's no reason to think they won't—AI will keep improving. (Kelly, 2014)

For commercial and corporate applications, services in information intensive industries such as medicine and law, Kelly may well be right about the potential of Watson's brand of AI. What Watson demonstrates is the power of what is known as 'Big Data' the strategic use of digital memory and processing power to search and analyse data at great speed. This in itself however, is far from sentient intelligence, and embodies a binary process

completely different to the way animal and human thought, and human language in particular, operates.

Essayist and cultural commentator Adam Gopnik (2011) argues that human language involves a very different set of parameters in order to communicate meaning, and that we are all too keen to uphold the fantasy of impending machine intelligence.

> Although Watson was vastly more suave and subtle than the old machines, it was still a server stuffed with answers and a retrieval device to find them. Organized dumbness is what beat human smarts. Computer programs are still revealingly hopeless at three and four-hand poker, where, as they say, you "play the man, not the hand"—where you have to guess your opponent's mental state from his "tells," not his hole cards from your knowledge of the odds. Win at three-hand poker, with its three-dimensional mind-modelling . . . and then we'll talk. (Gopnik, 2011, p5)
>
> And:
>
> Human intelligence expressed in sentences doesn't have only attributes and attainments; it has affect… the subtler, poetic point that human talk is not just an exchange of axioms, or even of emotionally coded abbreviations, but an activity played on an edge between the "lossiness" of compressed communication and the nimbleness with which we compress it—between our knowledge that in everything we say we have to leave out a lot of information for economy's sake and our ability to make that economy itself eloquent and informative. (Gopnik, 2011, p7)

Gopnik contends that no matter how fast computers become at storing and accessing massive amounts of memory, they are, in essence no more sophisticated than very large pocket calculators. Matching words and concepts in a database is a very different skill from the variety of ways meaning can be expressed, inferred, and coded between humans:

> Google has approached the difficulty of machine translation … creating such a huge corpus of French/English sentences that it can almost always find a near-match for any sentence you give it and tap-dance its way around the rest. It works, kind of. But only kind of. (Gopnik, 2011, p8)

That is not to say some technology won't rise to prominence that does indeed match the proselytizing. What must be contested however, is the narratives institutions and corporations of technology spin and encloak around themselves, the unquestioned belief that technological process is always taking us *forwards* for the greater good.

Oral languages and environment

> Everything forgets, but not a language. (Steiner cited in Crystal 2002, p65)

> This phenomenon has been called the "extinction of experience": the radical loss of the direct contact and hands-on interaction with the surrounding environment that traditionally comes through subsistence and other daily life activities. (Maffi, 2001, p6)

As outlined, of all cultures and living spaces outside the dominant group of languages, the most marginalised, and most vulnerable, are cultures based on oral languages—and it is oral languages and speech (parole) that form the primary focus of this exegesis and film *Audition Colorée.*

Creatively, the impetus to consider language loss from this perspective is because oral languages embody cultures that offer the greatest position of difference from our own, and because they are most likely to disappear without every being resurrected, or in many cases, recorded in the first instance.

> Of the 6,703 languages listed in the thirteenth edition of Ethnologue, 3,074 have the appended comment—'survey needed'. And what a survey chiefly does is determine whether the speakers found in a given region do indeed all use the same language, or whether there are differences between them. If the latter, it then tries to decide whether these differences amount only to dialect variations, or whether they are sufficiently great to justify assigning the speakers to different languages. Sometimes, a brief preliminary visit assigns everybody to a single language, and an in-depth follow-up survey shows that this was wrong, with several languages spoken. (Crystal, 2002 p110/2518)

Beyond a survey to identify status as a language, a further requirement of a full linguistic survey is required in order to record them. Even if recorded, if those languages only exist in an archive once the last speaker dies, they are no longer part of dynamically ongoing cultural systems.

At the core of the inquiry also lies an investigation of memory. Many linguists active in the field of the preservation of linguistic diversity argue that language is the repository of cultural memory since its parent culture's inception. In some cases this implies a memory of 50,000 years of continuous culture.

With no single language or culture capable of expressing all ideas, forms and degrees of experience, or memory, what myopia becomes enshrined in our thought from the loss of language? What price is exacted on the total ecology of human memory?

Speakers of marginalised languages from oral cultures occupy one fifth of the earth's surface, and are stewards of some of the richest and most biologically diverse regions on earth. (Crystal, 2002)

Speakers of all languages, but *especially* oral languages, need to speak their language in cultural and environmental contexts in order for these languages to remain alive. The question of language loss is more complex than simply whether or not speakers of a language remain. If languages are indeed a product of their environment, the dislocation of speakers from the cultural and physical landscapes in which the language has evolved and been practiced, can have critical impacts on the ability of that language to retain cultural practices and memory.

Oral languages often have unique ways of describing the memory of their culture and natural environment, because of intimate connections to place. In some cultures, language exists in a mnemonic-mirror relationship to landscape, further supporting the contention that languages initially arose in a symbiotic connection to the environment in which they were spoken.

Australia is home to the oldest continuous cultures on earth, with powerful bonds to country, culture and kin maintained through stories that have been retold since well before the starting point of western cultural memory and history.

The Murujuga region in Western Australia (also known as the Burrup Peninsula) represents the largest rock art gallery in the world. Nearly one million rock art petroglyphs (rock engravings) can be found embodying Ngarluma stories that reach back 30,000 years—enduring over the ages as great civilisations rose and fell, and offering insights into Indigenous life before the last ice age ended around 10,000 years ago. (Varga, 2013)

While subject to debate, it is widely agreed that human language originated around 50,000-75,000 years ago, while written language only began to arise 5,000 years ago. The first alphabet, the Hebrew aleph beth emerged alongside Phoenician script in 1000BC, with the Greek alphabet following in 750BC, marking the transition from symbolic scripts to alphabet-based forms of writing. The nature of memory and culture evolved profoundly with the arrival of the written word. (Abram, 2012)

It is often difficult for speakers of lingua francas to understand the possibility of such complex oral mnemonic structures. With our idea of knowledge and memory so textually based and increasingly digital, how can we truly connect with these experiential forms of knowledge? How is it possible these forms of oral memory could extend beyond western pre-history?

Welsh linguist David Crystal (2002) argues that oral languages use wider perceptions of structural organisation and employ different types of memory simultaneously in highly sophisticated relationships. Crystal equates this to how individual players of an orchestra can remember the discrete parts that produce the final complexity of a symphony (Crystal in Byrge Sørensen 2005). Walter J. Ong, also describes pre-written literacy complexity in oral performance.

> Oral cultures could produce powerful and beautiful verbal performances of high artistic and human worth, which are no longer even possible once writing has taken possession of the psyche. (Ong in Carr, 2010, p1013/4856)

If oral languages are often profoundly linked to the natural environment, embodying unique concepts of memory, place and even time, the technological age is providing even greater distance between those who occupy the living spaces of cultures built on dominant languages, and oral language speakers who exist outside of this state of linguistic and cultural privilege—whose words are accorded little value in the global marketplace.

As well as the potential diminishment of diversity as a result of colonialism, economic pressures and technological change, the very nature of our memory is evolving in the information age too.

In *Film Fables*, Jacque Ranciere writes that the challenge for the 'creation' of memory (memory being a vitally creative act for Ranciere) was once overcoming an absence of information. In the digital age, the 'creation' of memory must also be forged against an overabundance of information. (Rancière and Battista, 2006)

There have been significant shifts in cultural mnemonic practice as languages have evolved from being spoken-only and embodying oral traditions, to being written down using symbolic and then alphabetic written forms. Systems of cultural memory experienced a profound shift forward at the point written language, and particularly from the time written languages built on alphabetic rather than symbolic language systems, were adopted.

Arguably, changes to the practice of memory that occurred 5,000 years ago with written language (750-1000 BC for alphabet-based forms of writing) are less profound than changes to the practice of memory occurring as a result of current technological influences and emerging communicative media.

Those embracing digital memory changes taking place as I write argue cyberspace itself is, and will increasingly become, a repository to which memory can be outsourced and accessed only when needed, freeing up personal intellectual resources for more liberating activities.

Others however argue that—for or good or worse—new communicative pathways are changing the nature of memory and cognitive processes more deeply, and that the use of memory is itself inseparable from, and essential to, the function of thinking critically.

Nicholas Carr (2010) discusses how the digital age may literally be adapting minds according to the function of neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity refers to the susceptibility to physiological changes of the nervous system, due to changes in behaviour, environment, neural processes, or parts of the body other than the nervous system, and how the brain changes throughout life.

The simplest example is how the hearing of those suffering vision impairment might improve to compensate for the loss of sight.

> Our brains are constantly changing in response to our experiences and our behaviour, reworking their circuitry with each sensory input, motor act, association, reward signal, action plan, or [shift of] awareness. Neuroplasticity is one of the most important products of evolution, a trait that enables the nervous system "to escape the restrictions of its own genome and thus adapt to environmental pressures, physiologic changes, and experiences. The genius of our brain's construction is not that it contains a lot of hardwiring but that it doesn't. Evolution has given us a brain that can literally change its mind—over and over again. (Carr 2010, p588/4856)

In 2009 Lady Greenfield, professor of synaptic pharmacology at Lincoln college, Oxford UK, garnered international attention when she published warnings of the potential influence of social media in diminishing the communicative, empathetic and intellectual capabilities of regular users.

> Social network sites were at risk of infantilising the mid-21st century mind, resulting in short attention spans, sensationalism, inability to empathise and a weakened sense of identity. (Greenfield in Patrick, 2009)

Without commenting on the positives or negatives of shifts in the nature of memory (and cultural memory) as a result of technological change, it is clear that technological evolution is placing greater distance between 21st century lingua franca societies and the systems of communication, place and memory embodied within oral language cultures.

Memory's role is not just in making sense of the past. Research into how memory functions in individuals has found that subjects who suffer damage to their memory also experience difficulty in imagining a future (*How does your memory work? Unravelling the mysteries of recollection*, 2008). Our ability to construct a subjectivity that can posit future possibility relies on accessing a store of past experience encapsulated within memory.

Peoples who survive the death of their own language are similarly required to conceive of a future without references to the cultural memory and identity their languages once gave them.

So to, all of humanity misses an opportunity to draw on this store of shared memory to conceive of a future incorporating all of this diversity.

Information, or digital memory, is atemporal and zero dimensional. Cultural memory is multidimensional and evolving through time, with the potential consequences of a shift towards a greater reliance on 'outsourced' digital memory being, as Carr writes:

> The offloading of memory to external data banks doesn't just threaten the depth and distinctiveness of the self. It threatens the depth and distinctiveness of the culture we all share. (Carr 2010, p3340/4856)
>
> And;
>
> That's the essence of Kubrick's dark prophecy: as we come to rely on computers to mediate our understanding of the world, it is our own intelligence that flattens into artificial intelligence. (Carr 2010 p3807/4856)

The sensory experience of language

> As technological civilisation diminishes the biotic diversity of the earth, language itself is diminished. As there are fewer and few songbirds in the air … human speech loses more of its evocative power. (Abram, 1997, p84)

> Although contemporary neuroscientists study "synaesthesia"—the overlap and blending of the senses—as though it were a rare or pathological experience to which only certain persons are prone (those who report "seeing sounds," "hearing colors," and the like), our primordial, preconceptual experience, as Merleau- Ponty makes evident, is inherently synaesthetic. (Abram, 1997, p62)

Emerging ideas encompassing linguistic ecology (alternatively, ecolinguistics) view each language as not only more intimately connected to all other languages in a critical mass akin to an ecology that embodies all human thought, but is also far more profoundly connected to the natural environment than is commonly understood.

In both the western imagination and its intellectual traditions, phenomenologist and philosopher David Abram argues, language is regarded as a uniquely human capability that separates us not only from other animals but also from the natural world itself. It is the very mark of our perceived superiority, defining a human-centric worldview, individuated and distinct from environment.

He argues further that when Darwin's ideas began to displace the view that humanity's position of privilege was determined and ordained by God, language became enlisted as the rationale explaining humanity's superiority above other animals.

This acceptance, according to Abram represents a critical conceptual flaw, and he draws upon thinkers within the field of phenomenology to articulate a theory of the influence of language based upon human sensory experience of environment.

> What if thought is not born within the human skull, but is a creativity proper to the body as a whole, arising spontaneously from the slippage between an organism and the folding terrain that it wanders? What if the curious curve of thought is engendered by the difficult Eros and tension between our flesh and the flesh of the earth? (Abram, 2010, p4)

And:

> We … have long been creatures of language, of course, but verbal language lived first in the shaped breath of utterance, it laughed and stuttered on the tongue long before it lay down on the page, and longer still before it arrayed itself in rows across the glowering screen. (Abram 2010, p10)

Philosopher Alphonso Lingis also challenges accepted concepts of human identity and subjectivity as being separate from environment, favouring a more complex, amplified theory of interconnectedness with the natural world. To Lingis, the boundaries of a living body are open and indeterminate; like membranes defining a surface of metamorphosis and exchange.

> Human animals live in symbiosis with thousands of species of anaerobic bacteria, six hundred species in our mouths that neutralize the toxins all plants produce to ward off their enemies, four hundred species in our intestines, without which we could not digest and absorb the food we ingest. Some synthesize vitamins, others produce polysaccharides or sugars our bodies need. The number of microbes that colonize our bodies exceeds the number of cells in our bodies by up to a hundredfold. They replicate with their own DNA and RNA and not ours. Macrophages in our bloodstream hunt and devour trillions of bacteria and viruses entering our porous bodies continually: they are the agents that maintain our borders. When did those bacteria take up lodging in our digestive system, these macrophages in our bloodstream? We also live in symbiosis with rice, wheat, and cornfields, with berry thickets and vegetable patches, and with the nitrogen-fixing bacteria in the soil with which the rootlets of all those plants enter into symbiosis in order to grow and feed the stalks, leaves, and seeds or fruit. We also move and feel in symbiosis with other mammals, birds, reptiles, and fish. How myopic is the notion that a form is the principle of individuation, or that a substance occupying a place to the exclusion of other substances makes an individual, or that the inner organisation, or the self-positing identity of a subject is an entity's principal of individuation. (Lingis, 2000, p2704/1908)

Lingis highlights not only our connection to the natural world, but a cultural connectivity that exists across all languages. Abram (2012) additionally notes how this depth of perceptual experience could affect the sciences themselves, and their claim of detached, value-free objectivity.

> Indeed, it is precisely from his experience in this preconceptual and hence ambiguous world that an individual is first drawn to become a scientist, to adopt the ways of speaking and seeing that are acknowledged as appropriate by the scientific community, to affect the proper disinterested or objective attitude with regard to a certain range of natural events. (Abram, 2012, p31)

The limits of western lingua francas

> In modern structural linguistics, words have no inherent sense, for they can be reduced, every single one of them, to basic quasi-mathematical units. The fantasy of a basic number of irreducible elements out of which all speech can be constituted is a dissecting technique of the analytical mind which applies logical atomism to logos itself—a suicide of the word. (Hillman and Moore, 1989, p28)

James Hillman, experimental archetypal psychologist, takes the view that a scientific over-extension in some conceptualisations of language leads to a limiting of the imaginal power of speech and language itself, producing a semantic anxiety, creating what he describes as a 'credibility gap'.

This in Standard Average European (SAE) and dominant language cultures, can lead to distrust of language itself, particularly in relation to certain aspects of communications, such as the language of politics.

In any case, even if accepting that scientific objectivity is the ideal which underpins inquiry, even as a linguistic practice, then questions remain about the ability to apply the subjectivity and cultural bias of a western tradition to understand the experience of the world contained within languages far from our own, a question which also applies to the challenge of working to preserve linguistic difference. That is not to say there is nothing noble in the effort to preserve and understand linguistic difference from within western disciplines, and indeed, many who champion the cause of linguistic diversity and the preservation of cultural difference are from scientific fields or disciplines such as linguistics or the natural sciences.

While it is widely acknowledged that the degradation of the natural environment entails a loss of cultural and linguistic diversity, language loss, in its turn, has a negative impact on biodiversity conservation. (UNESCO, 2012)

As theorists such as David Abram have argued, language did not evolve as a practice disconnected from the natural environment, but precisely from within it. Sensually formed and experienced, language is a bodily-attained knowledge and performative practice formed in conjunction with the environment and social contexts it originated from within.

Comparative philosopher Saroj Chawla (2001), proposes two dimensions of functional reality when considering the relationship between human beings and the natural environment: objective and cognitive. Objective reality is the natural environment itself, while the cognitive reality is human perception and creation. According to Chawla, the creative dimension modifies objective reality, whether it be human construction or the utilisation of natural resources. Language she says, is the 'origin of most cognitive activity.'

> Cognitive reality and language are closely related, for the modification of objective reality is facilitated by language. Language has the power to evoke images and complex ideas. The ideas become definite and crystallise themselves. The desire to fly for example, when expressed and worked upon, can take the form of shamanic flight and lead to the invention of the airplane. (Chawla, 2001, p115)

Chawla goes further to examine the example of how many Amerindian languages (citing Dene as primary example), have a vastly different relationship to place as a result of the experience of their language in context. Amerindian languages, she says, make a distinction between real and imaginary nouns, do not give form to intangibles and mass nouns, and treat time as continuous. Chawla contends that English language patterns by contrast, encourage the tendency to perceive resources in isolation, rather than holistically.

> The English language often requires the speaker to refer to a physical thing as a binomial that splits the reference into a formless item and a form. Amerindian languages, in contrast, display the indefiniteness of mass nouns. They are neither individualised by type bodies—a bar of soap—nor by names of containers—a glass of milk. The use of the definite article exemplifies the habit of separating an object from the mass. (Chawla, 2001, p116)

While in the western language example of English we might refer to water in terms of stormwater, rainwater or bore water, speakers of Amerindian languages would describe all these forms of water using the same word. The western cognition of water atomises these different aspects of water so the degradation of one is not considered part of the whole, failing to draw connections between the water we might drink, and its relationship to the water polluted by toxic spillage for example, even it forms part of the same total system.

She argues that a holistic perception of the environment requires we become aware of the unconscious habit of fragmenting reality in speech and thought.

Large-scale categories of grammar such as the use of nouns, plurals, and tenses also have an impact upon our perception of reality and our relationship to the natural world.

Amerindian languages perceive time as a two-tense system, earlier and later, a perception that is closer to the subjective feeling of duration as it is experienced. This concept of time may be closer to the idea of human consciousness as an experiential entity. Regarding Amerindian languages, she argues there is little development of differences in the tenses of verbs, with time treated as a fluid rather than a three dimensional reality.

Objectivity is also problematic in the experience of time. In the English language (and all European languages), time is objectified. A day is a unit of time that can be measured in an experiential sense, however, five days cannot be counted objectively. One experiences only one day, and the other four are conjured up from memory or imagination. Because of the objectification of time, the technological world view ignores the fact that awareness of time and cyclicity contains something immediate and subjective, the sense of 'becoming later and later.'

As a result, concepts of time lose contact with the subjective experience of 'being earlier or becoming later' and are objectified as counted quantities, frequently envisioned as lengths made up of units that can be visibly marked off into inches. In Amerindian languages, different terminology is used for spatial aggregates and metaphorical aggregates.

The habit of perceiving time in a three-tense time scheme—past, present, and future—ignores the subjective awareness of time as a fluid experience in the sense that one can immerse oneself in the past as well as the future.

> In the English language, years, centuries and decades are nouns; they are pluralized and enumerated as if they are touch-and-see objects. (Chawla, 2001, p117)

Theo Van Leeuwen writes in *Discourse and Practice, New Tools for Critical Analysis*, that through the nineteenth century, the grip of the clock on society tightened, and with the rise of mechanised time, greater distance arose between the subjective experience of time and the objective reality of 'clock' time. (Machin and Van Leeuwen, 2007, p81)

In the same work, Van Leeuwen quotes William Grossin:

> There is a correspondence, a correlation between a society's economy, the way it organizes work, the means it uses for the production of goods and services, and the way time is represented in the collective consciousness, a representation that every individual receives, internalizes and accepts almost always with no problem. (Grossin cited in Machin and Van Leeuwen 2007, p76)

Quantifying intangibles and imaginary nouns, and perceiving time in abstracted terms of past, present, and future, as a result of a mechanised understanding of time, are factors in our inability to perceive the natural environment holistically. These language habits are now being adopted by other cultures as English or other lingua francas increasingly dominate local cultures.

Moreover, the very sense of time that is the product of the technology economy is extending what was a mechanical order on the objective experience of time, to a real-time constant digital immediacy, placing further distance between a subjective experience of time based on environment.

The more we rely on tools that become intermediaries in, or substitute for, our sensual experience of time and place, the more distance again is imposed on our connection to the natural world.

Carr notes McLuhan's pronouncement that our tools end up 'numbing' whatever part of our body they 'amplify', distancing ourselves from the amplified part and its natural functions. (Carr, 2010, p3560/4856)

Beyond factual

> Language is discourse about the world, photography and cinema are languages of the world. (Ruiz, 2005, p31)

> If there were a modern political cinema, it would be on this basis: the people no longer exist, or not yet ... the people are missing. (Deleuze, 1986, p216)

Approaches to the production of *Audition Colorée* required acknowledgement of the limits of the communicative techniques common to documentary practice.

This critical perspective on documentary and the creative strategy undertaken for *Audition Colorée* do not signify fundamental opposition to documentary conventions outright, or the use of the genre's modes of construction in all contexts and all possible subject matters. However documentary, and concomitant factual genres, are frequently driven by discursive techniques and conventions, that, despite subject or authorial intent, often coalesce with the dominant discourses of mainstream media to the extent they can become indistinguishable.

The popular assumption of objectivity in documentary is tied closely to a belief in the objective presence of instrumental reason. As I have outlined previously, visual arts theorists such as Paul Carter assert that the language of rational resistance (instrumental reason) is ineffective as an oppositional technique within the spaces of globalised media because it also embodies and emulates the dominant styles of language that underpin global discourse itself (Carter, 2005).

Therefore alternative pathways for the creation, production, and discussion of ideas, need to be pursued in order to examine complex themes such as the challenges facing the preservation of language diversity and cultural specificity, as well as better understanding the experiential, sensorial aspects of language and the significance of language loss.

Audition Colorée and this exegesis similarly recognise that documentary modes of filmic production and the dominant conventions associated with the

documentary genre are in many critical ways entwined with globalised market consciousness. Importantly, documentary techniques carry the processes of atomisation and classification within Standard Average European (SAE) languages reinforcing a particular type of subjectivity and a set of discursive practices.

Central to the goal of the film is the desire to examine what is unknown, what is unknowable and/or beyond representation, and this therefore requires different creative strategies, specifically those that foreground a Western disconnection to cultural difference and Otherness. To do so involves not simply an evocation of the significance of the linguistic and cultural diversity that has been lost or is under threat, but the limits of dominant language systems and cultures to perceive what this loss entails— limits that apply across a range of media modalities including documentary.

It is a paradox that, within all languages, including dominant languages, there is an inherent boundary that exists, problematising the ability of those speakers to understand cultural and linguistic subjectivities beyond their own. In essence, all languages are flawed, but the assumption is carried in our own discursive practices that the tongues of the West make us *the* caretaker of all true meaning, objectivity and reason.

Bill Nichols (1991) argues these are not necessarily limits or assumptions we see or typically question:

> Language can seem a prison-house confining us to a fixed range of predetermined possibilities and barring any more direct access to the real beyond its bounds. To the extent language speaks us rather than we it, we find that the critique of the copy now applies to language itself (it fabricates a world after its own image) although the hope of retrieving or attaining that lost object of the real has also faded. (Nichols, 1991 p10)

Understanding the limits of language overall, including the hierarchies of language or group of dominant languages, is critical for understanding what linguistic diversity means. Given no language is perfect, the true potentiality of the entire ecology of thought must lie within what can be learned from the collective of all languages and cultures combined.

Attempting to fathom meanings inaccessible to us in these worlds of difference, or to elicit a critical audience response that might facilitate a sense of connection to such meanings, demands more experimental approaches.

Outside of a small body of critical film theory, documentary is often considered a genre evolved from the best practices in journalism, in which rigorous effort is applied to representing the closest possible portrayal or revelation of the truth in any given subject matter, respecting principles of balance. However, representation of any kind, particularly of cultures and concepts outside the filmmaker's own heritage, culture, socio-economic group or gender, remains a contested ethical practice.

In the case of the film *Audition Colorée*, a critical approach to the issue of representation becomes even more prevalent, given the line of creative inquiry. It would be an impossible claim to on the one hand, speak of unbridgeable cultural difference and the hazards of Western/Northern arrogance in totalising all cultures, and then claim to truly represent that difference, all from the perspective of the same dominant culture responsible for the totalising.

However this is exactly what can and so often does occur in news media and factual screen genres including documentary. According to screen and documentary scholar Bill Nichols documentary production is aligned to discourses associated with instrumental power, or what he calls 'discourses of sobriety'.

> Whilst Cinema overall is the domain of mimetic distractions and counterfeitings [that] cannot engage our reason nor nourish our hunger for truth, Documentary film has a kinship with those other nonfictional systems that together make up what we may call the discourses of sobriety. Science, economics, politics, foreign policy, education, religion, welfare—these systems assume they have instrumental power; they can and should alter the world itself, they can effect action and entail consequences. (Nichols, 1991, p3)

According to Nichols, these discourses of sobriety facilitate an assumption that theirs is a connection to the real that is direct, immediate, transparent and authoritative.

> Documentary films, though, are part and parcel of the discursive formations, the language games, and rhetorical stratagems by and through which pleasure and power, ideologies and utopias, subjects and subjectivities receive tangible representation. (Nichols, 1991, p10)

The process of naturalising or legitimising privileged discursive positions is further supported by noted factual film theorist Michael Renov:

> The more conventional approach presumes that objectivity is possible, "that every documentary issues a 'truth claim', positing a relationship to history that exceeds the analogical status of its fictional counterparts" (Renov, 1993, p55)

Of course, documentary remains distinct from fiction, with Nichols highlighting the indexical relationship of documentary to the politics of representation and the discursive positions of the author.

> An indexical bond exists between the image and the ethics that produced it. The image provides evidence not only on behalf of an argument but also gives evidence of the politics and ethics of its maker. (Nichols, 1991, p77)

However, the politics of the moving image intensify when considering the representation of the Other, and for the reasons highlighted regarding the discursive positions of dominant languages and media forms, resulting in a scenario, according to Paul Carter, where:

> … speaking (and writing) as Other always implies a horizon beyond which language cannot go. (Carter, 2005, p253)

For *Audition Colorée* to interrogate a topic of this nature involves necessarily engaging with cultures outside of dominant lingua francas, and making critical connections from research undertaken from a range of desk sources—ethnographic, linguistic, cultural theory and language philosophy, as well as others.

The filming has also involved travelling and being immersed in other cultures, drawing on approaches that might be considered analogous with ethnographic documentary traditions. Ethnographic documentary production has many critics who contest the idea that turning on a camera in another country or culture allows for the truth of that culture to be revealed, no matter ethical rigour applied or authorial intent.

> Commentaries on Anthropological writing have argued that ethnographic texts involve a formidable sense of allegory. The genre is said to tell us significant things about ourselves, our modes of constructing "otherness," our idealisations and self-deceptions, and our class biases, our times and historical positions. These arguments are undoubtedly true in a general way, but it is also true that an ethnography is something more than a Rorschach test of writing conventions, intellectual fads, and tacit prejudices. (Feld, 1990, preface to 2nd Edition)

Feld highlights an ever-present problematic regarding the projection of western views on different cultures. Ultimately, there is always Western privilege at play. As mentioned in previous chapters, even with the best of intentions, additional biases and conventions can also exist at the level of language itself, as a result of associated discursive and even cognitive limitations. However as the above quote demonstrates, the situation is even more complex.

Since more stringent ethical examination of both filmic and stills photography documentary image gathering came to the fore, representing the 'Other', particular the 'Other' as documentary subject in crisis or suffering, came to be seen as exploitatively transforming images of suffering into works of art, cynically capturing the pain of others for the gain of the photographer, visual-artist, film-maker or news gatherer.

Such images, which have also saturated news media, have arguably made spectators immune to possible empathy with suffering or political or economic inequality. They form part of the ritualised consumption of media, with war zone carnage imagery an expected part of each news broadcast, with repeated viewing inoculating spectators to the true degree of their horror.

Practitioners and theorists are also acutely aware of the need for agents of a particular culture to have the right first and foremost, to represent their own culture in their own voice, rather than have their views represented by those beyond their own culture.

However, an all-consuming focus on identity politics can produce a semantic and actual anxiety regarding cultural appropriateness amongst producers, artists and directors: should it *prevent* the attempt of *any* inquiry on

a subject matter outside their own culture, group or gender? Could this be of more detriment if it results in *no* inquiry into a valid political, artistic or social issue, particularly when considering cultures with no mainstream voice at all, or true opportunity—for economic, political or other reasons—to speak on behalf of themselves?

Could it lead to greater levels of misunderstanding and ignorance? In order to highlight the sense of lack that exists within western thought regarding respect for cultural and linguistic difference, is it possible *not to* speak in some way of the Other? Particularly when attempting to focus critically on one's own culture with respect to the treatment of cultural difference?

While the answer to these questions could form the subject of another exegesis entirely, the question of the validity of conventional technique in documentary production remains central to this exegesis and the production methodologies in Audition Colorée.

Audition Colorée does on some level attempt to represent cultures outside globalised space, but it does not attempt to provide a true or authoritative representation of any of the unique world views embodied within those languages or cultures. Instead, it aims to foreground the question of difference, and the loss we are experiencing in not knowing, or preserving these systems of thought and culture, and the consequences of this loss overall.

Regardless, documentary photography theorist Ariella Azoulay has recently garnered critical traction in revisiting the politics of identity, representation and spectatorship. While she applies her particular analysis to the politics of stills photography, her ideas on spectatorship also have resonance in debates concerning documentary and in particular approaches taken in the film *Audition Colorée*.

Azoulay criticizes both Roland Barthes and Susan Sontag for reducing the role of the spectator to merely making an 'aesthetic judgment' in a passive sense. According to Azoulay, this aesthetic judgment model depends upon

'the notion of a stable meaning of what is visible in the photograph.' (Azoulay, 2008, p130)

For her, there is always also an excess of truth in an image, truth that stretches beyond the intended reading. In this model of spectatorship images can and should be read 'against their grain' with the photographer possessing no more authority than the viewer.

Azoulay's spectator is a universal citizen, actively engaged and compelled by a duty towards the other, encountering the Other through the image. Both the viewer/time of interpretation and the image represent a photographic event. The photograph itself becomes part of the common.

> Against the political order of the nation-state, photography—together with other media that created the conditions for globalization—paved the way for universal citizenship: not a state, but a citizenry, a virtual citizenry, in potential, with the civil contract of photography as its organising framework. (Azoulay, 2008, p134)

The spectator encounters the violence of power and photograph but does so with the faith that the subject represented can claim rights through the process of having their image captured.

Azoulay's attempt to redefine the nature of spectatorship, while idealistic, counters some of the arguments I have already made, also redefining the nature of an image maker entering another culture to some extent, reflecting instead the more neutral position of travelogue.

In the following chapter I will look further at the particular role of the travelogue in essay filmmaking and heritage, and its application in *Audition Colorée.*

Unlike documentary, *Audition Colorée* does not attempt to represent the truth of the Other, it evokes a sense of the Other, utilising alienation techniques, to represent the gap between (our) dominant and other cultures. Its construction is about facilitating open-ended readings, to place the viewer in the space between languages, using the curious lens of the knowing/unknowing traveller, moving through representations of alienation and a particular poetics of visual pleasure.

The loss of language and cultural difference is represented allegorically in the idea of the X-end—a deliberately generative undefined space in *Audition Colorée*—a blend of tropes formed from cultural concepts of apocalypse that western audiences can tangibly and intangibly identify with. But this end point alludes to an unknown—the sensorial world of language that fades as oral cultures disappear.

The intended effect is to produce the experience, or a simulation or sense of the experience—through a particular type of spectatorial alienation—of being a foreigner both within and outside of one's own language.

Essay film

> Richter describes the emergence of a new genre of film that enables the director to make 'problems, thoughts, even ideas' perceptible and to 'render visible what is not visible.' (Alter, 2006 #6, p17)

In 1940, Hans Richter, the German avant-garde director, wrote a short text entitled *The Film Essay: A New Form of Documentary Film*, from which Nora Alter (2006) paraphrases in the above quote.

Unlike documentary film, she writes, which presents facts and information, the essay film produces complex thoughts that are not necessarily grounded in reality. These thoughts are occasionally contradictory and not always rational.

As already outlined, *Audition Colorée* directly references Chris Marker's oeuvre including the seminal *Sans Soleil*, a work arguably best known in the critical history of film theory as a poetic essay film investigating the themes of time, place, representation, history and memory—particularly in the context of examining the reliability of the image as a vehicle for memory and history.

> Marker seeks to rupture the constraining bond between text and image, rejecting the idea that the latter illustrates the former as thoroughly as the idea that the former comments on the latter. As he states in his advice to the reader at the beginning of *Le depays*: The text is no more a commentary on the image than images are illustrations of the text. (Alter, 2006, p10)

Homage to Marker and the techniques he explores, as well as other employed in the works of experimental essayists represents the starting point for the construction of *Audition Colorée.* I reference the film *Sans Soleil,* the work of Chris Marker as well as other film essayists, because of the genre's ability to employ techniques that place it outside the noise of market consciousness, and because of the creative possibilities essay films can facilitate.

Stretches of poetic and hypnotic narration in *Sans Soleil* induce a seamless sense of identification with the subject material, which is then ruptured in an unpredictable rhythm through the use of alienation devices that challenge the

authority of images to represent memory, inviting questions on their reliability in the construction of history.

Audition Colorée embraces Marker's fascination with memory and the image, but the thematic focus is shifted towards the memory embodied within language, the influence of this diversity, and the limitations of western hegemonic thought. It is the extinction of both memory and experience within language that becomes the focus of *Audition Colorée*, and an examination of the forms of remembering and meaning that are unknown and possibly unknowable to speakers of western lingua francas.

Marker's declaration of the fundamental frailty of the image as a substitute for memory is evolved, as *Audition Colorée* tries to connect the audience to a sense of the loss of not only personal memory, but wider cultural memory, and by extension, the experiential systems of memory that have informed the totality of human ontology.

This loss of language is of course most significant to the speakers of those languages, but remains profoundly important to all of us. Languishing in the shadowy regions of our own cultural blind spots and contemporary fascinations with the promise and seductions of our capitalistic sense of the global, the value this linguistic diversity embodies is invisible yet integral.

It is the condition of the traveller that opens up, if not understanding, at least a liminal awareness of that difference. The ambiguous and curious voyeurism that is the state of the wanderer provides a tension for the viewer and fosters an alternately generative/alienating experience of spectatorial identification, a technique widely employed across Marker's work.

As Catherine Upton (2006) outlines in her book *Memories of the Future*.

> This approach is reflected in the aleatory character of Marker's travelogues, which flit spontaneously from one fact or observation to another, without attempting, an orderly narrative account of the place being visited … The consequence of accepting the random shocks of the journey then becomes a perpetual disorientation of the self in the face of difference. Rather than fearing this difference, Marker's reaction is that of the 'exote' described by the French travel writer Victor Ségalen: 'the lively and curious response to the shock of a strong individuality encountering an objective world, and perceiving and

> savouring its distance. The distinctive, disembodied 'I' who speaks or is implied in Marker's travel commentaries measures this distance by tracing his own displacement in the effort to show and enter imaginatively into the living worlds of other nations and cultures, reversing expectations by perceiving strangeness as familiarity and depicting the routine habits of his own culture as bizarre and outlandish rites. (Lupton, 2006, p654, 655 & 657/4427)

Marker's travel commentary continually interrogates ideas of time and its passing in the cultures he traverses, introducing a more complex conception of this time, and an assemblage of the image that defies the narrative construction of both fictive and factual film techniques.

Deleuze's notion of time-image cinema is also relevant to both understanding Marker's work and the starting strategies of *Audition Colorée*.

To understand time-image cinema, we must contrast it with movement-image cinema, in which frame follows frame according to necessities of action, subordinating time to movement.

> Movement-image is a bearer of narrative, and comprises a linear progression of spaces and characters organized by means of montage. Time-image, in contrast, presents an abstract situation with loose narrative ends – it 'creates paradoxical movements'. (Deleuze in Skakov, 2012, p210/5255)

Clearly, *Sans Soleil* is nothing like movement-image cinema. The film has no discernible action or plot that works to subjugate time. Images span many different periods, and a scene is just as likely to traverse between Guinea-Bisseau or Kyoto as it is to cut to an early computer graphics representation.

While many of Marker's films are set in faraway places, he does not always foreground the journey itself. The images recorded in the transient passage between each disparate destination make it possible to connect these films both to the genre of the written travel essay and to popular film travelogues.

The production technique chosen for *Audition Colorée* also concerns itself with the idea of the traveller, and an indeterminate and generative sense of time, and the possibilities and limits this mode imposes. Travel in general, despite or because of its very transitory condition, and the rhythmic play of

words that maintains a state of open-ended audience identification, refuse to allow the text to be locatable within the traditions of documentary narration.

Filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard also interrogate ideas of the truth claim of documentary representation of the Other through the notion of the travel film, most notably in *Pravda* (1970).

In *Audition Colorée,* footage is shot on handicams, using toy Japanese cameras, mobile phones, DSLR cameras, or created using graphics programs, in a combination that provides for a shifting style that becomes an anti-aesthetic rupture of documentary and factual technique, disturbing the usual spectatorial identification with both the documentary and the travel film. The use of three narrators, one who appears in the film (Queen Sheba), also subverts the usual authority of a single disembodied omniscient narrator.

Variations in voiceover utilising third person, past tense, or opinions 'quoted' rather than directly stated, facilitates a sense of distance and reflection working alongside sound elements, and offer an approach distinct to normal voice over. It also serves to make the opinions expressed less 'opinionated'.

The desire is to place the viewer in the liminal zone between viewership and the perceived representation of a different reality, and importantly, to use this space to generate the experiential sense of engaging with what is unknowable.

The effort is not to frame and oppose in dialectical terms, but adopt a sense of connection to the Other, through the interplay of alienation and poetic devices. These techniques provoke more tangential audience responses and offer greater potential for critical responses through different layers of meaning. The film text offers a multiplicity of ideas – an alternative to documentaries that consistently draw participants back to a central thesis, or filter and signal the material through a singular, tangible onscreen identity or omniscient narrator.

The text of the narration itself plays with language via reflexive techniques, and poetic deviations from the usual tone and mode of documentary narration. It is a suite of techniques that is meant to dislodge us from our monolingual comfort zones. The idea of the X-End, as something unlocatable or indefinable, but also traceable to many popular culture representations of endpoints of civilisation, also servers to maintain critical awareness of the film's construction.

In developing the project I have studied a range of filmmakers in essayist or related genres and witnessed the same effort to either induce alienation devices or make their presence known in order to encourage a critical audience awareness of their own voice.

Experimental filmmaker Harun Farocki is often present in his films—at times through narrational interruptions, and in others such as *Inextinguishable Fire* (1969), he makes an appearance that works to articulate his role in the manufacture of the images of, in this case, napalm victims. This deliberate directorial presence provides a means of signalling awareness of his own political stake and influence. (Guerin, 2009)

Pixel poor filmmaking

German experimental film essayist, philosopher and conceptual artist Hito Steyerl has straddled conceptual art practices and experimental film in a diverse body of work to date with thematic interests covering media, technology, and the global circulation of images. What I have found most interesting in her work is a conception of a particular 'class' or heirachy of imagery. Steyerl's heirachy is based on technical excellence and ever-ascending digital resolutions, which has served to overwhelm experimental or arts-based film methodology as audiovisual industries and distribution platforms realigned to almost exclusively service media and entertainment industry economies.

> Twenty or even thirty years ago, the neoliberal restructuring of media production began slowly obscuring non-commercial imagery, to the point where experimental and essayistic cinema became almost invisible. This development was of course connected to the neoliberal radicalization of the concept of culture as commodity, to the commercialization of cinema, its dispersion into multiplexes, and the marginalization of independent filmmaking. Resolution was fetishized as if its lack amounted to castration of the author. The cult of film gauge dominated even independent film production. (Steyerl, 2010)

Steyerl also posits that in many cases the only possible distribution of former experimental and essay films lies in digital realms in degraded forms, often copies of formerly analog versions shared between likeminded souls, who once may have viewed the same works, projected on film, amidst a community with similar interests.

> The poor image embodies the afterlife of many former masterpieces of cinema and video art. It has been expelled from the sheltered paradise that cinema seems to have once been. (Steyerl, 2010)

Whereas experimental or arts-based film production was once connected to a particular cultural niche, often backed by state cultural agencies to project or foster a sense of national identity or act as a platform for soft power, the shift towards entirely commercial models of production demanded production values to rise inline with emerging technological capability. As technology has become more accessible and ever-higher resolutions appear within reach, production-values from student first efforts to elite blockbusters, have been lured towards ever-rarifying degrees of technical mastery and visual clarity. Resolution, and concomitant production

techniques are equated directly to the value of a work in entertainment or aesthetic terms.

> Poor images are poor because they are not assigned any value within the class society of images—their status as illicit or degraded grants them exemption from its criteria. Their lack of resolution attests to their appropriation and displacement. (Steyerl, 2010)

In a film like *Audition Colorée* a wide range of image gathering techniques are used, ranging from toy Haranezumi cameras, camcorders, mobile phones, to higher-end DSLR and cinema cameras, as well as archival materials of widely varying resolutions. The choice to follow this production pathway is both pragmatic and strategic, and follows essayist cues in unsettling the usually unbroken hold on the viewer weaved through narrative construction and a polished, single aesthetic.

The scientific and digital sublime

> This grand book [the universe] is written in the language of mathematics, and its characters are triangles, circles, and other geometric figures without which it is humanly impossible to understand a single word of it; without these, one wanders about in a dark labyrinth.' (Galileo in Abram, 1997, p30)

> … we see that the real world begins, in the modern Age, with the decision to transform the world, and to do so by means of science, analytical knowledge and the implementation of technology—that is to say that it begins in Hannah Arendt's words, with the invention of an Archimedean point outside the world (on the basis of the invention of the telescope by Galileo and the discovery of modern mathematical calculation) by which the natural world is definitively alienated. (Baudrillard, 2009, p10)

As outlined, uncritical faith in the supremacy of value-free scientific objectivity and economic rationalism belies the existence of metaphors and myths that underpin western modes of thought. Again, it is not the task (or possible or achievable goal) of this exegesis to decide what so many disciplines still contest in epistemological and ontological terms regarding their claimed dominion over objectivity, reason, or truth.

It is however possible to point out where discourses attached to institutions over-reach, and assume totalising ownership of an objective or 'sober' reality. These institutions are, like any others, products of a specific culture and their cultural biases, and, as Edward T. Hall points out:

> Culture hides more than it reveals, and strangely enough what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants. (Hall, 1959, p39)

I argue in *Audition Colorée* that what is hidden to us, what we fail to take note of, are the limitations of our own dominant cultures, and through our own languages, the limits of our own cognitive endowment.

While it is clear that the resources humanity relies upon are finite, the horizon neoliberal global capitalism continues to see for its own growth is *infinite.* This disavowal is necessary to maintain the survival, as well as amplify the intensity and profit-making prowess, of the system as a whole.

The fantasy, as Paul Carter notes, is:

> … a sign of always deferred arrival, retreating as we approach, the horizon embodies capitalism's Lacanian desire. (Carter, 2005, p251)

Carter refers to the perpetual motion machine of desire, the seeking of Lacan's *objet petit a* (object little-a or the unattainable object) also sometimes called the *object cause of desire*. It is a never-ending system in which desire looms closer to its object and then escapes in a perpetual elliptical motion, where contact is impossible.

> It is an expression of the lack inherent in human beings, whose incompleteness and early helplessness produce a quest for fulfillment beyond the satisfaction of biological needs. (Kirshner, 2005, p53)

As subjects within (and arguably objects of) a system whose economic fate depends upon our ability to adopt and exist within that system, is it any surprise that so many citizens of dominant, privileged cultures, refuse to accept, for example, what would appear an incontestable body of evidence demonstrating human-induced climate change? Is it another mythology, the myth of our separateness from the natural world that propels a fantasy allowing us to ignore the greater risk?

> … as the philosopher Alisdair MacIntyre (1970) concludes, myths are neither true nor false, but living or dead. A myth is alive if it continues to give meaning to human life, if it continues to represent some important part of the collective mentality of a given age, and if it continues to render socially and intellectually tolerable what would otherwise be experienced as incoherence. (Mosco, 2004, p29)

Indeed, pitted against the broader challenge of survival, the economic imperative seems incoherent in the extreme, however according to Mosco:

> Myths persist in the face of powerful evidence that they do not accurately embody an underlying reality. (Mosco, 2004, p49)

As the saying goes, Chief Executive Officers are the new celebrities, and economists the new priests, many of whom, with the political process and media superstructure in tow, continue to mythologise expansion of the capitalist system above the clear ecological limits it faces, which, if transgressed, will sooner or later precipitate some variant of catastrophe. An easy argument for proponents of instrumental reason to convincingly make, it would seem.

Despite soberingly persuasive arguments, the overwhelming consensus of scientific opinion and evidence—clear cases for proving human-induced climate change and highlighting urgent demand for remedial action, adherence to the myths and metaphors of competing institutions, interests and discursive powerplays continues. If no model of capitalism is possible without the prospect of infinite growth, and this is *clearly impossible*, why aren't the policy makers of the world busily inventing new systems of economic thought?

> 'Disproving' a myth by pointing to its failure to conform to an accepted truth or to evidence usually does little to dispel it. (Ohmann cited in Mosco, 2004, p3)

> … myths are important both for what they reveal (including a genuine desire for community and democracy) and for what they conceal (including the growing concentration of communication power in a handful of transnational media businesses). (Mosco, 2004, p161)

But what of the myths underpinned by and perpetuated by the imaginal powers of science? Whether or not scientific inquiry can be truly objective, or as it contends, is above non-scientific philosophical critique, I certainly, on a personal level, am swayed by the sober scientific corpus of knowledge in many fundamental ways. I would always prefer to be a passenger in a jetliner designed according to the best principles of aerodynamics and the laws of physics; or be treated for a serious disease by the latest medical advances. I hold out hope that science will provide an alternative source of abundant energy that will replace the fossil fuels that are the cause of many environmental problems. And, I use technology constantly, more than most people. As a film-maker who shoots and edits his own films, computers offer a way to not only bring images to life, but to write music, edit and mix sound.

However science is not immune from its own tendency to mythologise or rhapsodise its own ideals or visions of the future, nor is it detached from the fantasies of infinite expansion. In fact, it would be fair to say that science, or at least applied science, underpins technologies that stimulate and amplify the neoliberal market, and has been a major driver in propelling the myth that capitalist economies can expand indefinitely.

One only has to look at historical predictions of the future, based on the promise of past scientific discovery and technoutopias, to see how fragile our hold on the future is.

In the 1950s, supporters of nuclear power boasted that the 'mighty atom' would soon bring us heat and electricity 'too cheap to meter'. At the dawn of electricity itself it was predicted crime would be eliminated by a night sky brilliant with electric illumination.

Audition Colorée makes reference to a science that would study and measure past predictions of the future against the reality of that future lived when that future arrives. Such a science would register a vast number of disappointing failures in its mythologising of science's role in possible future visions, alongside the considerable successes that were never ever contemplated. What also of Virilio's *integral accident*—the unforeseen accident embedded in each new application of scientific discovery and technology?

Those who foretold electricity delivering a safer world with brightly illuminated streets or the automobile's revolutionary effects on transportation, didn't anticipate carbon-accelerated global warming would accidentally be a by-product of these new technologies.

The dream of space

> The aesthetic of the sublime, in a rudimentary sense, exposes the fundamental and irresolvable difference between knowing and feeling. That is, between knowing and feeling lies a differend that is felt as the pain of thinking coming up against its limits. (Lyotard in French, 2010, p73)

One of the master narratives underpinning science and metaphor or unravelling the laws of the universe lies in the fantasy of exploring the infinite, discovering habitable worlds and making contact with intelligent life.

Audition Colorée begins with images of NASA and space exploration and the idea of an externalised journey of discovery, a journey beyond the limits of our own world, towards possibilities beyond our solar system and potentially beyond our understanding.

What is known as 'escape velocity'—the speed required to exit the earth's gravitational pull – is appropriated and takes on another meaning in cultural theorist Mark Dery's (1996) book of the same name. Signifying an escapist trope in the cultural imagination, Dery refers to Leo Marx's term the 'rhetoric of the technological sublime.'

Space exploration is a goal of science but also a constant thematic playground for science fiction, both of which project a culturally-specific desire, propelling into the infinite realms of space the earthly metaphor that sustains the mythology of unfettered progress and infinite expansion. Faith in these tropes simultaneously legitimises a view that current challenges facing our own liveable world are less important, should the goal of finding another habitat be achieved.

Space travel's popularity in popular imagination (outside of science fiction) arguably peaked with the Apollo 11 moon landing, the last time the narrative of projecting a human into the borderlands of the final frontier was sustained. Largely because the moon was not so much a frontier but a baby step in distance terms, and the next manned expedition to land on another planet or body in space would require a far greater leap in science than existed, probes became the focus of NASA research.

The Voyager mission, which saw the launch of the probes Voyager 1(1977) and Voyager 2(1977), was initially intended to study the planetary systems of Jupiter and Saturn, but the space probes still continue their mission into the outer solar system, pushing through the heliosheath (the limits of the Sun's gravitational influence and the border of our solar system) into the absolute zero of deep space.

Voyager 1 and 2 both carried with them the *Golden Record* that contains pictures and sounds of Earth, along with symbolic directions for playing the record, as well as detailing the location of Earth.

Since the 1950s NASA has been beaming the message 'We are right here' into space via radio transmitters, with language spearheading our first imaginative leap into the unknown and our possible contact with the great alien 'Other'.

For the Voyager mission, celebrity astrophysicist Carl Sagan and a team of collaborators set out to explain our planet and our civilization in 117 pictures, greetings in 54 different languages and a representative selection of 'the sounds of Earth,' ranging from an avalanche to an elephant's trumpet to a kiss, as well as nearly 90 minutes of what was then believed to be the world's greatest music, all appearing on *The Golden Record.*

Landing on the moon was a difficult feat to follow up on, given the cost and scale of landing humans anywhere else anytime soon, so Sagan knew that part of the worth of *The Golden Record* was in its power to once again titillate popular imagination for public relations reasons, and so did his team. One collaborator on the record's content, B.M. Oliver, Vice-President for research and development at Hewlett-Packard, said:

> There is only an infinitesimal chance that the plaque will ever be seen by a single extra-terrestrial, but it will certainly be seen by billions of terrestrials. Its real function, therefore, is to appeal to and expand the human spirit, and to make contact with extra-terrestrial intelligence a welcome expectation of mankind. (Oliver cited in Sagan, 1979, p199/4196)

Part of the team also included science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke— who recommended that the plaque contain the following message, reportedly a statement of hope that our civilization would go on long enough for the message to be read:

> Please leave me alone; let me go on to the stars. (Clarke cited in Sagan, 1979, p204/4196)

Herein lies the contradiction disguised by the mythologising of science and the grand narrative of space exploration. Whilst the scientific and popular imagination is drawn to the infinite, it brings a startling awareness of the near absolute solitude that we occupy in *this* time and space. It is myth, disguising contradiction, in the sense Levi-Strauss intended.

While not discounting what is possible in the realm of scientific imagination, a survey of the existing laws of science tends to, if not quash hopes for encountering other habitable worlds or intelligent life, make such dreams seem a secondary priority to the many real problems on our terrestrial plane.

The distances are simply too vast and the physical requirements of a human body reaching velocities near the speed of light, necessary to bend time and traverse these distances, is an insurmountable barrier to any current, or even projected future technologies. Even if the inertia required to acquire near light speed would not crush a human body according to the forces of required acceleration, scientific consensus seems to agree that no material object can ever reach the speed of light. Approaching the speed of light only means time *slows*, so even to reach the closest possible solar system where it is predicted life might *possibly* exist would be 12 light years away, which could require many human generations of travel at speeds currently well-surpassing any current technology. Is the dream impossible? No. More science fiction than currently plausible science? It would seem so, for the foreseeable future at least.

Despite the outstanding achievement in both scientific and imaginative terms that took humanity into space, the likely futility of space exploration and the cultural produced techno-futurist, technologically sublime vision it

embodies contrasts starkly with the neglect of cultural difference, linguistic diversity, and decimation of ecologies amidst the differing worlds of subjectivity already available in the cultures of earth.

Perhaps these cultural worlds, if we were to truly appreciate and learn from them, could offer another an even greater window on a possible sublime.

The Golden Record did include greetings in Hungarian, so that the aliens out there could at least experience *perfect language.*

It also included music from senior Aboriginal men Djawa, Mudpo and Waliparu who gathered one night in 1962 on Milingimbi mission in Arnhem Land for a recording session with Australian anthropologist Sandra Le Brun Holmes. The song which appeared on the record was incorrectly listed however, as revealed by a recent article in *The Conversation.*

> According to Murmurs of Earth, the songs were recorded in 1958, and 1m 26s on the golden records included "Morning Star" and "Devil Bird". However, Le Brun Holmes' first visit to Milingimbi occurred in 1962. And when the golden record is compared with the original recording, it becomes clear that the didjeridu and clapsticks (Mudpo and Djawa) is the first 23s, with Djawa's vocal cut off, while the remainder is not the "Devil Bird" song at all, but Waliparu singing "Moikoi". (Gorman, 2013)

Another question the *Conversation* may have taken up in the article is the number of Indigenous Australian languages which have become extinct since the *Golden Record* left the earth's gravitational pull in 1977.

Speech music

> Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out. (Anzaldúa, 1987, p35)

As well as oral languages, a primary focus of *Audition Colorée* is to emphasise the importance of speech (parole), particularly in relation to oral languages traditions. Like music, the act of speech requires a set of skills and performance art. It is rich and loaded with subtle nuances, unfolding in real time. People use speech to persuade, assert, and to express intimacy, to delight and to dominate. The immediate and performative aspect of speech, also links back to questions raised about the sensual, experiential nature of language as an oral practice.

> Active, living speech is just such a gesture, a vocal gesticulation wherein the meaning is inseparable from the sound, the shape, and the rhythm of the words. Communicative meaning is always, in its depths, affective; it remains rooted in the sensual dimension of experience, born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole. Linguistic meaning is not some ideal and bodiless essence that we arbitrarily assign to a physical sound or word and then toss out into the "external" world. (Abram, 2012, p73)

The sonic properties of tongues very different can evoke a sense of what is unknowable and infinite in language, and therefore the question of the sublime. The assumed primitiveness of Indigenous languages, based on what were perceived sonic peculiarities, is an element of difference in language that is explored through the usage of sound and its relationship to image in *Audition Colorée*.

> For example the Khoisan language family of southern Africa, which displays a vast array of complex systems of click consonants (the kinds of sound which are heard on the margins of English, in such vocalizations as tut tut). When European explorers first encountered these languages, clicks were so alien to their ears that the speech was readily dismissed as bizarre and animal-like—compared to the clucking of hens or the gobbling of turkeys. But no set of animal noises could even remotely resemble the system of phonological contrasts found in, for example, !Xu, which in one analysis has 48 distinct click sounds. (Crystal, 2002, p56)

It is useful to consider this aspect in relationship to how language as an oral practice functions within our own languages, distinct from the written word.

> A professional story-teller 'knows' how points in a story coincide with crescendos and diminuendos, with allegros and lentos. … In the professional, the sequences become elaborated indeed, incorporating a wide range of repetitive motifs, figures of speech, patterns of verbal elaboration (e.g. for praising, boasting, abusing), formulaic exaggerations, points of digression, and other linguistic devices, many of which act as the 'keys and scales' of oral performance. The analogy with music is not far-fetched, for much oral performance was in fact chanted or sung. (Crystal, 2002, p43)

In *Audition Colorée* I have attempted to explore the musicality of speech. This has involved converting famous speeches such as the famous Nuremberg address by Adolf Hitler, using a software program that can interpret tonal changes in the voice embodied in a sound file, then converting these tones to midi notes, which can than be fed through electronic instruments, either to achieve rhythmic effects or musical sequences.

The minimalist experience of time

One of the features of oral languages, according to David Abram and others cited in this exegesis, is the embodiment of differing concepts of time. Rather than a linear unfolding of past-present-future, oral languages often embody a sense of unified place and time, where past-present-future intertwines with place to produce a concept analogous to a constant state of becoming.

This idea of temporality is something which I have linked to the creation of specific sound works for the DCA project. In particular, the idea of non-narrative time is closely linked to ideas informing the minimalist music tradition. This includes eschewing linear elements in composition such as melody, or specific movements such as chorus or finale, in favour of repetition. These works are included in the final film.

Sound works have also been created using recordings of languages themselves. For example all of the words in the English lexicon, over 1.2 million as at Oct 10, 2014, downloaded from an online free dictionary including buzzwords and slang, were spoken and recorded by a computer program. The program generated a voice recording, which, if played in realtime, would require a period of 3 weeks to play in total. The recording was then sped up again so that the entire vocabulary of English is revealed in

20 seconds as a sea of white noise, with the resulting audio driving a visual animation.

Ambient sound pieces using extinct language recordings have also been created to supplement original music and provide a sense that language—albeit unrecognisable at times—is always present in most moments of the film.

Exterior and interior multiverses

> Back in the 1970s and 1980s the feeling was that we were so smart, we almost had everything figured out."—Alan Guth, theoretical physicist (Guth cited in Lightman, 2013, p108/1580)
>
> If the multiverse idea is correct, then the historic mission of physics to explain all the properties of our universe in terms of fundamental principles—to explain why the properties of our universe must necessarily be what they are—is futile, a beautiful philosophical dream that simply isn't true. Our universe is what it is simply because we are here. (Lightman, 2013, p165/1580)

During NASA's golden era, between conquering the moon and sending the first space shuttles into regular flight, the idea of a Theory of Everything (ToE) appeared within reach. To theoretical physicists this would involve reconciling aspects of quantum mechanics and the theory of general relativity, which seemed a few short steps away.

> … there were prospects for merging quantum physics with the fourth force, gravity, and thus pulling it into the fold of what physicists called the Theory of Everything. Some called it the Final Theory. (Lightman, 2013, p110/1580)

Evidently, the fundamental laws of nature do not pin down a single and unique universe. According to the current thinking of many theoretical physicists, we are living in one of a vast number of universes, or universes incalculable by science (Lightman, 2013). These ideas however, cannot currently be tested by scientific observation.

As a creative work, *Audition Colorée* focuses on space exploration imagery and concepts relating to both ideas of the sublime as previously articulated—the rhetoric of the technological sublime and the mathematical sublime.

In broad terms the sensation of encountering the sublime occurs when an experience confounds understanding, when the power of an object or event is exceeds the limits of language or representation. This is certainly a possibility when considering scientific theories yet to be proven or even observed, such as string theory, the idea of a multiverse (a vast number of universes occurring simultaneously with our own), or others such as inflation theory.

However I also propose there is another possible variation on the multiverse concept, and the sublime, which relates to the worlds within the

subjectivities of the cultures on earth. The sense of profound and nascent discovery associated with the sublime relates to the worlds inaccessible to us, the possibilities, knowledge and experience they represent. The impossible realisation is, that without entering the worldview of each language that exists—an unachievable task—we will never engage with or understand the experiences only truly available to the native speaker of a specific language. While scientific objectivity creates the assumption of one true world, linguistic relativity would define the number of 'worlds' accessible to humanity as being the number of languages that exist.

The film therefore investigates this idea of the dynamic sublime in its construction, of encountering the many ways different cultures have created their own unique worlds and subjectivities, as well as their constructed mythologies to counter the limits that constrain every culture.

Cultures and languages in *Audition Colorée*

> All languages have a word for 'see' but not all languages have a word for colour. (Wierzbicka cited in Van Leeuwen 2011, p49)

Audition Colorée primarily focuses on speakers of oral languages, or those with a link to oral traditions, from several countries, including speakers of the oral dialects of Tibetan Yunnan, Mongolian shaman traditions, African-American performance poet Queen Sheba, several African languages such as Maasai, Gikuyi, Kigiryama, Kamba and others, as well as Australian Indigenous speakers of Dharug (Sydney Basin and Sydney West), and Dharawal (Sydney Basin, Illawarra and South Coast).

Special mention is warranted here on Australian Aboriginal languages. Australia has the worst record of language loss of any country—95% of all Indigenous languages are either lost or critically endangered. This loss is especially significant because the oral traditions embedded in those languages preserve the longest continuous cultures on earth, and were often not recorded (Crystal, 2002), These more than 200 languages, according to linguists such as Stephen Pinker, belong to family all of their own. (Pinker, 1995, p257)

As such, it is perhaps an irony that in a culture so Anglo-European historically, later informed by immigrants from Europe and then from Asia, the cultures that still represent the most difference to Lingua Franca speakers and cultures are those of the first Australians, those that seemingly receive little attention, recognition or respect from mainstream Australia.

The synaesthetic association of visible topology and auditory recall, or what David Abrams describes 'the intertwining of place with linguistic memory, common to almost all Indigenous, oral cultures' is central to the link between language and place in many oral cultures. (Abram, 2012, p3167/5728)

Additionally, according to Abram, Aboriginal Australian languages are especially significant in this context because, as Aboriginal people use (or

arguably chose to use) simple and elegant technologies, their connection to land through language was more intimate than arguably any other culture.

It can be difficult for westerners from written-language cultures to understand the destitution felt by Indigenous oral-language communities who have been forcibly displaced from their traditional lands.

> The local earth for them, is the very matrix of discursive meaning. To force them from their native ecology … is to render them speechless. (Abram, 2012, p176/258)

The songlines of Aboriginal Australian languages provided an auditory mnemonic tool–an oral means of recalling viable routes through often harsh terrain, a songbook of survival and the transmission of culture.

This connection is evident in the animistic mapping common in many aboriginal languages, including the now extinct language of Kaurna:

> Kaurna people once named places spread over an area of 1,500 square miles on the coast of South Australia, near Adelaide. Each place name corresponded to a body part of an imagined giant kangaroo. In this giant kangaroo landscape, two mountain peaks represented ears, a peninsula the 'nose', two hills eyebrows, one river the 'tail' while a nearby river was 'excrement' and a river delta the 'throat'. (Harrison, 2007, p4144/5656)

Western people often assume that Aboriginal languages, or oral languages in general, are inferior to our own, despite the arguments linguists make that languages mostly share the same degree of complexity.

> Yanyuwa (70 speakers in Australia) women and men talk so differently that their speech is really two different dialects. Differences go beyond sounds or words, encompassing grammatical affixes, pronouns, and other parts of speech. (Harrison, 2007, p3670/5656)

I acknowledge the complex issues of representation that may arise when non-Indigenous people attempt to speak on behalf of Indigenous people, either politically or in the attempt to describe their culture.

However, I feel it is well within my creative and conceptual remit to interrogate failings of my own culture in not adequately supporting the maintenance of Aboriginal languages and culture. I have also largely focused on the intersection of non-Indigenous and Indigenous Australia in territories close to my own, and what I feel is most the relevant local to my own discursive history as a writer, filmmaker, and resident of Sydney. Sydney is

the city where I have spent the majority of my life and it is relevant as the site of first contact and colonisation in the country with the world's most unenviable record on the preservation of linguistic diversity.

I have referenced two languages that once existed in the southern side of Sydney Harbour, Dharawal (Southern Sydney and NSW South Coast) and Dharug (Southern and Western Sydney). There are fewer than ten speakers of each language, none of these speakers with an unbroken connection to culture, and arguably only one or two elderly speakers who could claim to have known someone who would have used these languages with any real connection to their original cultural contexts.

The issue I found to be most relevant to this project is that Indigenous memory contained in these languages is ignored, and in some cases, consciously erased for reasons suiting mainstream cultural and economic imperatives.

In my research, which involved consultations with communities in La Perouse, The Blue Mountains, and Northern Illawarra, I came to develop an understanding of Sydney as a city built without meaningful reflection of having been constructed over a culture that extends back well into the western conception of pre-history; a city that to do this day continues to disavow the significance of this history.

The major arterial road routes in Sydney are based on songlines, including routes just outside of the National Park, south of Sydney, where the trails are still kept alive. I was also told by Dharug Elder Richard Green (personal communication June 2011) stories of the Kuringgai (Sydney North Shore) people that told of the last time climate change had profoundly affected the coastline, when the shoreline of Sydney was several kilometres further east than it currently stands.

The memory of a sophisticated civilisation lying beneath the city of Sydney embodied in these languages, and the specific resonances of Aboriginal history as vehicle for oral language, was saddening. Amplified by the fact the city of Sydney has so many Aboriginal place names, which at one

point in time would have had very specific meanings, many of which are now lost, led me to conclude that Sydney is, as is scripted in the Indigenous section of the *Audition Colorée*, a ghost city, a city of erasure.

Conclusion

> The years 2000, 2001, and 3001, the Millennium, the Eschaton, Utopia, Heaven, and the Level above Human: however we describe the object that lies at the end of history, it inevitably becomes the focus for intense cathexis—the libidinal transference of value. (Pettman, 2002, p3)

> All language on apocalypse is also apocalyptic and cannot be excluded from its object. (Derrida cited in Pettman 2002, p173)

The word eschatology arises from the Greek ἔσχατος *eschatos* meaning 'last' and *ology* meaning 'the study of', first used in English around 1844. The Oxford English Dictionary (2006) defines eschatology as 'The department of theological science concerned with 'the four last things: death, judgment, heaven and hell'.

Many, perhaps all cultures, have a variation on the tale of the end of the world or ascension/passage to utopia or heaven, as part of their suite of mythologies. The Norse Ragnarök, as well as Islamic, Christian Hindu and Buddhist mythologies all feature differing endpoints that can be catastrophic or revelatory, but are nearly always represented as the end of time as we imagine it.

In the West, while the idea of the apocalypse signifies this end-point, its roots are more complex, and it is possible to be interpreted as a process that is ongoing, a series of illuminations, as well as a reflection of the societal and cultural values prevalent at the time of the *Book of Revelation*'s composition. In an essay for the online journal *e-flux,* Oxana Timofeeva (2014) cites analysis by Fredrick Engels on the historical context of the text that features in the *Book of Revelation.*

> The word Apokalypsis, from the Koine Greek, means "unveiling" or "revelation." It unveils and reveals the truth about a certain reality. As far as it unveils (i.e., unveils what is), etymologically, the apocalypse is always now. "How Christianity looked in 68 [AD] we can here see as in a mirror," Engels says about the Book of Revelation, thus perfectly grasping a mirroring relationship between reality and the real, revealed through this peculiar numerology. In this sense, Revelation is a book on history, which depicts the religious and class struggle of that time, and addresses Christians with a call for solidarity: note that John does not address just anyone; his book contains messages for the seven churches of Asia, i.e., the existing Christian communities of his day. "The apocalypse is now, don't give up"—that's how one would now translate John's message. (Timofeeva, 2014)

Predictions of the future, like differing versions of history, can often be read or interpreted as servicing our desire for meaning in the present.

For all these eschatologies that can be linked to the practices of mythology and religion, science too, mirrors this desire, for a 'libidinal transference of value'. (Pettman, 2002)

For example, as mentioned in previous chapters, the Theory of Everything (ToE) which was believed to be within near reach of theoretical physicists in the 70s and is still pursued today. This goal will be achieved by accessing the underlying rules of the universe, which, once discovered, will deliver a mastery over the infinite and an omniscience that neatly parallels the totalising grandeur of its theological equivalents.

David Abram suggests in his essay *Earth in Eclipse* that Plato's cave allegory, and its message to distrust the sensual world of humanly perception, informed not only developing conceptions of science, but would provide elements that would serve to underpin the creation of Christian theology as well:

> As the intellectual culture of ancient Greece mingled with other cultures in the Mediterranean region, including the monotheistic culture of ancient Israel, and as Pythagoras' and Plato's theories came in contact with the new religious impulses stirring on the edges of Hebraic culture, Plato's eternal realm of pure forms—ostensibly the true home of the intellect—inspired and offered the model for a new notion of eternity: the Christian Heaven, or afterlife. (Abram, 2007, p153)

In the same essay Abram points to the many ways contemporary experience in advanced technological capitalism, like the ideals of NASA and other space agencies that I have outlined in previous chapters, create or discover worlds which divert us from experience within the natural environment, which provided the crucible for the formation of language (and humanity) itself.

> Our desire may be stirred, today, not only by the religious heavens that many believe will supersede this world, or by the mathematical heaven of pure number and proportion toward which so many reasoning intellects still aspire, but also by the digital heaven of cyberspace, that steadily ramifying labyrinth wherein we may daily divest ourselves of our bodies and their cumbersome constraints in order. (Abram, 2007, p158)

While these systems look to external worlds, driven by the power of the scientific or mathematical imagination, in synchronicity with the metadiscourses of ever-expanding capitalism, there are potentially many more worlds offering discovery in the internal worlds of existing (albeit disappearing) cultural subjectivities.

There was once another idea of the global—one that never saw or consciously knew its related parts but belonged to complex networks of thought and memory that extended across continents like a web of sensual intelligence.

In advanced technological neoliberal capitalism it as if we have stripped the colours from our eyes, leaving only those hues that captivate and guide us within the one system. Future generations may only ever see this limited colour schema, remembering only images created from this partial palette.

In the book *Colour and Culture: Art Science and Symbolism* author John Gage (1999) describes how the artists who painted the frescoes and mosaics at St Peter's cathedral in Rome classified colours according to a system of 25,000 named tint samples. While the tints remain the system used to describe their colour and how to combine them is gone—the level of distinction seems to have been lost to language. (Gage, 1999, p261)

For extinct languages that have been recorded the situation exists in reverse – the words, grammatical structures, vocabularies, and some systems of classification, even audio recordings of speakers of languages now lost may remain, but often their colour or meanings are entirely absent, divorced from any active living context. If culture can only exist in the act, they are therefore reduced to archival curiosity.

I contend that *Audition Colorée* as a creative work communicates the possible synaesthetic power of this diminishing yet still overwhelming 'colour', and serves to evoke a sense of the cultural difference and memory that is unknown to those whose view of the world is built on an intimate knowledge of only one or a limited number of dominant languages.

In *Audition Colorée* an argument regarding language loss is constructed, but not through conventional documentary or factual techniques. It is achieved instead through an alternating rhythm based on poetic seductions and alienation devices that elicit a critical audience response. In some respects, these alienation devices could be seen to be mirroring the alienation that the audience might experience when encountering a different language, or a starkly unfamiliar use of language.

In doing so the intention of *Audition Colorée* interrogates the space between languages and translation, attempting to place the viewer in this realm.

Ien Ang locates the project of 'cultural translation in a globalised world' in what she describes as a liminal zone, arguing that the moment of translation should acquire primacy over the substance of the identities (Ang, 2003).

It is in this concept of 'zone' which aims to locate its audience: a common space between cultures and languages that exists because of difference—voices, sounds, utterances from the shadows of non-places, that cannot be heard or understood, and whose meanings may be lost forever, implying a cost that cannot be measured.

What is unknowable, an absence or void, signifies the presence of something real that is unable to be represented—the systems of thought embodied in languages outside our own, that we as lingua franca speakers do not have access to.

This zone between languages, links back to the Merleau-Ponty's idea of primordial, pre-conceptual experience that is innately synaesthetic. (Abram, 1997)

Audition Colorée also evokes the understanding that every language that is lost diminishes our own. By highlighting the value of this linguistic Otherness, this repetition of presence and absence, the film becomes both a celebration of difference, and reminder of the increasing pressures on the

maintenance of cultural and linguistic difference. It also offers an indeterminate warning in its idea of the X-end regarding the dangers of disregarding the very diversity and connection to environment that arguably led to our very ontology as beings in possession of language, to our evolution as human.

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