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## Chapter 1

### Between Spectacle and Politics: Indigenous Singularities

*Barbara Glowczewski*

In ALIGNMENT WITH THE French speaking Native Americans from Quebec who define themselves as *autochtones* (autochthonous, “from the land”), UNESCO has adopted a protocol to use this translation in all its declarations and publications for the word indigenous instead of the French *indigène*. The use of the latter word is judged politically incorrect because of its old colonial use. But some non government organisations (NGOs), whose agenda is to defend the rights of Indigenous peoples, have revalued the French expression *peuples indigènes*, “Indigenous peoples” to insist on their special status. A French militant reappropriation of the word *indigène* emerged in a different context with the movement “Indigènes de la République” (Indigenous people of the Republic) which was constituted in reaction to a French law that was passed in 2005 requiring schools to teach the supposed “benefits of colonisation”.<sup>1</sup> Mobilization by French historians and anthropologists, as well as many petitions convinced the then President, Jacques Chirac, to abrogate this article of the new law, shortly after “riots” had erupted in the suburbs of Paris and other big French cities; the actors of this civil unrest were essentially young French people whose parents or grand-parents were part of the African colonial or postcolonial immigration to France<sup>2</sup>.

At the United Nations the expression “Indigenous people” (*peuples autochtones* in French) tends only to designate those colonised people who identify as such on the basis of their original economy, which rested on subsistence activities such as hunting, gathering, horticulture and grazing in a vision of the earth often holistic and sacred, and who found themselves a minority on their own lands. These criteria seem to correspond to thousands of language groups spread across the globe, representing at least 6% of

the population. Their claim to be granted status as sovereign people has been discussed at the UN for over thirty years while their ways of life, whether in Amazonia, in Siberia, in Mongolia or in the Kalahari desert, are threatened by the violence of the States, or by forestry and mining companies. The UN recognition of the status of “Indigenous people” in Africa relates to Tuaregs, Berbers, Bushmen, Pygmies, Peuls and Masai, and excludes ethnic groups that practice agriculture or that were historically displaced, that is, the majority of the continent. In North America, Australia and New Zealand many Indigenous people now live in cities or old reserves that have become self-managed communities. Within the same families, the social achievement of some—through art, studies, sport, social action or politics—contrasts with the despair and suicidal distress of others. Nevertheless, those who succeed generally claim their indigeneity and the right to cultural and legal recognition of their difference as the first Australians; they struggle politically to bring to light the specificity of the problems that affect the communities they come from<sup>1</sup>. Some play with diverse discursive strategies about their relationship with nature, for instance accepting the role of ecological custodians, in order to attempt to recover a public-spirited and economically fair model of governance<sup>3</sup>.

Indigenous people also aim at controlling the representation of their culture by anthropologists, museums and the media. The Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) which has gathered delegations since 1982 at UN in Geneva to define universal standards for human rights, was instrumental in bringing to fore the issue of intellectual property regarding Indigenous knowledge and practices and the question of the status and destiny of anthropological productions. Aboriginal Australians joined the delegations of Native Americans from the United States and Canada, Maori from New Zealand, and Sami from Finland and Sweden, following their opposition to petroleum drilling in the community of Noonkanbah, located in remote North West of the continent in 1980. At that time, I was conducting field research in the region for my doctoral thesis. Thus, I had the opportunity to witness the

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<sup>1</sup> Ostenfeld, S., S. Le Queux & L. Reichard (2001)

incredible intertribal solidarity that was demonstrated on that occasion. Protests occurred all over Australia with the support of unions, ecological movements and political parties opposed to multinational mining companies. Aboriginal groups travelled hundreds of kilometres to give their support to the people of Noonkanbah: Warlpiri initiates from Lajamanu community on the edge of the Tanami desert brought them their fire ceremony used to settle disputes. The Noonkanbah resistors gave them in exchange a boy to initiate. Alliances which existed traditionally were thus reactualised through a process of anchoring in the country. Such a process is not only the result of a response to colonisation, but also demonstrates that the ritual function among Aboriginal people—and probably elsewhere—always consisted in reworking the past in relation to the present. Because of the refusal of many colleagues in France or in Australia to recognize the dynamism of societies that are modulated by myths and rituals, the phantasm of people wrongly defined as “out of history” continues to haunt our disciplines.

This book set up to confront this ‘malaise of civilisation’ carried by the history of our concepts: agency and indigeneity ‘disturb’ because the exclusive and dominant logic of the Western world—or other Oriental powers—does not accept that victims can also be subjects. This book is called *The Challenge of Indigenous Peoples* as an attempt to show the contrary. Our starting point was that the current array of Western social sciences suffers from a political uneasiness about the idea that people are able to affirm themselves as agents of their own destinies. The return of neo-evolutionism has generated an atmosphere of cynicism and denigration of the impact of initiatives of *empowerment* and identity reconstructions of any group that is socially disadvantaged, marginalised or dissident; especially migrants, refugees, people with no papers, cultural or religious minorities, and also people who became minorities on their own territory because of being encompassed by a colonial state, as has happened to most Indigenous people, the first inhabitants of any land as far back as one can go to the first waves of human migration. Actors oppressed by history, victims of social as well as structural discrimination, often see themselves denied the recognition of agency, as a mode of existen-

tial self-sufficiency in terms of their actions and their interactions with their physical, economic and political environment. The difficulty of translating in French with one word the process of giving oneself a power that is recognized by others indicates that we find it hard to think what we are not used to say.<sup>4</sup> We should interrogate the cultural impact of languages to deconstruct what in different theories and thinking frameworks is reduced, biased and most of all excluding.

Our anthropological challenge here is to produce a dynamic relativism which constantly associates local singularities and refracts them in a diversity of creative performances that can move us globally. The challenge is to conceive a way of being in the world (*l'être au monde*) in which each and everyone participates in weaving a social fabric that complexifies itself horizontally in networks though which singularisations can be brought together and diverge. Anthropology consists precisely in reconciling attempts to enhance a certain relativity of world views which are carried through words, symbols and images but also through other human expressions that cannot be reduced to them. It is a search for defining tools of cognitive or affective connection that will allow us to put all expressions in resonance so they can operate together. In each language, the choice of some terms used to define identities and characterise the social impact of the relevant actors is a challenge because the context of reception and diffusion of these words implies different forms of perceptions and representations. To advocate a generalised contextual relativism can prevent all communication or produce stigmatisations when the everyday words of some become sources of wounds for others. On the other hand, to pretend to a common language which could be substituted for all others always opens a gap, risking misinterpretation of the subtle and the complex or their reduction to a simplistic understanding. Apart from words and images, we are looking here at what ritual, artistic or political performances convey not only through symbols and icons, but also through direct, intuitive and sensory-motor perception: it is what, in line with Francisco Varela, neurophysiologists and other specialists of movement and perception define as an “enactive complexity” characteristic of human interactions with multimodal interfaces.

The first part of the book analyses different Australian situations with an attempt to circumscribe the paradigm of Aboriginal people, icons of the oldest civilization of the planet whose contemporary art and reticular world view, expressed through their concepts of Dreaming pathways and the semi-nomadic way of life, seem strikingly current. The Western Desert social practice and ontology of nomadism and anchoring are presented by Stéphane Lacam-Gitareu (Chapter 2) who, in the middle of the 1990's, followed young Aboriginal people who were always on the road: he shows us the despair attached to their Indigenous status: how they found themselves torn between two worlds led them to reconstitute their nomadic being in networks of alliance as they wandered across the Western desert. An example of a regional reappropriation of their culture and art by the Yolngu people—through a data base regrouping of their collections scattered in museums of Australia or Europe—is given by Jessica De Largy Healy (Chapter 3), who worked for two years to help establish one of the first Aboriginal Knowledge centres, in the Galiwin'ky Island community of Arnhem Land, where language and ritual are still very much alive. Anke Tonnaer (Chapter 4) analyses historical changes and the dynamic of gender and in the reenactment of the aeroplane dance performed at the Festival of Boroloola; Martin Préaud (Chapter 5) analyses two theatre plays which were directed with Aboriginal people: one stages the pre-European contact with seasonal trepang fisherman from Indonesia (Macassar) in Arnhem Land, the other reconstitutes a massacre of the Kija people in the Kimberley. Arnaud Morvan (Chapter 6) reviews the reception of Indigenous Australian art in France over a period of over thirty years, analysing its militant impact with the example of Kija artists from the Kimberley with whom he has been working for many years. Géraldine Le Roux (Chapter 7) analyses her experiences as a young anthropologist and curator, with Aboriginal artists in the cities and their tactics for the distribution of their work, such as virtual exhibitions on the internet which allow them to network with Indigenous artists from Oceania or America. Wayne Jowandi Barker, Aboriginal composer and musician recalls his experience of regional festivals and his interactions with audiences during tours in France and in Europe: the creative process nourished by

his encounters with other world musicians is balanced against various expectations as to cultural authenticity (Chapter 8).

The second part of this collective publication widens the indigenous problematic to a global scale considering questions of interpretation, appropriation of Indigenous representations, and the claim of the inalienability of cultural singularities. Various examples of these debates on the meaning of authenticity and notions of a continuously reconstructed cultural identity are given in two chapters dedicated to the Festival of Pacific Arts, the ninth hosted in 2004 by the population of the small sovereign island of Palau (Glowczewski & Henri, Chapter 9) and the first one organised in Fiji in 1972 (Kempf, Chapter 10). We argue that these gatherings, which originated to display cultural spectacles, constitute a real strategy aiming at both affirming local singularities and weaving links of solidarity and alliances for sustainable development, in order to preserve these societies that are threatened by the global economy, mining and sea pollution. Jari Kupiainen (Chapter 11) dissects in a similar way the cultural and political issues of the first festival of Melanesian Arts and Culture *Spirit Bilong Melanesia* that was established in the Solomon Islands in 1998.

We also wanted to provide the reader with two examples that can illustrate the political saga, the sufferings and creative responses of Indigenous peoples subjected to the dominant power of States other than those of Western imperialism. The Adivasi from Jharkhand are administratively dependant on the State of India but, as Alexandre Soucaille demonstrates, a part of their resistance is Maoist and some of their people are allied to a world network of people of the forest (Chapter 12). As for the Khantys and Nenets from Siberia, they are subjected to the new laws of the Federation of Russia: according to Dominique Samson Normand de Chambourg (Chapter 13), who translated some of their books, the literary testimony of the sufferings and resistance of their people given by their authors has found its place in the contemporary field of literature. Finally, the concluding chapter by Rosita Henry contextualises this Indigenous performativity in terms of an analysis of its potential as a strategy of resistance employed by the cultural singularities in question, against the forces of globalisation. Our aim is to reveal the originality of the model of alterity fostered by the rel-

evant Indigenous people, especially artists and activists, based on networks of transversal planetary alliances.

### **The Paradigm of Indigenous Australians**

Many French people—including journalists and intellectuals—often mistakenly say in French “aRborigène” instead of *aborigène* which comes for the latin “origin of”. It is probably an unconscious effect of the stereotype that associates people living from hunting gathering with a population that would have lived “in the trees” (*aRbres* in French), ancestors of all stone age people, or even monkeys which actually do not exist in Australia. Curiously the Musée de l’Homme (Museum of Mankind) in Paris has transmitted this error of orthography on a presentation board from the 1930s which was displayed until 1985 when I was asked to redo the Aboriginal display section. Aboriginal Australians subsume people of more than 500 different languages and dialects. The description of their way of life, rituals and beliefs has fed theories about their religion, myths and incest taboo, which lie at the foundation of anthropology and sociology through the writings of Durkheim and Mauss, the psychoanalysis of Freud, and also the structuralism of Lévi-Strauss. Archaeological discoveries, of human remains in Australia date back to at least 60 000 years, indicate that Aboriginal people embody one of the oldest societies of the world. On consideration of their stone based material culture, their lack of iron, villages, cultivated gardens or herding, they are often wrongly identified as survivors of Prehistory. Since British colonization 220 years ago, Aboriginal people have experienced a physical, social and psychic genocide which is still affecting their descendants through the legacy of such a traumatic history as well as through the succession of governmental policies, including a new turn in 2006. The survivors of the colonial hecatomb carried in the 1970’s an alternative social utopia supported by many intellectuals and some politicians. But this alternative life in self-managed communities was put in question by drastic budgetary cuts of the government, which declared the abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and of its



fifteen regionally elected councils after only twelve years of existence. The positive outcome of the three previous decades was negated even though they had emulated a creativity that turned upside down the history of contemporary art. In a media campaign currently in full swing, the government has been denouncing Aboriginal cultural particularisms under the pretext of the world failure of “collectivist” systems<sup>5</sup>. Legislation has been passed to allow the right to private property on communal lands, forestalling previous laws that had favoured the collective restitution of lands according to traditional titles, first with the *Land Rights Act* (NT 1976) then with the *Native title Act* (1993), and a relative delegation of the powers of management of public budgets to the benefit of Aboriginal organizations. Community economy is now judged not cost-effective, even though Aboriginal art is consecrated as a symbol of Australian identity and exhibited overseas to attract tourists and industries. Aboriginal works of art have fetched astronomical prices on the art world market, and the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris has involved two Aboriginal curators and eight artists in integrating an example of their respective art in the interior architecture of its administrative building<sup>6</sup>. Does the recognition of art suppose the death of the societies that produce it? It is not about primitive art here but indeed about contemporary art which is nurtured by ritual, mythical and spiritual thought and colonial experience, as shown in the first part of this book.

The dozens of Aboriginal communities in the desert or in other regions of the North, which are threatened by destruction are the same that offer since the late 1970's the hundreds of painters who have become globally famous as initiators of local stylistic trends that some art critics distinguish as “aesthetic schools”. In the tradition of desert people everybody has to know how to paint designs which identify his/her spiritual Being, the Dreaming of his/her totemic ancestors— animals, plants, rain or fire—which link them as a brother or a sister to species that one bears as a name and also to the land that these ancestral beings marked through their passage. The purpose is to paint on the body of the men and women of one's group the stages of the travelling of these ancestors, which are like mnemonic maps of the emergence of different named places through the geographical marking of these ancestral actions:

waterholes, hills, rocks. Art in this sense is part and parcel of a relation to the world anchored in places; the first generation of Aboriginal artists painted canvases to use them as a political tool in order to transmit this spiritual and existential message. Private galleries today hire hotel rooms for artists in town or even make them buy houses to incite them to leave their remote communities and live close to the galleries. Next to mining resources, art is one of the main sources of income for the Central and Northern Australian communities, so the exodus of artists who often feed extended families of 20 to 30 people could signify the progressive exodus of the whole population. This perspective has recently become a reality with the Australian government announcing its intention to stop decentralised funding. One of the intentions of this programme is first to suppress all the small communities (*outstations*) which emerged with the homelands movement of return to the land during the 1980-1990's, and second to empty all the old reserve townships of old reserves to which groups were forcibly removed, although selfmanaged by their own Aboriginal councils since the 1970's. These thirty years of so-called *self-determination* consisted in giving budgets to community councils and to Aboriginal organisations but without really allowing them to choose the type of development they wished. The management was often catastrophic, submitted to the slowness of the bureaucracy, the corruption of non Aboriginal or Aboriginal staff and to pressures of external interests. With the suppression of ATSIC and its regional elected councils that administrated its budget, the communities passed under the direct rule of the government, which in 2005 tried to negotiate "shared responsibility agreements" (SRAS) with each community. One hundred and sixty out of 400 communities existing in 2006, signed such agreements which were summarised in statements like "*no school , no pool*": parents had to commit themselves to send children to school so that the community could have a pool, or they had to promise to wash their children every day in exchange for a petrol station. Knowing that bands of children play at sniffing petrol, hundreds destroying themselves in front of parents ravaged and often enraged by alcohol, such agreements seem completely inappropriate considering the emergency of a social and collective therapy that some Aboriginal families with an exemplary determi-

nation try desperately try to secure while the successive governments do not seem to hear them.

In the absence of commerce and work opportunities, bush communities cram together in broken-down houses surrounded by kilometres of waste from our consumption society, looking like urban suburbs, erected in the middle of nowhere. It is not surprising that the government is playing ostrich and trying to camouflage the problem by pretending to displace the population to the so-called “civilisation” embodied by cities. But cities already have peripheral squats with camps of Aboriginal wanderers who come to drown themselves in alcohol for lack of being able to take their destiny into their own hands.

A 2006 report of the government announced that teaching of Aboriginal languages was not recommended because it would prevent children from assimilating themselves to the Australian nation. Such a discourse echoes the worst years of colonisation—with forced sedentarisation in missions, reserves or boarding schools where speaking the language was forbidden—, a period that was supposed to end with the 1967 referendum that included all Aboriginal people in the census allowing the extension of some citizen rights to all. Often it is in the communities where education was bilingual—some thirty languages have been adapted for school curriculum—that an appearance of the social fabric was left to give the strength to live to those who are everyday confronted with racism and humiliation because of their status as Aboriginal. Bilingual education can have this redemptory effect on the condition that it is taught by the Aboriginal language speakers and not by teachers who with a bad accent stutter through the transcription word by word following the English structure. The aim is to make the ‘Elders’ experts of their own culture. While many cannot read and write, they are the specialist of their language and help young Aboriginal literacy workers at the school. Together they can transmit the pride of their culture while restoring the subtlety of the concepts and syntax of their languages that translate a complex perception of space, time and the network of links between people and their environment. We continue to learn dead languages like Latin or ancient Greek precisely to capture what cannot be translated and the logical structures of different systems of thought.

Why can't we accept that Indigenous languages carry a similar cognitive enrichment? This intellectual effect is vital and structuring not only for Aboriginal people themselves, but also for humanity in general in the sense that each language, by allowing us to see the human genius, can push back the threshold of our mental constraints. To understand a new language is to open oneself to the world, not only in spirit but also physically like learning a dance that helps us to move in space.

The success of Aboriginal art is an example of such an opening that touched people all over the world. It was also a formidable source of hope for all Aboriginal people of the continent, especially those one out of five children who between 1905 and the 1970s were forcibly taken from their parents to grow "sheltered from" their culture that had been described as "savaged" or "barbaric". The recognition of this trauma of the "Stolen Generations", taken from their families and culture, and the many initiatives which encourage the pride of culture and "self-esteem" have attracted more and more Aboriginal people who grew up in town to leave in search of their roots, even if many generations of mixing gave them the appearance of a white skin. A new elite flourished, painters, musicians, film makers, lawyers, activists of all kind creating associations and organisations which press the government constantly with their propositions, whether local, regional or national. Deprived of elected representatives, Aboriginal people have continued their activism in various local actions—for instance with walks, rallies but also interventions in health, justice or education. They organise local and regional festivals where they invite for instance politicians and other VIPs to think with them about their future<sup>7</sup>. All these local, national or international meetings are political tribunals where life is reinvented and resistance takes root in creative mobilisation.

### **Creating Rituals as an Attempt to Digest Historical Conflicts**

I was fortunate to attend a secret cult in the central Australian desert in 1979—forbidden by missionaries for its supposed black magic. It was dreamt on the West coast as a spiritual and political

message from the ancestors and transmitted from group to group for fifty years, each of them bringing new ritual elements, dances and songs, in response to recent events related to this message. The dream was provoked by the wreckage in 1912 in the Indian Ocean of a steamer that was never found, nor the bodies of the many Aboriginal people it transported. The dreamer saw the spirits of the Aboriginal people who had travelled up or down the coast on this boat: men, women and children who were deported either as prisoners, lepers, or children of mixed descent. The version of this cult I observed in the desert in 1979, like the one that was recalled by a few elders who saw it staged on the West coast in Bidyadanga in the 1920's or later in Broome, consisted in the reenactment of some traumatic events by men and women initiated through the process of adopting a new Law in the Aboriginal sense, that is rules of social behaviour that would be legitimated by the caution of spiritual ancestors. This new Law was defined as "two way", taking into account the interaction with the power of the State embodied by White men and aiming at recognising a new social role for the "middle men": in the cult they represent a new generation of men and women torn between traditional law and the law of the British settlers who had invaded their lands and prevented them from continuing their way of life based on a nomadic economy of subsistence and a symbolic repartition of gender roles. The Kriol expression "middle men" also referred to camel drivers from Pakistan, called "afghans" and indentured labourers, fishermen (Indonesians, Malays, and others), often Muslims, as well as their children from Aboriginal mothers. Mixed unions were forbidden by law until the 1970's, except with special permission of the colonial administration. Most of the children from Asian or European fathers, even babies, were tracked by police to be taken from their Aboriginal families and raised in institutions to become maids or farm hands for the settlers. The secret cult was shared by dozens of (language) groups as a performed message whose staging changed in terms of the rhythm of various historical events— for instance during the second world war a song was added about the Japanese bombing of the town of Broome with a dance on an aeroplane strip. This demonstrates how an Aboriginal ritual can rework identity as a constellation of intersubjective relations, not only between

people but also with all the elements of the natural, social and technical environment. Towards the end of the 1970's, when desert groups received the secret cult from the Kimberley, the expression "middle men" came to include all White men who were working for the recognition of Aboriginal rights, that is land rights lawyers, anthropologists, cultural officers or political representatives. I call this cult "historical": still secret in the 1980's, it served as a catharsis for a certain identity resistance consisting in reworking one's own memory to gain resources in the spirit of the ancestors (Glowczewski 2002). Ten years later, the support of Aboriginal activists by non Aboriginal ones allowed the establishment of the Stolen Generation Royal Commission.

Playing events of the present in reference to the ancestors brings them into a reticular new configuration which in turn informs the way ancestral memory is shared with others to allow a reaffirmation of the self as an agent. The anchoring of a dynamic social realm founded on ritualised references illustrates a process of actualisation which resonates with the kind of assemblages defined by Félix Guattari, who proposes a matrix that articulates multiples intersubjectivities<sup>8</sup>. The ritual actualisation of political alliances also illustrates performative theories of ritual and Varela's definition of cognition as 'enaction': "effective action: history of structural coupling which enact (bring forth) a world"<sup>9</sup>. The ritual is a tool for enaction and the production of intersubjectivity, not only through performance but also through the interpretation and transposition of dreams which, among Aboriginal people, generate new dances and songs. When Indigenous people lose their rituals, they lose a tool for grasping the world that can destabilise them: missionaries well understood that when they forbade Aboriginal and other Indigenous people to continue their ritual life and forced them to destroy their sacred objects. Nevertheless enaction specific to ritual can also emerge in other performances, especially artistic ones. Rosita Henry (2000) has shown for instance how, when dances are elaborated for cultural spectacles at the Tjapukai Cultural Centre in Cairns, young Aboriginal people, who did not grow up in a traditional ritual context, explain how they fell easily into gestures, , postures and body movements which are "recognized" by the elders as having a traditional style. According to the young

performers, this dynamic body language emerged from them in the process of dancing, stimulated by traditional music: hidden (like a (photo) negative that reveals itself on paper, in this case through the body in movement.

It is essential for anthropologists to consider how memory actualises itself. It emerges with active images from the past that produce elements including present events, nurturing individuals, their social relations and their relations to the world. This is one of the keys to understanding identity constructions inscribing themselves in alterity and not against it, and their transmission in an existential balance that can manage to overcome the despair of loss. The point is not to find what is lost but to live with the empty spaces while learning how to create new relations. In their own way, traditional Aboriginal societies had mastered this work of mourning: they were forbidden to say the name of the dead and other things that evoked this name, or even to go to place that the deceased used to attend. Hunter-gatherer societies did not construct villages, so they could keep this flexibility of moving and living in a language that has ruptures of memory but that is enriched with synonyms, metaphors and also non-speech substitutes to designate traces left by the absence of the dead. The abandoning of houses and the refusal to live where a person has passed away exasperate administrators. Nevertheless, this customary attitude insists on an essential feature of indigeneity. The land is inhabited by spirits with which we ceaselessly have to make peace. If not, one is deemed to be haunted by death, violence and madness.

In my early writings on Aboriginal people I have stressed my fascination for the way they combine multiple identities—totemic becomings, kinship roles, symbolic androgyny, and so on—and play in that way with intersubjectivity not only between humans but also with all elements of their environment, which are perceived as acting in an interaction with humans. All these elements are animated not in the sense of being inhabited by a soul but propelled in dynamic relations which transform themselves while each time slightly changing the interacting elements, be they humans, animals, plants, minerals, objects or ideas. The Aboriginal concept of Dreaming can be apprehended not as opposing dream to reality but as posing the virtual in a dynamic relation with the actual. In

this sense, dream, memory, history and the past all pertain to the virtual which is an ever present dimension as it virtualises its potentialities in the environment: for instance, it is said that children as well as the young of all species, or winds and rain “wait” to manifest themselves: they are virtually already there but need to be actualised through a performing action. I wrote in relation to this self-reference:

Whether the person is painted with his totem or another, he or she leaves the register of his/her social identity to enter into a cosmological alterity that melds him/her to the Dreaming, the space-time as Law comprising all totemic beings [...] Aboriginal mythical heroes as totemic names are concepts that men unfold in stories on one hand, and on the other hand generate from one another in a process of feed-back which constantly modifies them to reflect and integrate the factual. (Glowczewski 1993: 135–137)

The anthropological question that has guided me all these years is: what is interpretation? The question involves both the notion of *mise en scène* and acting like in theatre and the notion of hermeneutics, that is the quest for meaning. The sharing of ritual and myth embodied in everyday life with Aboriginal people made me discover that far from being unalterable creation stories and repetitive ritual gestures, myths and ritual practices can be real testimonies of a creative process of reactualisation, or ‘difference in repetition’ as Deleuze put it:

The point is that the concept, I believe, involves two other dimensions, percept and affect. My interest lies in this relation and not just in images. Percepts are not perceptions, they are bundles of sensations and relations that survive to the one who experiments with them. Affects are not feelings, they are ‘becomings’ that overflow the one who goes through them (he becomes different).<sup>10</sup>

In the 1980’s—to the great displeasure of some anthropolo-



gists–, I emphasised role games to explain ritual organisation, as well as kinship at play in land management, dispute settlement, and marriage alliances:

It looks as if Aboriginal conservatism was expressed in the following terms: we will conserve if we preserve the other and his/her difference, by partially identifying with it. This applies to land, animals and other species, the other sex or other generations, other groups or tribes [...] We just saw that there is a difference/distance between the world view and the social organisation, both have conservative and dynamic elements [...] dynamism involves a practice/thought of transformation as adaptation, conservatism involves a practice/thought of preservation of institutionalised differences through symbolic identifications. Aboriginal people have no gods, they make themselves Others through a complex process of symbolic transfers”).<sup>11</sup>

Thanks to Aboriginal people, I experienced an associative memory working like a live network which activates itself through different links on the occasion of each ritual performance where women and men paint their bodies, sing and interpret through dance a complexity of meanings. These meanings are superimposed, crossed and actualised in past and present alliances but also in an aesthetic and spiritual emotion which seems to propel all participants towards a future as the emergence of a “possibility” which is both internal and external, the expression of everybody’s intersubjectivity: a display of identities with multiple polarities, tensions and attractions, conjugations and disjunctions of alterities resulting in a dynamic and open network.

If hundreds of different Australian groups reproduced themselves and even segmented into new singularities for thousands of years it is not because each of them was isolated but, on the contrary, because they were all connected by complex networks of exchange, circulation of everyday objects, weapons, tools, ochre, tobacco, and also songs and rituals. The tangible and intangible productions circulated, throughout this immense continent over thou-

sands of kilometres. This circulation of human alliances actualised ancestral alliances memorised through totemic myths. Exchanges of traditional objects and rituals were disturbed by the sedentarisation imposed upon Aboriginal people, but they continued until the 1980's when many exchanges became less material and more political. In fact the movement of paintings for sale was a way to transpose these pathways of alliances. Some artists even say that the travelling of their paintings and artists in exhibitions held in the big capitals of the world is a way to propel their Dreaming roads across the planet. Aboriginal cultural resistance—demonstrated by the global success of Aboriginal painting—makes the 400 000 or so people thus represented a paradigm that we try to outline in this book by comparing various Australian situations to the embodied experiences of other Indigenous people whose existential singularity—which cannot be reduced to a fixed identity— goes through a similar creative genius that is claimed to be anchored on a multi-modal relation of spiritual ancestral connection with the earth.

### **Interpretation and Reappropriation: From Exotic to Inalienable**

The technological inflation of audiovisual tools—media, the Internet, and the growing public circulation of images for a private use—, challenges anthropology to respond to issues of production and distribution of all these recordings, whether their accessibility is deliberate or not. Neutral “capturing” of reality with such tools is questionable ; indeed the medium often reveals instead the perception (gaze?) of the observer who fabricates the images. Anthropologists who document through writing, sound or images, have to locate their place in what they are recording. We thus have to think about how we do it and for whom, in terms of content, form and means we choose to use to return the results of our research and their interpretation both to the people we record, to specialists and to a wider audience. Confronted with ethical and technological questions, the researcher has to analyse a multitude of images to contextualise his own images and writing. To deal with this proliferation, one has to constantly change place, to surf in networks

whose links are many intersubjective relations: there one has to relearn how to position oneself in a reflexive manner to adopt as many points of view as the light that changes during a stage show. The spectacle here is society framed spatio-temporally : the local of a cultural situation which only exists however under the light of the global. But this global should not be the white light of a projector that would flatten all the features to the point of making actors and spectators blind. These lights indeed threaten us constantly. Thus, the urgency is to find a way to switch on fire for atmosphere, footlights and all the other tricks of lighting which change the angle to enhance people, settings and, most of all, the aesthetic emotions produced by these performances.

The performance stages we are interested in here are firstly produced by Indigenous people. Every stage needs to be “taken” as it is, already under the projectors and always threatening to fall into a show lacking subtlety, depth, shadows and impact, a spectacle that could not move us when actors cannot start living in it. Today, Indigenous people are again designated as doomed to die. We are constantly invited to attend to their agony. But our eyes turn away because a stage is to “play” on, not to die on for real. The art of performance is that of simulation. It knows how to make us cry and not to invite us to participate in the ritualised pain of funerals. All images are staged. In the case of those that present Indigenous people, the stages carry centuries of our certitudes, civilisation, colonial, western, right-thinking, scientific. These certitudes have certainly been deconstructed by a generation of anthropologists and other thinkers, nevertheless images continue to produce their perverse effects, which new discourses restart to legitimate.

Images in the media are always lying in wait for capturing exoticism or “remarkable” alterity either by its excess of success—*peoples*, stars for a season or more (increasingly Indigenous representatives experiment such spotlights)—or its excess of sorrow: victims of all catastrophes, wars or miseries, where the stigmatisation of indigenous people occurs from the moment they claim to be victims. In the face of media images, anthropology has the task to analyse stereotypes and new codes carried by various media: they participate in the construction of identities and their perception

generate movements of tolerance but also new prejudices and discriminations. Another source of production of images comes from the Indigenous actors themselves: they represent themselves in everyday life through the individual or collective actions they perform. But they also present themselves in a more activist approach as controlling their own images: exhibiting their paintings, touring with their music, filming or writing their history, their present and imagining their future

*Live* performances and artistic creation are part and parcel of the transmission of traditional culture among Indigenous peoples. The growing international interest in these aesthetic forms was amplified by the recent adaptations to new media and contexts of performance in festivals, theatres, galleries and museums<sup>12</sup>. The public demand for information on this cultural phenomenon is unique and very strong in Europe, complicated by (post)colonial issues relating to Indigenous people but also to a trendy quest for European pre-Christian roots. European audiences rarely have the knowledge or the cultural resources to be able to evaluate the meaning and the “authenticity” of such performances and productions. Local and global networks which nowadays promote art, literature and film by Indigenous people help us to understand the new dynamics at play in the shaping not just of cultural identities but also statements about sovereignty and other existential perspectives. Obviously it is thanks to fieldwork that we learn to put into perspective writings of the past. One cannot deduce from the present that all that was written in the past was wrong. Nevertheless, like in a criminal inquest, one can try to unfold the impact of some facts, already observed in the old texts, and interpret them differently from those who reported and who were necessarily caught in the paradigms, or even the prejudice of their time, especially with regard to the situation of women and “non civilised” natives.

The United Nations saw a flux of Indigenous delegations coming from different countries—most recently from Sub-Saharan Africa, India or Siberia—who enriched the content and most of all the formulation of the articles of the declaration of their rights originally developed mostly by Native Americans, Maori, Sami and Indigenous Australians. Shortly after this book was first pub-

lished in French, on 13 September 2007, the UN General Assembly adopted the Declaration with 143 votes in favour, eleven abstentions and four negative votes by US, Canada, Australia and New Zealand who reconsidered their position since. At the White House Tribal Nations conference on December 16, 2010, Barak Obama said in his long address to the First Americans that after a nine months review “the United States is lending its support to this declaration”.<sup>13</sup> Canada signed it the November 13 of the same year. New Zealand government announced its support on July 7 and Australia on April 3, 2009. In 2008 both Canada and Australia had organized a national ceremony for a historic official apology to Indigenous children who were forcibly removed from their parents to boarding schools.<sup>14</sup> The then newly elected Australian Labour Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, declared his resolve that “the injustices of the past must never ever happen again”, and promised “a future where all Australians, whatever their origins, are truly equal partners, with equal opportunities and with an equal stake in shaping the next chapter in the history of this great country, Australia”. But he did not stop the emergency intervention in the Northern Territory that was implemented by his liberal predecessor in June 2007 through the suspension of the *Racial Discrimination Act* 1975. Sixty three Aboriginal communities saw their land confiscated for five years, and self-management programs suspended by the Federal Government. Bilingual education was also stopped, reducing to half an hour per week the teaching of the Indigenous language, first spoken at home. This intervention has upset many Aboriginal people and has been criticised by some anthropologists and politicians, in relation both to the conditions in which it was imposed and the poor results after four years. But the whole issue still divides some Aboriginal leaders who are struggling to find solutions to the general mismanagement and despair of many of those places faced with violence, poor health and discrimination.<sup>15</sup> In March 2009, following a complaint lodged by a collective of Aboriginal communities, the UN wrote a letter to Kevin Rudd expressing its concern over the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act. In August 2009 the UN special Rapporteur, James Anaya, stressed the need to reinstate the protection of the Racial Discrimination Act but also to encourage partnership with Aborig-

inal organizations.<sup>16</sup> The Australian Human Rights Commission has since produced a Community guide to the UN Declaration on the rights of Indigenous peoples asking the community to lobby all levels of government to implement the UN recommendations of the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the rights of indigenous peoples<sup>17</sup>.

Article 31 of the Declaration (p. 33, out of 46 articles) stresses the Indigenous right “to maintain, control, protect and develop their intellectual property over such cultural heritage, traditional knowledge, and traditional cultural interpretations”.<sup>18</sup> The principle of copyright is extended to all painters of the world for the reproduction of their art, in books or other usage; on this basis Aboriginal artists were able to stop the fabrication of a carpet by an Indonesian enterprise which had copied an Aboriginal bark painting without asking the permission from the author (Janke 1998). The big issue is the copyright of designs that existed before the commercialisation of new introduced media such as canvas (or cars, façades, floors or ceilings of buildings, and so on); they were perpetuated mentally with the making of ephemeral pieces which were never copied but only remembered. Indeed painting on the body, the sand, or ritual boards, just like the making of masks destroyed at the end of a ritual, allowed painting in an active performance whose spiritual strength resided precisely in the destruction of the pattern and forms which are produced as an integral part of the fabrication of the ritual itself. Despite the absence of fixed media—or maybe thanks to refusing them—designs passed from ritual to ritual, generation to generation, memorised as mental maps which encrypted many other aspects of knowledge which if not transcribed, were transmitted: about seasons, animals, plants, and all perceptible connections in the environment, such as between sound rhythms and visual forms.

According to the current law of copyright, rights are transmitted to the one who fixes it in a medium (recording, photography, transcription of published story) but Indigenous people say that the content of these ancestral knowledges, just like creations initiated when asleep or awake belong to them and cannot be appropriated by others because they are from their point of view culturally inalienable. This is why they have been asking for decades that public

broadcast systems do not distribute some stories, songs, designs or sacred objects that they consider as secret.<sup>19</sup> Money generated by the commercialisation is often a source of wealth for those who buy the copyright rather than for those who are the creators or their descendants. To ensure the reappropriation by the authors of income from their productions, free circulation is sometime proposed as a solution. It is an interesting intellectual challenge that the logic of inalienability in the circulation of painted, sung or danced designs seems to be close to a very different audio-visual universe that was brought forward with new technologies: indeed, conceivers of free software think they are better protected through a certain free circulation of their creations—called copyleft or creative licence—rather than the establishment of copyright that erases the inalienability of their rights to the benefit of big corporations. Will Indigenous heritage that for many centuries circulated from people to people in complex exchanges of gifts, counter gifts, find a form of equivalent recognition to those of computer designers, which, pay respect to their creation and returns some possible benefits to them? Currently, the system does not really work when the main beneficiaries are museums and collectors.

The contributions gathered in this book show that local and global networks, which currently promote cultural diversity, the place of Indigenous people and of their historical and contemporary productions, help us to understand new social dynamics. These seem to function in network and self-reference, in feedback around points of crystallisation of social and political crisis, black boxes both generated by and provoking the emergence, the formation and affirmation not just of cultural identities but also of existential world views which aspire to a sovereign form of control, especially of the images produced about these alterities and publicly displayed. It is not about a dual opposition between Us and Them but a constant negotiation, an ethical and critical reevaluation where the researcher's interpretation is challenged by a multitude of factors that interact with attractions, tensions and ruptures.

The control and definition of labels of authenticity for productions and services stamped “indigenous” are (for example) formatted by the uncertainties of an international market which is becoming the main survival resource for many Indigenous groups who

are in competition with all other actors and producers of this economy of consumption and services in full expansion: galleries, museums, journalists, academics, tourist agents, but also representatives of the government, political lobbies, associations, NGOs, multinational corporations for mining exploration or other enterprises, especially the legal profession. It is imperative that anthropological interpretation of social and cultural identities take into account all these interactions at the local and global levels. Among the factors to be considered are the wishes, sometimes conflicting, of the people with whom the researcher works, as well as the agenda of the institutions that employ him/her and of all organisations—Indigenous, national, international or non-governmental implicated in the field. Other factors are the alliances and conflicts of the studied group with other groups, the intellectuals and academic fashions specific to this or that local or imported trend, and most of all the global pressure of corporations, media and ideologies which measure cultural identities on a market of authenticity posted as a source of economic income. In this contemporary social configuration, rather than making the process of life, or the constitution of a group whose identity is homogenous, the subject of an ethnographic monograph, our task becomes the interrogation of the constitution of a place that singularises because of the heterogeneity of its inhabitants with multiple identity constellations. These identities are determined from blood, education, conditions of life or culture, but for many they are recomposed also through different economic and political allegiances that fabricate actors who produce the place as a passage of multiple flows. Erkki<sup>20</sup> underlines that ‘the post-structuralists have understood identities as unstable, multiple, fluctuating and fragmented, which means that they have excluded the idea of permanence and sameness from the concept of identity’ quoting Brubaker and Cooper (2000:7): “This sameness is expected to manifest itself in solidarity, in shared dispositions or consciousness.”

I discussed elsewhere on the essentialism debate that was raging in anthropology and cultural studies in the 1990’s (Glowczewski 2005c). I still persist today in accepting an essentialist aspect in the definition of identity as fluctuating and disseminated within a network of connections, on the condition that it is



the characteristic of an Indigenous ontology: for me, as an anthropologist, to “deconstruct” reality to understand it cannot consist in rejecting the systems of interpretation of the world of the people we study. It is too easy and even arrogant to label these systems as beliefs; they are rather tools for perception and apprehension of the world whose symbolic efficiency is measured in the way in which they articulate themselves with other systems, especially social practices.

One of the vocations of the social sciences remains to try to place these systems of interpretation in comparable networks, mostly in relation to other statements which, according to the way they are connected will eventually give the impression of fluidity of identities constantly in a process of recomposition.

If it has been difficult to talk about these questions for twenty years, it is probably because we are attached to an old paradigm: nationalism. Every time people talk about identity, they think of cultural walls. But what comes as a lesson from Indigenous people, especially in the Pacific—where survival is linked to the preservation of cultural diversity through exchange— is that we witness a meeting between the world of diasporas and contemporary technologies with very old ways of functioning which have produced many languages and life styles, but by following underling currents that connected people. It is thanks to these flows that such a cultural diversity could flourish —just like the biodiversity of the environment. These ancestral models meet today a moment of history on the techno-ethnic stage that we call globalisation, thinking that it means one assimilating nation. Yet if the steam roller of the mechanic ogre bolting in its self-organisation deploys physically as well as psychically more and more violently, numerous means to destabilise us, we are also crossed and constituted by reticular flows which recreate constantly singularities of resistance to this amalgam.<sup>21</sup> Thinkers—like Deleuze and Guattari—had the premonition that the acceleration of this revolution of identity (“identitaires”) and nationalistic (“nationalitaires”) trends do not necessarily produce xenophobia and nationalism: they theorised the fabrication of open networks (social networking) that they had insights on through their analysis of capitalism and decolonisation, but also their systematic interrogation of the process of thinking. They also

showed that this cognitive intuition already inhabited older thinkers like Vico, Whitehead or Tarde. Indigenous people teach us also how to question these processes of subjectivation. Exiled or migrant people who go through the world in search of an existential territory explore new ways for their reanchoring. In this quest for what we still call clumsily “identity”, what we look for in fact is how we can accept to be multiple inside ourselves, while recognising the singularity of each.

The objective of our work is to track situations where multiple identities attempt to emerge not as a reflexive mirror of alterity but as a condition for the constitution of places as “roundabouts” to somewhere else.

## Notes

- 1 This movement mostly included descendants from the old French African colonies or territories (Algeria, Tunisia, Senegal, etc). Many other French citizens come from other parts of the globe: countries colonized by France who are now independent (such as Vietnam/ex Indochina, Haiti, Madagascar, Vanuatu/ex New Hebrides), or still remain under French rule with a mixed population including descendants of African slaves (Martinique, Guadeloupe, La Réunion, Maurice Island, Mayotte) and Indigenous people: Kanaks from New Caledonia, Mao’hi from French Polynesia or Karib, Tupu-guarani and Arawak Indians from French Guyana. It is only recently that some activists from the latter countries decided to claim their Indigeneity (*autochtonie*). For French people, if *indigène* was used in reference to any colonised population, the word *autochtone* is even more ambiguous, as it is often understood in the philosophical sense of the ancient Greeks, as the status of any inhabitant of a country. Commonly used by Africanists for all African populations, it can also be used by any French people claiming a heritage with a place, especially in the regions where the Republican rule used to forbid the local languages to be spoken in school (Breton, Occitan or Basque).
- 2 Mucchielli L; & V. Le Goazou (eds) (2007).

- 3 See all the issues of the French journal *Ethnies* produced by Survival International France; Kolig and Mueckler (2002); Starn & (de la) Cadena (2007), Bosa & Wittersheim (eds) (2009); Gagné, Martin & Salaün (eds) (2009).
- 4 2011 note: The French Canadian translation of agency, *agencéité*, is not commonly used in France and subject to misinterpretation with the word *agentivité* used in Actor Network Theory where agency is reduced to systematic action without the notion of empowerment (Latour 2004). On Agency debates see Ortner, 2006; Otto & Pedersen (eds) (2005).
- 5 2006 declaration of the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, Mal Brough: see Glowczewski (2010, transl of 2008), Behrendt Larissa, Cunneen Chris & Terri Libesman (2009).
- 6 Price (2007), Morvan (2010), Le Roux (2010).
- 7 Préaud M. (2009), De Larcy Healy J. (2008), Glowczewski (2010).
- 8 Glowczewski & Guattari (1986), Guattari (1995; 2000), Glowczewski (2011).
- 9 Varela (1992: 256).
- 10 Deleuze (1988: 17), translated by the author.
- 11 Glowczewski (1981: 150, 153; 1981). See also Glowczewski (1989; 2007; 2009).
- 12 Glowczewski (ed) (1991), Dussart (2000), Poirier (2005).
- 13 <http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/12/16/remarks-president-white-house-tribal-nations-conference> accessed March 3, 2011.
- 14 Videos and Transcripts of the “Indian Residential Schools Statement of Apology”—Prime Minister Stephen Harper, June 11 2008 (<http://www.ainc-inac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/pmsh-eng.asp>) and Apology to the Stolen generations, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, February 13 2008: <http://www.pm.gov.au/node/5952> or <http://australia.gov.au/about-australia/our-country/our-people/national-apology-to-the-stolen-generation-video>. All sites last accessed 3 March 2011. See Christen (2009).
- 15 Altman and Hinckson (eds) (2010), Langton (2008). Koori Mail, 11 February 2011: “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice commissioner Mick Gooda has attacked Federal Labour over its redesign of the Northern Territory intervention, arguing key elements remain racially discriminatory. In his

first social justice and native title reports, released on Thursday, Mr Gooda criticises in particular the commonwealth's compulsory acquisition of leases over Aboriginal land in 64 communities."

- 16 <http://unsr.jamesanaya.org/list/country-reports>
- 17 [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/declaration\\_indigenous/index.html](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/declaration_indigenous/index.html), last accessed 2 March 2011.
- 18 On 14 December 2007 the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, which held its first session in Geneva from 29 September to 3 October 2008 replaced the original WCIP. Another UN agency, WIPO, is focused on intellectual property rights: [http://www.wipo.int/about-wipo/en/what\\_is\\_wipo.html](http://www.wipo.int/about-wipo/en/what_is_wipo.html). UNESCO's 2003 convention of Intangible Heritage adopted in 2003, which has been ratified by its 125th country in 2010, states other rights for the protection of Indigenous knowledge.
- 19 See the cultural protocols for making a CD-ROM: Glowczewski (2000; 2005a; 2005b; 2007).
- 20 In his introduction to Kupiainen *et al* (2004: 18).
- 21 Castells (1997; 2000), Appadurai (1986).