



# Learning Communities

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LEARNING IN SOCIAL CONTEXTS  
**SPECIAL ISSUE: OBJECTS OF GOVERNANCE**

**Number 15**

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**CHARLES  
DARWIN  
UNIVERSITY**

Northern  
Institute





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## Editorial

The papers in this issue of the *Learning Communities Journal* grow out of the work of a learning community that began to come to life in CDU's Northern Institute in 2013 organised by the Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance group. We set out to consider 'governance,' a seemingly pervasive contemporary socio-political issue in Australia, by convening a workshop for those interested to write about 'an object of governance' that they were in some way acquainted with.

Why governance? Northern Australia is by no means exempt from the constant buzz around governance which has been a feature of Australian public life for the last decade. In one way or another – as researchers, analysts, educators and facilitators – we are all involved in projects which are related to governance and Northern Australia. At the same time we also seem to be caught up within current shifts around the nature and position of governments in northern Australia. And so we, in our small northern universities, find ourselves forming partnerships with all levels of government, industry, civil society organisations, Aboriginal organisations, and natural resource managers. As a result, we have become deeply implicated in the current government project of devolving responsibilities for service provision to individuals and communities.

There are all sorts of tensions that arise within this work when we, as academic researchers, become involved in these processes. 'Disjuncture' emerge around policy rhetoric and practice, as the 'normalisation' of past practice promoting autonomy and self-determination in Indigenous communities rides alongside contemporary governmental expectations of expansions of economic activity, and as new corporations and forms of corporate law and decision making, enter into everyday life of Indigenous communities. We find ourselves amidst a general confusion around monetisation of socio-political landscapes as currently being experienced by many Australians, including many civil servants. Knowledge and culture practices become radically reformed. In this context, as workshop organisers we considered a focus on objects of governance might help us hold a steady focus while allowing recognition of momentous change.

Not surprisingly the topic of objects of governance caused some confusion. Did we mean an object that was governable? Or, more controversially since it assumes objects have a sort of agency, did we mean the objects themselves seemed to govern in some way? Wasn't it only people who were either the governed or governors?

In part to deal with this confusion, in our call for expressions of interest in attending the workshop, we included a quotation from the work of French philosopher, Michel Serres, (1995) making the odd suggestion that objects have a way of knowing that is all their own, quite different from human knowing.

*Look at those children out there playing ball. The clumsy ones are playing with the ball as if it were an object, while the more skillful ones handle it as if the ball were playing with them: they move and change position according to how the ball moves and bounces. ... The ball is creating the relationships between [the children]. It ... creates their team, knows itself and represents itself. Yes the ball is active. It is the ball that is playing with the children (p.47).*



We asked would-be workshop participants to: identify an object involved in governance in some situation they were familiar with; and to commit to writing a narrative about it as an object that is active in way Serres has us imagining ‘the knowing’ of a ball that is part of a children’s game; as active.

Why establish a learning community around governance in Northern Australia in 2013?

‘Governance’ has become a buzz word, especially in scholarly engagements with Aboriginal Australia, and in the ‘grey literature’ produced by government. One gets the sense that the increased concern with governance in contemporary Aboriginal life far outstrips the worry over governance in Australian society more generally.

In our approach to considering objects of governance in our learning community we distinguish between government and governance in a way that is sensible in the context of thinking about policy, people and place in northern Australia at the beginning of the twenty first century. Thus, somewhat arbitrarily we confine our use of the term ‘government’ to consider the processes of governance used by organisations of the state – government departments or organisations commissioned by the state. Governance we use to consider collective control and organisation mechanisms in organisations that broadly make up civil society – non-government organisations (NGOs), non-profit organisations (NPOs), and variously incorporated bodies, both public and private.

So why a focus on ‘objects of governance’ in a writers workshop, and what is an object of governance anyway? We turn to Kathryn Pyne Addelson (2002), an American Pragmatist feminist philosopher to begin to answer that question. She has been considering governance in the context of control over American women’s reproductive experiences since the 1970s. In one of her last articles she points to ‘the fetus’ as an object of governance, as mediator, a participant of one sort or another.

*The fetus has played important roles on U.S. politics for nearly 50 years. It has participated in political skirmishes over procreation and in the deep moral disputes over how we Americans should live. With the increasing authority of science, a biomedical definition [ontologically speaking a particular sort of object] has come to dominate... [But] the fetus emerged in the early “public problem” of abortion [as a ‘soul,’ a different sort of object] and it is to this day a participant in the [public] problems ranging from abortion to child abuse to AIDS (p.118).*

Addelson uses difference to focus up the idea of ‘the fetus’ as the object of governance; ‘the fetus’ is a mediator or participant where governance – some sort of control in the context of collective practice – is being exercised. In Addelson’s work, we see how human collectives are changed by this object; just as Serres urges us to see children with good ball skills working as a team, as changed by a ball.

Our writers’ workshop set out to make such objects of governance more familiar by writing stories about them. We began by considering contemporary government in Australia in the context of recognising a general expansion of concern over governance. To do this we made use of an idea from the French social theorist Foucault, who quite presciently in the 1970s began considering what he saw as ‘a changed diagram of government’ in France. We suggested that the same sort of change could be seen as happening in Australia in the twenty first century. And to capture that sense of change in government process, we drew on Foucault’s term ‘governmentality.’

We can understand governmentality by analogy to ‘musicality’ or ‘physicality’. Just as a musical performance might be said to exhibit a particular type of musicality related to its genre (jazz, classical, afro-beat) and by which the performance might be commented on, and even critiqued, so too might episodes of government actions be commented on or critiqued by identifying their governmentality. But importantly we were not asking those who wished to write short papers for our collection to write on governmentality.

We wanted to use the idea of governmentality for two purposes. First to suggest that all episodes of governance, governance in civil society organisations, and in government organisations are in some way alike, governance too has an “ality” so to speak. Second we used the term governmentality to point to the changed conditions under which government now proceeds in northern Australia. Under this new governmentality, most government services are delivered by non-government organisations, and the processes of governance of those non-government organisations is important. Learning to recognise how objects are active in these processes of governance is important. In addition to the reading from Foucault (2007), in order to problematize taken-for-granted ideas about objects and their names, we set a short satirical text from Jonathan Swift (2005), and a text focusing on ‘scenario’ as an object of governance.

What emerged from our work is the set of texts which follow. We meet the following objects of governance: a cyber-safety pamphlet, the climograph, heat stress, financial literacy, ghost nets, a land management fire, a house in the Aboriginal town camps in Alice Springs, and quality education. Perhaps they may be read as also expressing a particular musicality or physicality as we have puzzled over these objects emerging in our work. In a concluding paper, we as editors have prepared a response to these short narrative papers further developing the idea of objects of governance.

**Professor Helen Verran and Professor Michael Christie**  
*Editors*

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## Weaving this and that way: Ghost net connections in an Aboriginal community in northern Australia

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**Keywords:** Objects of governance, Aboriginal, ghost net, weaving

Walking along the shore of North Goulburn Island we look for rope and fishing nets discarded or cut loose by commercial fishing boats. These nets are given the name ‘ghost nets’ as they drift ownerless through the sea. I am here with the manager of the art centre on Goulburn Island and the manager of the Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP)<sup>1</sup> who invited me to go out on the sea with them on my first weekend in Warruwi. I am volunteering at the Mardbalk Arts and Craft Centre, as an assistant in the art centre and to conduct research for my Master of Environment thesis. We collect the bits of rope as we find them, tugging and pulling them out of the sand where they are deeply buried. As we walk along the shoreline I can see the beach as a kind of treasure trove, where all the bits and pieces of things end up after they are thrown ‘away’, into the unknown. My feet are scorching on the hot white and black sand, marked by goat tracks in every direction. In between buoys, seaweed, single shoes, glass and goat poo, we come across our desired objects. The rope known as ‘ghost net’ is considered by environmentalists to pose serious environmental risks as it can tangle and trap sea creatures, killing or seriously injuring the wildlife and end up as pollution on beaches in the region. However, rubbish collection is not our primary purpose. We are scavenging these ropes for the art centre where they are used to produce sculptural artwork.

In the month prior to my arrival at Warruwi, some women came to Mardbalk Arts and Crafts Centre to instruct the artists in the use of ghost net as a fibre to weave bags and sculptures. Bright nylon thread is used to stitch the ghost net bits together. In some communities such as Warruwi, where paid community work still exists under the banner of CDEP, workers assist in removing ghost nets from the shorelines. I can already tell that this is hard work – not only is it hot in the direct sun, but the sand burying the rope is heavy and wet and sometimes the rope is quite embedded.

1. The Community Development and Employment Projects (CDEP) program funded by the Australian Government has operated in Indigenous communities as a paid community work initiative for Indigenous people since 1977. CDEP provides activities and work that contribute to the maintenance of communities and develop participants’ skills and employability. In recent years, the program has undergone a number of evaluations and is being scaled back and integrated into the Remote Jobs and Communities Programme (RJCP). This shift raises questions about the future shape programs and community work may take, and the structures and support that will replace the CDEP.

Retrieved from the Australian Government Department of Human Services website: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/services/centrelink/community-development-employment-projects#a4> (August, 2014)

On my first day at Mardbalk, I find myself surrounded by the earthy scent of moldering wood, paint, pandanus leaves<sup>2</sup> and other art centre smells. The manager gives me a quick tour of the brightly coloured building. There aren't many paintings in the centre, but there are a lot of baskets, jewelry and carvings. There is a blue tarp on the ground in the front room with a few cushions in a circle, various bits of ghost net and dried pandanus, along with empty tea mugs and several friendly camp dogs. This is the area the women sit and weave during the working day. The other main public room of the centre contains several large black and white photographs of people from the days when Warruwi was a mission settlement. The images are of happy looking young Aboriginal people. In one photo, there is a beautiful young woman smiling shyly at the camera and cradling a tiny baby; in another, there are several people in a bark canoe dragging a turtle out of the water. They are very clear and beautiful pictures and the manager tells me that they are very old. The manager takes me into the back room, which has a large padded table used for screen-printing.

'Can you photograph the ghost net work?' She asks me, gesturing to a pile of brightly coloured creations stacked on one corner of the table. 'They need to go up on the website, so I was thinking you might be able to Photoshop them a bit, make them look even prettier?' She looks from my sunburnt face (from the boat trip) to the ghost nets. I agree. 'You'll have to get up on the table and try and not cast a shadow over them,' she advises. Pointing to a small wooden stool as my means for getting onto the table, she leaves me to it.



Once the small digital camera is in my possession, I clamber up onto the table noting the dusty red marks my feet have already made on the white sheet that is meant to serve as a backdrop. I place a small brightly coloured ghost net bag in the centre of the white sheet and do my best to make no shadow as I take a photo. I contort my body and duck so as not to hit my head on the ceiling fan, which is spinning slowly and slightly off kilter.

I can hear voices in the next room and turn to see the art centre manager enter with one of the artists. She introduces me - I feel self-conscious about not only my pose and elevated height, but also of my sunburnt face. I struggle inelegantly down from the table and shake hands with the artist who is eyeing me with an amused smile.

'I'm just taking some photos of the ghost net for the website', I try and explain. The artist smiles and nods at me. 'So is one of these yours?' I ask pointing to the pile of ghost net weavings. She nods her head and removes a bag to show me. It is green with bright pink nylon stitching. We admire her handy work, and then she tells me she is going to get a cup of tea. She doesn't come back.

I don't really know what to do with myself in the art centre – aside from the jobs the manager gives me. I am eager to see how the centre operates, how things are done and who and what is involved. I feel a great sense of discomfort when I 'hang around' – not wanting to make people feel watched or studied. I try to figure out how best to collect information and try to get people to talk to me about daily workings. I also don't want to upset the operations of the art centre, so it all feels like quite a messy dilemma. I concentrate on the task at hand - taking photos of the ghost net weavings, standing on the table in funny positions, trying not to hit my head on the fan. As the day progresses, people come in and out of the room, introduce

2. Pandanus is a spiny-leaved tree/shrub found in the north of Australia. In Warruwi and other communities in Arnhem Land, the leaves are collected, split, dyed and dried and used to weave floor mats, bags, hats and sculptures as well as many other things.



themselves; nod at me, or just ignore me. The CDEP manager comes in and laughs at my sunburned face. The local Police officers come by and introduce themselves. Some children run in and out of the room giggling and yell 'HELLO' at me as they scuttle away again.

Once I have finished photographing the art works, I take the camera and sit in the office with the art centre manager. She sets me up on a beautiful shiny new Mac computer in the corner, and explains the machine is part of the language program to record and maintain the local language – Maung, which is considered in danger of being lost as there aren't many native speakers left. I get to work on the images, making them brighter and clearer, all the while enjoying the airconditioning offered by this room and the frequent visits by the artists who come by for tea, biscuits and chats with the manager. I get to hear a bit of gossip and also to observe some of the interactions people have, how they work together, where difficulties lie. A couple comes in, smiling shyly at the manager. They ask her if she can help them with a banking query. They hand her a letter, she reads it; they discuss the issue. I finish the images and excuse myself from the office – it seems inappropriate for me to be in there.

I head into the main art room where some artists are sitting on cushions on the floor weaving – some are using pandanus and some are using ghost net. A man is sanding the outside of a log, making it smooth and light brown. He explains it is a hollow log<sup>3</sup> and will paint the outside. A woman is sitting at the table with a cup of tea, a little bit away from the group. I sit on a plastic chair next to her. She has been most friendly and welcoming to me. She has a small ghost net bag in front of her. I ask her about it. She uses gestures as she explains what she has done to make it. She asks for a lighter and I retrieve one from the office. She uses it to singe the ends of the nylon twine together. I can smell the acrid burnt plastic smell as she pinches and twists the melted ends. She shows me her handy work. I nod and smile. The couple from the office exit a short time later. They seem happy as though the issue they came about has been resolved. They leave the art centre quietly.

As the day progresses I move back and forth from room to room, photographing completed ghost net sculptures, editing them on the Mac in the office, and trying to talk to the artists as they go about their business. The friendly woman who showed me how to singe the twine together is polite as I sit down next to her on the tarp on the floor. The man who was sanding the log asks the women to show me how to weave with the net – and so the friendly woman shows me how to stitch ghost net together using nylon twine. I decide to make a bag and use faded green ghost net, fraying at the edges, and a red nylon twine. The artist instructing me is making a large turtle from the same green ghost net – it is going to be a mat or a sculpture to hang on the wall she tells me.

In the evening I walk to the beach with the art centre manager, and we hold our noses as the dogs following us chew on the turtle intestines and shells left on the beach after someone has been hunting. The manager explains to me that you can usually find a small hole in the shell of the hunted turtles where the spear went in. People go out on boats and catch turtles for eating. I think of the photos in the art centre of the people dragging the turtle into the boat, and of the turtle ghost net sculpture the artist is making. I feel like the threads of knowledge and elements of the community are starting to come together to provide me with just a little bit of an idea of how things work.

### Object in play

As discussed in the introductory piece by Helen Verran, the French philosopher Michel Serres (1995) uses a description of children playing with a ball to enable us to see the ways in which objects have their own ways of knowing and governing.

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3. Hollow logs are traditional coffins where a deceased person's bones are placed. The outside of the log is painted with a set of designs that represents the family and group to which they belong.

*Look at those children out there playing ball. The clumsy ones are playing with the ball as if it were an object, while the more skillful ones handle it as if the ball were playing with them: they move and change position according to how the ball moves and bounces. ...The ball is creating the relationships between [the children]. It... creates their team, knows itself and represents itself... It is the ball that is playing with the children. (p.47)*

Rather than a game of soccer, this story is of the networks and interactions that are created through the game that is formed by the tangling and weaving of the ghost net throughout the community of Warruwi.

For me, the weaving of ghost nets is useful for my role as an ethnographer as it provides an intelligible background for me in figuring out my place and ways to be useful in the art centre. The ghost net brings me in with a purpose, I become a photographer, an editor, a weaver and a temporary member of the art centre community. Teams exist and are created through the activity of the ghost net, sometimes without participants even realising they are involved in the game at all. The ghost net is thrown into play by the fishermen on the boats that discard it, perhaps assuming with some correctness that they will not be held accountable for their actions, and without the recognition of the net being an object of governance within the fishing industry. The ghost net washes up on the shorelines of Goulburn and the surrounding islands, into the lives and daily doings of other people and entities who also become teams: the community workers collecting it; the instructors teaching with it; the art centre accepting it as a fibre; the artists weaving with it as a fibre; and the consumers purchasing it as an art and educational piece. The ghost net is also a political tool in the environmental sector, highlighting the issue of environmental hazard and excessive waste, whilst also modeling how to upcycle materials into useful/usable items.

When I arrived in Warruwi, ghost net was still working its way into being integrated into the 'normal' governmentality of the art centre, and so was operating on its own terms as an object of governance – taking me on its evolving journey – as it was pulled out of the sand and integrated into the business of the art centre and the community. At that moment, the agency of the ghost net was weaving and connecting different elements of the community together in a more formal way, obvious to outsiders such as myself. The ghost net allowed me to weave with it, and to see the obvious path it was making into the art centre and beyond into the community. The play was interactive, multiple ways, and the ghost net was certainly an active and directing participant.

The bag I made out of ghost net under the guidance of one of the artists at the centre was a little clumsy – not at all pretty. I created a drawstring and straps so it could be used as a kind of backpack. I gave it to the CDEP manager before I left – as a thank you for the outing he took the art centre manager and I on the first weekend after my arrival. He looked at it, smiled and said 'I found this rope' and gestured to the green fraying and faded net I used to make the bag.

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Figure 2: Cyber safety poster/pamphlet (back)

# Cyber Safety

## Makmakthurr gurrutu rom ga gurrutumirr mala



### Connect with Respect

facebook.com/connectwithrespect

### Digital technology keeps gurrutu, language and culture strong

Staying in touch with family and friends  
Telling stories  
Sharing culture  
Caring for country  
Teaching from country  
Doing work  
Learning

Making music and movies  
Taking and storing photos and videos  
Shopping  
Playing games  
Having fun

### Digital footprints

Every time you use digital technology you leave a 'footprint' behind in the digital world. Your digital footprints show what you have done and where you have been. Digital footprints can stay online forever and can be tracked back to you.

### Everyone is connected in cyberspace — THINK BEFORE YOU SEND OR POST

**Nothing in the digital world or cyberspace is fully secret or private.**  
When you send a text, a photo, video or email — you lose control of it.  
What you send to one person or post online can end up everywhere!  
You don't know who might see it or where it will end up.

**Sexing is not always secret or safe.**  
Sexing is sending sexual messages, images, photos or videos using a mobile phone or posting online. Sexing can cause shame and affect your reputation.

**Child pornography is a crime.**  
Child pornography is uploading, sharing or sending any naked or sexual images, photos or videos of someone under the age of 18.  
If you are under 18 it is illegal to take a photo of yourself or anyone else naked and text or send it, post it or upload it onto a social networking site like Facebook.

**Cyberbullying hurts people, causes fighting and big problems.**  
Cyberbullying is when mobile phones, computers and the internet are used to try to harm or shame another person.  
Cyberbullies use texts, photos, videos, emails or messages to intimidate, control, manipulate, put down, frighten, upset or humiliate someone.

**Stirring up, encouraging and filming fights or other acts of violence and cruelty can be a criminal offence. If you share, send or sell a picture or video that is sexual or violent you can be registered as a criminal.**

**Internet fraud is when people use the internet, texts, emails, websites, chat rooms etc to trick you into giving them money.**  
**Phishing** is when people send fake messages or emails to trick you into giving them your bank account details. **Proper banks do not send texts or emails asking for banking details.**  
**Scams** are fake phone calls, messages or emails saying things like: 'you have won lots of money.' They are sent by people trying to lure other people into a trap. Scammers always end up asking you to give them your bank account or personal details. **Offers that are too good to be true are probably scams.**  
**Identity theft** is when a person pretends to be someone else (steals their identity) to cause trouble, to get, buy or steal something.

**Criminals hide in the digital world—watch out for internet fraud, scams and identity theft.**

### 10 Cyber Safety Tips

**Keep your personal information secret**

1. Use a strong password and keep it secret.
2. Set your social networking profile to private.
3. Don't give any private information over the phone or internet — about you, your family or friends.

**Be careful who you trust**

4. Tell people to ask your permission before they send, upload or tag a photo of you.
5. Only add people who you know as friends to your social networking sites.
6. Don't reply to rude messages or to messages from people you don't know.
7. Don't accept offers from people you don't know or that are too good to be true.

**Think before you send or post**

8. Think about what you are saying and how the other person will feel after it has been sent or posted.
9. Don't hide behind the computer screen — if you wouldn't say it to someone's face — don't say it at all.
10. Never send or post rude, bad, inappropriate or illegal content anywhere on the internet.

### The Digital World

Together, digital technologies and the Internet make the digital world (cyberspace). The Internet is a massive network made up of all the computers in the world connected to each other by satellites, towers, wires and signals.

Digital technologies can be devices like computers and mobile phones or services like the world wide web and email.

The Internet carries many digital technology services such as the world wide web, email, text messaging, social networking (like Facebook and Deva Chat) and online banking and shopping.

People connect to the Internet and use the services with digital technology devices like mobile phones, computers, laptops and iPads, and through providers like Bigpond.

During their end of financial year budget sessions in 2012 the East Arnhem Land regional arm of the Government department responsible for Indigenous Affairs, earmarked some money and created a project concept to address feedback given at community-based 'Stronger Futures' consultations. I begin by imagining 'Community Feedback' like the ball Serres' (1995) has us imagining in drawing attention to the relation between a ball and children playing a game. 'Community feedback' might be imagined as an object of governance – like the ball that skillful children playing a game are 'ordered around by.' Accordingly, the actions of the skillful public servants involved in the 'Stronger Futures' consultations setting about their 'game' brought to life another object of governance : The Makmakthurr gurruṯu rom ga gurruṯumirri mala (Connect with Respect) - Cyber safety poster/pamphlet.

In the 'Stronger Futures' discussions, community elders in three Yolŋu Aboriginal communities spoke of their concerns and worries about what was happening with new technology, and in particular, mobile phones. The government workers were told that the younger generations were using the new technologies in ways that were having serious consequences within the community. These consequences manifested in various conflicts and trouble within social networks and cultural relations. The public servants 'translated' these discussions into a small program to support communities to work through some of these issues. The project was given a catchy name, 'Talking Strong Staying Safe' (TSSS).

I work with a group of academics and practitioners in the Northern Institute at Charles Darwin University. We have many years of experience working in Arnhem Land and with Yolŋu people. We are now marketing ourselves with the moniker GroundUP in an attempt to articulate the methods and theoretical underpinnings of the way we like to work. On the strength of our work and the relationships we have made with government and Yolŋu, our group was contracted to deliver the program. This is the context that the posters were 'brought to life'.

In our projects, GroundUP is committed to methods whereby projects are built from the ground up, with and alongside the people it targets. We actively try to avoid a top down approach. GroundUP seeks to privilege local knowledge, collaboration and knowledge generation through exploring problems. We find people to work with, work out what skills and knowledge we can all bring to the project, and negotiate how it will be implemented and for whose benefit. We document our activities carefully and develop our resources and strategies collaboratively.

The TSSS project work started with a conventional 'desktop research phase' collecting current Cyber Safety resources and materials. We sifted through the textual material and simplified the main concepts and messages into plain English that we thought would be appropriate to the context.

Following the desktop research, I visited communities and started conversations, listening to what people were concerned about. What were the local issues around cyber safety? We decided to create a poster/pamphlet. Having a physical picture-based poster/pamphlet would give us an object we could use, to generate conversations around the issues. A poster/pamphlet could become a participant in an imagined future conversation with parents, youth, and teachers. I suppose, the 'we' who decided here were the consultants, but it was not solely us – the texts we'd dredged up off the internet, and our Aboriginal friends and acquaintances are also part of that 'we'. We would use these posters in workshops, at schools; share them in public spaces and visit individuals and families. We already had experience making posters as conversation generating tools.

Somewhat unexpectedly the discussions and early sketches for the poster using images of people was abandoned for a version being populated by birds; a landscape of birds using phones and computers, including all the possible scenarios of using technology we had



identified as important. We thought using birds could keep the issues in an imagined (non-human) space, and add a level of safety for people to discuss private issues. The figures of birds-in-landscape carried no explanation with them. The idea was that we would spread it around and generate on-the-spot stories about what was happening amongst the bird characters. The back-side of the poster of a landscape filled with digital device- using birds, would have concise explanations and imagery that linked back to the landscape view. If people could read English they could find explanation of hazards and safety issues in the poster.

I brought the text for the back-side of the poster to a translator. I showed what we had developed with its accompanying text. We translated a few pages from English to a Yolŋu language together. I realised, what we had thought was heavily edited and simplified English was still too detailed and full of assumptions. Our initial aim with the text and accompanying pictures was to provide some pointers to the underneath story and the implicit assumptions behind many of the concepts relating to new technologies.

On the surface level, the digital technologies and the functions they perform seem straight forward, but how the devices worked socially, the traces they left behind and other hidden discourses, were what we wanted to tease out in the written text. The translation process turned English points about Cyber Safety into awkward word by word translations expressed in a language where many of the concepts just didn't seem to have life, and the terms we found ourselves using were becoming instructional do's and don'ts.

As an object of governance, an expression of the practices of government officers and of our practices as contracted consultants, the poster/pamphlet would introduce some key ideas, suggest some scenarios, and present some facts. As we 'worked' the illustrations and text with people, we showed them how they could use it with family members and encouraged people to take a copy home. We imagined this would allow space for people to find their own methods and processes to incorporate new knowledge, new categories and new practices into their already established governance practices.

Inappropriate mobile phone usage and other cyber safety issues are generally seen by Aboriginal community members as an internal community matter: boys and girls are naughty; people do the wrong thing; kinship laws are forgotten etc. One aspect that we weren't prepared for was that many Elder people talked about how this technology had dropped into their communities without warning and without proper explanation of how it worked (the underneath story). Of course people would get things wrong if they weren't aware of 'digital footprints', the persistency of life in the digital world, and especially threats (such as scams) coming into the community via these new technologies. We realised that we needed to include in our conversations that the issues we were talking about in the Talking Strong, Staying Safe project were felt as problems across all classes and places in Australia and around the world. This was not a problem unique to Aboriginal communities.

To keep the conversations going, we kept foregrounding that the new technologies and processes were opportunities to strengthen the very things that they were also eroding. For example, with kinship, new communication technologies exposed the kinship system to new and inappropriate communication practices (e.g., Facebook, DivaChat) but that at the same time it allowed the same kinship networks to be strengthened across distance and with multimedia.

Typically, modern posters are about communicating a message through mass production and distribution enabled by the low cost of production. For over two hundred years, posters have been displayed in public places all over the world. They are designed to attract attention, making us aware of a political viewpoint, some new information, or encouraging us to subscribe to a particular product or service. Our poster/pamphlet could be categorised in a particular class. It

is designed to demonstrate and show examples and concepts in an educational, awareness-raising, information-sharing and most importantly, by conversation-generating modes. The poster could also be included in a class of objects designed to communicate across language and cultural divides.

So a poster seeks to communicate visually and can include text. In this case the poster worked in two ways, as a hand-out pamphlet and a hang-able poster. It worked as an intermediary between people to generate conversations. I remember posting a few posters up outside a store. People stopped to have a look, they said hello and asked what it was all about, all sorts of conversations started up. Some conversations eventually got around to what the poster was there for, to generate stories around Cyber Safety, ask advice, seek clarification, can I have one to take home, good times.

I remember another time at another location, we went to talk to a couple of 'naughty' boys who were apparently hard to talk to about anything, and were known to be causing problems via new technologies. The poster in its pamphlet form (and the role of pamphlet-giver-as-part-of-government-project we had) allowed us an opportunity to engage with them via the object of the poster. They were squirming the whole time, but my Yolju co-worker relished the power the poster/pamphlet had given him for that interaction to be possible, as a culturally appropriate 'not shaming/disciplinary' encounter.

Two years later the poster, albeit spotted with fly dirt and rather tattered, can still be seen in one or two places around the communities which were its target audience. It sits there as an object of governance, possibly now invisible to most, but nevertheless still a possible agent eliciting responsible engagement with digital technology. Because of my involvement in the project, some people recognise me as the cyber safety expert and ask me for advice. I still have a few posters left and am still handing them out. The issues around social media seemed to have diminished, but the problems of scams are on the rise.

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## Boris Problematizes Quality Assurance

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### Introduction

This paper is the story of Boris and the way that as a small Aboriginal child, he reveals the Australian state's assurance of quality in child care delivery as an object working me as an early childhood services expert, as much as I work it. Boris attended two institutions subject to my pastoral care as an early childhood professional. These were quite different. On the one hand, a well-stocked and smoothly functioning pre-school facility, and on the other, a child care centre run by an Aboriginal organisation which struggled to meet standard quality bench marks, eliciting a worried concern from my professional self. Boris offered a powerful challenge to my taken for granted views of 'quality assurance' dissolving it before my eyes in an exemplary moment of what, from reading Foucault, I have learned to see as "problematization".

This entity Quality Assurance was 'born' and quickly expanded and intensified its reach in the domain of childcare, across the time period in which my professional persona also expanded and intensified. In order to describe the impact Boris had, I first do most of my thinking through telling a story of my emerging as 'a professional' working in the area of childcare provision, and my growing familiarity with quality assurance as an object of governance. I see now that in actuality the figure of my professional persona as an 'expert' and the entity quality assurance that I as an expert know through and with, grew and matured together.

I foreground Foucault's notion of problematization which Carol Bacchi (2012) suggests direct attention to the heterogeneous politics which shape lives, and "alerts researchers to their unavoidable participation in these relations" (p.1). I examine "quality assurance" as problematization and therefore attempt to understand how it came to be accepted in childcare centres in Australia and treated as a key characteristic of early childhood education and care (ECEC). I attempt to access the problematizations which govern educators and children in ECEC, and me. I end the story of the growing mutual intimacy of quality assurance as an object of governance and the figure of the knowing expert (me), with the story of Boris.

### Quality Assurance comes to be 'real', and I become an 'expert'

Problematization puts into question accepted truths about what is real. By studying the practices, political structures and ethical forces which establish a "problem", that process of becoming real comes to be more noticeable and "opens up for examination the complex relations that produced it and the effects of its operation" (Bacchi, 2012, p.2). Additionally,

“Foucault selects his sites – his ‘problematizing moments’ – by identifying times and places where he detects important shifts in practice.” (Bacchi, 2012, p.2). Here, I am writing about two shifts in practice regarding the ascendance within the field of educational policy and governance of quality assurance and assessment. I had a professional connection with quality assurance at the time these two shifts in practice emerged.

From the early 1970’s, the Whitlam Labor Government committed to a range of reforms including, those for women and childcare. However, in the 1980’s, feminist and early childhood care and education advocates lobbied the Australian government for more accessible, affordable and *high quality* childcare for all families on the basis that access to child care arrangements was (and remains) a major barrier to the participation of women in the workforce (Harrington, 2014). From 1984, the Hawke Labor government introduced Child Care Subsidies which continue to exist in various forms (Massanauskas & Philip, 2007; Hawke, 1987). In 1990, Labor introduced the world’s first *compulsory* Quality Improvement and Accreditation System (QIAS), (Rowe, Tainton & Taylor, 2006) into Australia’s childcare industry and extended payment of the Commonwealth Child Care Benefit to private, for-profit childcare. This was much to the chagrin of the community not-for-profit sector which objected strenuously to the private sector receiving Government funds. At the heart of the QIAS was improvement of quality care through the introduction of standards for all childcare centres in Australia. Even so, the actual interpretation of high quality was left to people like me – a tertiary teacher in early childhood education.

When I was first appointed in 1990 by the National Childcare Accreditation Council (NCAC) as a reviewer in the pilot project of the QIAS, I was chuffed. I had already been working in early childhood centres in Australia for 10 years, had earlier experience of working with children on a Kibbutz in Israel and in London, and was now working providing professional development and resources to other childcare workers and organisations. I was impressed by the notion that a national system of improvement and accreditation would lift the standard of care and education offered to children, believed the standards were measurable, was “forthright that the childcare industry in Australia required an external control mechanism if quality care was to be consistent across centres” (Abbey, 2001, pp.8-9); and I was excited to be personally involved.

So along with a small group of other people from across the country, I was trained in how and what to assess in a childcare service for the 52 principles of quality and I felt I was expert enough to do just that. I used the documentation to decide if each target centre would be worthy to be ‘accredited’. Ironically, I was sent to visit centres in urban and regional South Australia rather than the Northern Territory, where I would likely know most of the centres under review. This ensured I showed no bias, did not upset staff, or jeopardise longer-term working relationships if my decision about the quality of their care did not go in their favour.

I remember the feeling of being in control when I visited the centres; and recall in particular the nervous staff in a childcare service in Port Augusta, South Australia. It caused great excitement when I assessed their ‘babies room’ as being at a higher level than the centre had in its self-assessment. I still remember the feeling of warmth, comfort and order in that room which I thought were indicators of high quality relationships with children and respect for them, and of good planning. The educators and I referred together to the new (pilot) accreditation documentation, compared their self-assessment to my own, and discussed my ultimate decision and advice about their practice. We were literally working off the same pages, and I felt I was making a contribution to quality childcare in Australia. Many years later, in the Aboriginal childcare centre, I realise that my position has shifted to become that of a judging observer, and Boris will help me see that good relationships and respect can occur in many ways.



### Quality Assurance as security for the future

Another ‘problematization moment’ that acted for me as an entry point (Bacchi, 2012) to access and reflect on quality assurance as an object of governance occurred with the emergence of neuroscience in early childhood care and education. Research by neuroscientists highlighted the critical importance of the early years to brain development and to the future. Brain research linked the familiar notions of development and wellbeing to quality childcare and preschool as sound economic investments for the future, “pre-empting and resolving problems early on” (Oberklaid, 2007, pp.8-11) and saving governments money in areas of education, law enforcement, health etc. Oberklaid and others identified problems arising in adults that have their roots in early childhood: mental health; family violence and anti-social behaviour; crime; poor literacy; chronic unemployment and welfare dependency; substance abuse; obesity; cardiovascular disease and diabetes. According to Oberklaid (2012),

*Any adversity that impacts on the parents or caregivers has the potential to have a negative impact on brain development in the young child and therefore to act as a risk factor for the health and development of the child (p.19).*

Indeed, “by the second grade ... gaps in test scores across socioeconomic groups are stable by age, suggesting that later schooling has little effect in reducing or widening the gap that appears before students enter school (Heckman, 2006, p.4).

Twenty years after the first quality assurance and improvement system for childcare centres, the Federal government responded to the argument that high quality early childhood education benefits all children, and delivers economic benefits in the future, by offering government funding to preschool education as an entitlement for all Australian four year olds (Penn, 2011, pp.1-16). Until this time, the provision of early childhood (preschool) education in Australia was the sole responsibility of state and territory governments. Now under the new Education and Care Services National Law, there is commitment to collaborative national approach through the National Quality Framework, including assessment and rating against National Quality Standards. And, now the relevant regulatory authority in each state and territory undertakes the assessment and rating process. Furthermore, the ratings must be displayed by each service and are published on the Australian Children’s Education and Care Quality Authority and MyChild websites.

Whilst Early Childhood Education and Care advocates had espoused for years the value of ‘high quality’ early childhood experiences, it was a stroke of genius in relation to getting the attention of government to make direct links to fiscal policy. Childhood emerges as a significant public problem and is viewed in relation to what dire economic consequences might occur in the future without the assurance of high quality care – the nature of which is defined by government - and quality assurance is an intervention against economic insecurity. Bacchi (2012) refers to Walters’ identification of “security as a dominant motif in national and international governance” (p.5). Similarly, Lakoff and Collier (2010) write of the central tool of imaginative enactment in anticipating the occurrence of security interventions “as a way to generate knowledge about current needs in the face of future events” (p.259). Whilst they write of critical infrastructure protection against multiple threats such as nuclear attack and natural disasters; in this case, young children are identified as vulnerable, especially in the domains of cognition and in terms of emotional regulation for the future, particularly for Indigenous children. Quality childcare and education is vital in securing intervention and saving money in the long term for government; and a new accreditation system is enacted to mitigate potential catastrophe: that is one side of the coin which is quality assurance, but of course there’s also an underside. My long promised story of Boris is what reveals this underside.

### A new journey for me and for Quality Assurance

Twenty years on, still working in early childhood education and care, I found myself visiting an Indigenous community in the Northern Territory again doing work based on quality care and education, and quality assurance. This time, however, I began to wonder about the strange political technology that now seems to be doing something different than what I first imagined.

I visited both the childcare centre and the preschool in an Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Over a two year period, I delivered Certificate III in Children's Services training to Indigenous staff in the childcare centre, and next door at the preschool, worked with the non-Indigenous teacher on a project to build the literacy and numeracy of the Indigenous children in readiness for school. This period of time coincided with the introduction of the National Quality Framework for early childhood and the 'Belonging, Being and Becoming: Early Years Learning Framework for Australia' (Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations for the Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p.1-50) which is "built around a number of key concepts and principles which require educators to use particular understandings and practices effectively to achieve the desired outcomes" (p.2). The Framework includes specific commitment to closing the gap in educational achievements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

It is significant to mention here that the childcare centre I visited is one of those across Australia funded under special budget arrangements which deliver child care, early learning and outside school hours care to predominantly Indigenous children in rural and remote areas where it might not otherwise be financially viable. These services, at the time of writing, were exempted from meeting the national quality standards. Nevertheless, quality care and education and quality assurance already 'existed' in the national training packages I was utilising. I was convinced that, the preschool teacher, Aboriginal educators and I were all thinking about 'high quality' as we journeyed together, albeit, as I was to discover, in very different ways. As Bacchi (2012, p.5) points out, such 'thinking' about high quality is "a set of practices in its own right."

When I first meet Boris (4 years old) at preschool, he is disruptive and uninterested, despite the fact that there are many rich, new resources and equipment provided. He does not stay long at any one of the prearranged table activities and only reluctantly performs the daily hair combing and teeth cleaning routines. When the non-Indigenous preschool teacher and I 'test' his word or number recognition, he is disengaged and all but rolls his eyes at the questions. He is perceived to be performing at below anticipated levels. I caught his full attention once when I read to a small group a book of a 'dreamtime' story written by a local author (Boris immediately asked for it to be read again).

In the childcare centre, unlike the cosy order for the babies which so impressed me in South Australia all those years ago, the children and adults are noisy, chaotic and disorganised (Hazard, 2013, pp. 3-8). But for Boris, in this setting, there is a transformation. Here the Indigenous staff are his caring extended family. He plays for long periods on the bicycle, inviting and helping other younger children to ride on the back (especially, I later learn, targeting those children to whom he is directly related). He draws pictures of his fishing trip with his father and uncles from the weekend and writes his name proficiently across the page. He responds proudly when an adult asks him to tell me his totem. He watches the cars going past the centre and conducts a running commentary on the people inside ("That's my cousin"). He is involved in detailed and serious discussion with the adults, who also consult him for information ("who is that person who came to your house last night?"; "where has Joseph gone?"). All of this occurring in a setting that seems to me sparse and uninspiring.

Unlike the preschool, the childcare centre is under-resourced, much of the equipment is broken and books torn. The main room is for the most part empty until the tables are dragged to the middle of the room for meals. Here I see the adults and children ‘herding’, moving together from one activity to another; I hear adults calling out to the children loudly if something is getting out of hand. And yet, I am also seeing happy, relaxed, connected and ‘normal’ children and adults. When I refer to the nascent Early Years Learning Framework, I see in Boris a child who has a strong sense of identity and wellbeing; a child connected with and contributing to his world; a confident and involved learner; and an effective communicator. I am without a doubt witnessing a way to ‘do’ quality that is a long way from my previous experience of what constitutes quality childcare. Everything is unfamiliar and disconcerting. Boris and his teachers are demonstrating a particular sort of (Aboriginal) quality assurance, that is clearly viable, but which undoes some of my assumptions about formal education and my own professional knowledge and any notion I had of being an expert able to interpret quality.

### **Boris problematizes Quality Assurance**

Carol Bacchi (2012) presents problematization in this way:

*Problematization doesn't mean the representation of a pre-existent object, nor the creation through discourse of an object that doesn't exist. It denotes the set of discursive or non-discursive practices that makes something enter the play of the true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought (pp.1-8).*

In my initial experience of ‘administering’ decisions about the status of quality in a number of childcare centres, I considered myself expert and was treated accordingly. I understood (even more than the people in their own centre) what quality care they were offering, and guided them towards a “true”, common end, “quality”. I knew that all the other people trained as assessors were making more or less the same decisions as I was as they visited centres across the country.

But in my most recent experience, things are different. I am still essentially an administrator for the government but I am confronted with the strangeness of ‘quality’. My power to decipher ‘quality’ is disrupted; here, I am the judging observer. I am now wary of the technology of the accreditation document. I am no longer confident of my own ability to administer it, and especially uncertain about the implementation at the local level. Rather than starting with specifications of what quality looks like, and checking for their existence in this setting, I am realising that here I do not recognise what I am seeing. Indeed, Boris helps me to realise I do not even know what I am looking for.

If I consciously or unconsciously imagined that I had the same authority as when I first visited centres for the purpose of accreditation, I am quickly aware that it is not the case now. When I visited the childcare centre on the community, I was the one being reassured by the educators and by Boris that quality care and education existed. The Aboriginal staff did not independently consult the *Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (and indeed, were not yet obliged to as a service provider receiving budget based funding). Nor did they necessarily even think about quality assurance as an object of governance, but they were able to identify the importance of relationships, connectedness, identity and wellbeing as most important for the children and themselves and to function together in the childcare centre accordingly.

Boris and the Aboriginal teachers, without even thinking about, or needing to justify quality care and education in their childcare service, exposed uncertainties and complexities of quality assurance that might have otherwise been invisible, dismissed or ignored by me. Boris, by

clearly “belonging”, “being” and “becoming” alongside other children and adults within a space that I might have regarded as not meeting quality standards, resisted a “true” understanding of quality assurance that I had come to take for granted, and thereby made quality assurance, as an object of governance, more noticeable.

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## Governing Climate: Griffith Taylor's Climographs and Contemporary Blind Spots

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**Figure 1: Climographs from Australia, T. G. Taylor, 1916**

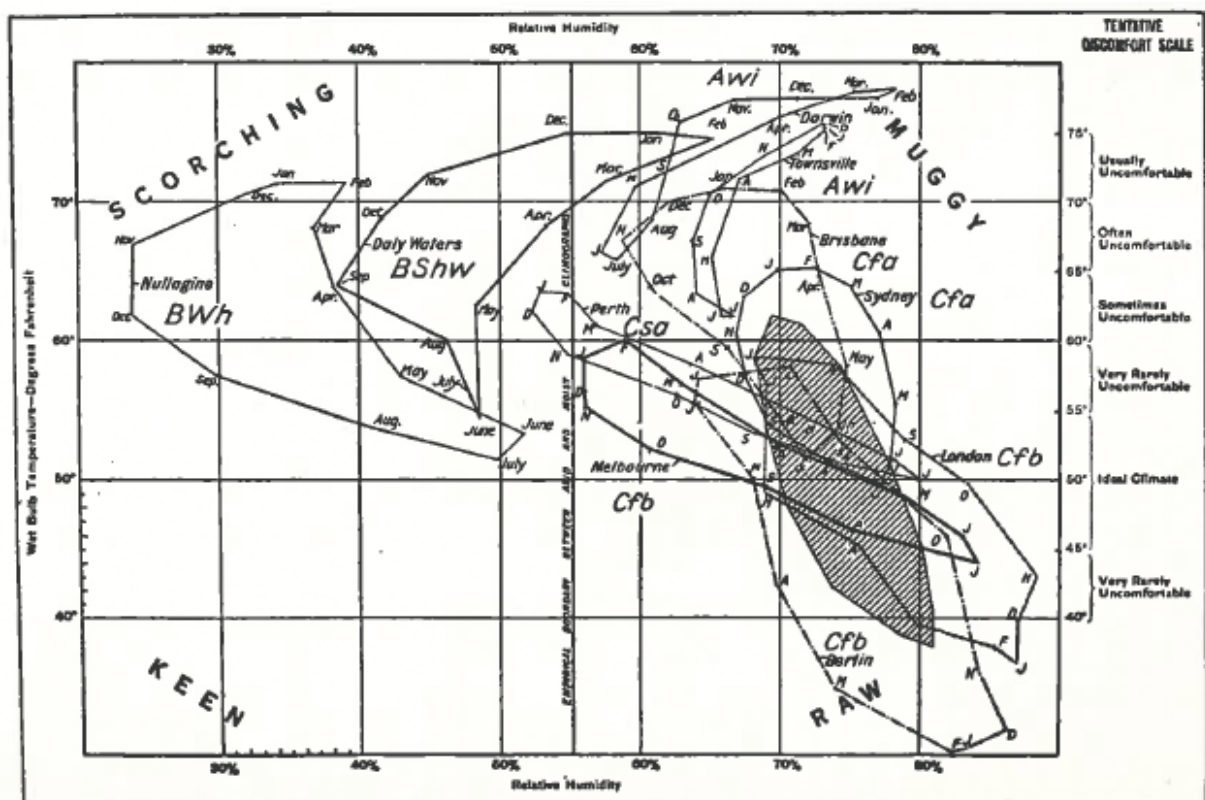


FIG. 26.—CLIMOGRAPHS FOR AUSTRALIA, SHOWING HOW THE LOCALITIES APPROACH THE FOUR TYPES OF DISCOMFORT

The shaded climograph shows the most habitable type for white settlers. The climatic formulae used by Köppen are added. The Wet-Bulb Discomfort Scale is at the right

The lines tell the story. Indeed they tell so many stories – linear narratives with a beginning, middle and an end. These are stories about climate, particular stories, from a particular time: which places are ideal for “civilisation”, which are merely suited to it and which locales are beyond the climatic pale. This was a time European prejudices about Indigenous people combined with an

understanding that the atmosphere could only be understood with instruments, numbers and tables, a confluence which precluded the invaders from learning about climate from those who had long experienced it. It was a time when data, lines and graphs told the stories of climate. The story of the climographs is that northern Australia is climatically unsuited to European society – beginning, middle and end.

The lines were innovations when they appeared. Their creator, Thomas Griffith Taylor, (1916) was Australia's most distinguished geographer, an influential public intellectual and one of this continent's more prominent academic exports.<sup>1</sup> His creation circulated way beyond his own publications and the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology's Bulletins. In 1920 Griffith Taylor's lines attracted comment in no less a journal than the American Meteorological Society's *Monthly Weather Review*.

Are these lines governing or governed? For many decades they shaped policy. They informed decisions about who would live where in Australia: what development could take place in northern Australia; who could undertake it. These lines set limits on the possible. Or, were they just reflecting climatic impediments? If climate is reduced to averages of temperature and humidity, that might be the case. But as climatologist H. H. Lamb (1982, p.8.) has argued, climate is not just enumerated means; but also extremes and patterns across time (decades usually). So these lines govern a particular understanding of climate, which governs what can and can't be done in Northern Australia. However, these lines are governed by a particular modern European way of grasping climate. They are applied to a peculiar way of defining territory and slicing up spaces of governance.

These lines are labelled 'tentative' but their presentation is resolutely empirical. X-axes, y-axes, grid lines, numbers, the terms on the 'discomfort scale' are subjective, but their pairing with wet bulb temperatures and relative humidity readings gives an impression of solidity. We can picture the instruments, the diligent observations, meticulous, ordered recording of numbers in rows and columns, and finally, the statistical calculations. But the stories these lines tell unmask the British colonial imaginary. London and Melbourne as 'ideal' climates – only if you don't have to live there! Ideal for whom and for doing what anyway? Darwin 'usually uncomfortable'; speak for yourself, I love the build-up! This is my fifth and I've never had to resort to air conditioning, either at home or at work. It's the dry trade winds that play merry hell with my sinuses. Yet, this subjectivity dressed as objectivity tells us so much about their methods and thinking. A little critical questioning and the thought-prints become visible and this hall of mirrors becomes navigable.

So, a new conversation starts. A conversation well served by remembering what Australian governments and science and law studiously forgot for so long - that there were people here for millennia before invasion and colonisation. Amnesia is integral to the colonial project. With each colony a unique constellation of things is forgotten or ignored. When Europe landed at the various points along this continent's jagged coastline, it came with a vast, even ingenious store of knowledge about the world. Knowledge that was hard won, knowledge resulting from painstaking endeavours. But it was knowledge contaminated by potent prejudices. Prejudices that governed what constituted knowledge. Prejudices that made them conclude that they could learn nothing about weather and climate from those who had been here for so long before them. Prejudices that assured them that the ideas they brought were all they needed to think with in their quest to quell these 'new lands'.

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1. For a comprehensive study of Griffith Taylor's life and work see Carolyn Strange and Alison Bashford (2008), Griffith Taylor: Visionary, Environmentalist, Explorer, Canberra: National Library of Australia.

Aboriginal people have lived in north Australia for at least 50,000 years. In the dozen or so millennia since the end of the last Ice Age, the region's climates have bequeathed long annual periods of heat and drought broken by distinct periods of storm borne rains and monsoonal downpours, sometimes punctuated by deluges brought by tropical cyclones. Surviving in this environment requires skill. Surviving for so long can only result from intimate knowledge of the vicissitudes of land, sea and sky. But European invaders did not, based on surviving accounts, fully avail themselves of this treasure trove. There are many accounts of newcomers asking Indigenous people about landscapes and watercourses, where recent historiography now records many examples of Aboriginal people helping or even leading explorers; we have no evidence of similar exchanges about weather or climate. This might in part result from the abstract nature of climate and seasons. That Europeans had developed elaborate, detailed and seemingly verified models of global climate by then is also important, however, that two vital elements to this (his)story are the prejudices the invaders brought about Indigenous people and a concomitant belief that we can only grapple with climate with instruments, data, tables and maps. Elaborate understandings of climate and seasons that linked weather to complex ecological changes have had, till recently, a penumbral existence. Until anthropologists started to ask Aboriginal people about their understandings of weather and climate, the rest of us were foolish enough to think that they didn't have any. Until then, we didn't realise there were other ways of knowing this place. Before that time, we had no idea of how much climate in the Northern Territory varied from place to place – think of a mosaic rather than lines and bands.

This happened the world over. North Australia is particularly fortunate that Indigenous understandings of climate have survived the material, governmental and epistemological onslaughts of colonialism. We can get a sense of what was ignored, what was forgotten and what was excluded – delineated as out of bounds – in the project to subdue and govern northern Australia. In the language of Michel Foucault's lecture of 8th February 1978 (2007), this project ignored the multiplicity and governed the territory. Government turned its mind to how Europeans could control and exploit the territory of Australia including its tropics. But governing the multitudes entailed excluding those defined as anything other than 'white European'. In the case of Aboriginal people, exclusion involved confinement, surveillance, forcible removal, efforts to absorb 'difference' and assimilation. Crucially, they were excluded from the modern governmental and epistemological imaginary of Australia and deemed to have nothing to contribute. Government had its own institutions, with their own methods, practices and ways of knowing. These ways of knowing – empirical and observational, much like Indigenous environmental knowledge – were total. They encapsulated the world and defined what was seen and unseen. Australia's meteorological offices – colonial and federal – and their meticulous, systematic practices exemplify this.

### **Governing Climate: Meteorology**

Australia's colonial weather bureau and their federal successor – the Commonwealth Bureau of Meteorology – have been remarkable institutions. Their networks spread with the telegraph wires and by 1860 covered much of southern Australia. With the coming of the Overland Telegraph Darwin, Pine Creek and Daly Waters were part of the South Australian network by 1875. Vast quantities of data circulated on these networks. Weather as rain volume, temperature, atmospheric pressure, humidity etc, was measured. With so little atmospheric physics understood before the 1920s (and much to be elucidated today), meteorology was a largely statistical branch of modern knowledge. Numbers were paramount. These enumerations were recorded and this rapidly growing sea of data provided the basis for stories about weather and climate. Methods of observation, timing of observation, units of measurement, all were standardised based on accepted principles in Britain. Weathermen saw themselves as scientists. Their work, though, was the essence of statecraft: defining territory by numbers in order to control it.

A science to be sure, Meteorology was also an indispensable political technology. Andrew Lackoff and Stephen J Collier (2010) define a political technology, from Foucault, as ‘a systematic relation of knowledge and intervention applied to a problem of collective life’ (p.244). The problem of collective life here is that of exploiting and developing tropical Australia in all of its otherness to the temperate neo Europe of Australia’s south. Until the mid-twentieth century this problem was defined in racial terms and climographs were a considered attempt at answer. From the earliest colonial days industrialising the north was a problem approached with the political technology of science, which itself used the ultimate political technologies – statistics and numbers.

I doubt that Australia’s early scientific practitioners saw themselves as political technologists. They were members of disciplinary professions that had their methods, their theories and ways of seeing. They worked in institutions that had a raft of standardised procedures for measuring, recording and analysing weather. Through the acts of preserving this data and subjecting it to statistical calculation they created modern climate. Using tables of numbers, charts, graphs and maps they communicated their findings to other scientists and the broader literate world. Numbers and lines seemed to guarantee objectivity. They vouchsafed truth and reality. Moreover, this method was to those who practiced it self- correcting and critical. Data could be checked, calculations re-examined, errors corrected. The extraordinary development and refinement of human understanding of the natural world through the processes of modern science has been profound. So much so that it has lured many into thinking that it was a totality probing the totality of material existence. That it worked so well kept its practitioners and its faithful in the dark over its critical weakness. Enacted as integral to governing, this was a way of seeing blind to other ways of apprehending nature and the world.

Philosophical criticism exposed these weaknesses again and again throughout the second half of the twentieth century. On the other side of this from Griffith Taylor’s 1920s climographs we must be careful not to sneer. I certainly must be. I first learned about them in the 1990s. Something of a product of my times, I recognised the incoherence of its focus on race. Something of a product of modernity though, I found the idea of quantifying climatic discomfort more than a little seductive. Until I experienced the complexities – long term – of Darwin’s climate I also did not re-think any aspect of the climate science that is the basis of the climograph. To my detriment, I also knew nothing about Indigenous understandings of weather and climate till about 15 years ago. We must not commit the historian’s cardinal sin of anachronism nor the egregious scholarly violation of failure of imagination. All of the criticism that opened this essay stands. But far more interesting (and challenging) than laughing at mistakes of the past is trying to grasp how they made sense. Griffith Taylor’s climographs had authority because they were products of the scientific method in a scientist governmental culture. Accepted as sound they communicated important knowledge in the language of this culture. It was testable and so subject to checking, verification and, if need be, correction. In the minds of those who read and used it, these graphs represented reality. They explained some things and seemed to answer important questions. We must recall that they were genuinely innovative. People graphed average temperatures all of the time, but till then did not relate these to comfort and periods of comfort/discomfort across the calendar year. Representing different places on the same chart to enable ready comparisons was also new. Griffith Taylor had found a new way of applying average temperatures. Attempting to render subjectivity objective through numbers has been part of modern scientific culture. Even to those who challenged Taylor’s claims this method and process meant something. Griffith Taylor’s climographs answered crucial questions and he made sense through their methods of creation, modes of communication and the world view that they were both a part of and that they reinforced. This was how modern technocrats saw the world and sought to control it.



### Blind Spots Past and Present

A potent challenge looms for us now. We've seen the blind spots of the past. We've come to see how something strange can make sense in its time and place. Do we, though, have the imagination to see any of the blind spots in how we seek to understand our world? Can we see the limits to our ways of knowing? Can we identify how contemporary objects of governance and political technologies limit our apprehension of weather and climate? To me, these questions are among the most exciting for any practicing historian to engage with.

Even ideas that work can obscure or distort. Mean values of quantified weather phenomena are at the kernel of modern understandings of climate. Through calculation of these means weather in numbers becomes climate. This has been the case for well over a century. We cannot attribute this endurance to mere convention. This technology of averages answers so many important questions and illuminates so much that humans have sought to know. It is indispensable in making informed decisions. It is how we are able to identify global warming at work - arguably the most compelling issue of our time - and plan for some of its expected ravages. But this approach to climate, and indeed governance relating to climate, is itself blind to a vital aspect of climate: the timing and length of seasons, crucial to activities such as agriculture. Global warming can, does and will manifest in many aspects of local climate. Seasons might get warmer or wetter or drier, some comparative to which a number can be assigned and statistics calculated. But they might also come later, or earlier, become longer, shorter. In climates as variable as some across Australia some seasons might only come three times a decade instead of annually. Temporal patterns across decades might change. Mean values, defined by the calendar month, do not have the scope to see such dynamics on time scales beyond that of the year. They imply that temporal patterns repeat each year, which might be a good enough fit for Europe but misses a key aspect of climate across Australia. For north Australia, this means that the regime of rainfall appears far too ordered and that the enormous variability in the timing of rains is rendered invisible. We can only know this variability by looking historically at time sequences of rain and its absence, and the diligence of meteorologists in taking and preserving observations that will provide us with this knowledge. With this we will be able to identify other vital aspects of local climate change. To better understand what is happening we need to embrace other ways of knowing - the treasure of Indigenous knowledge to be sure, but also other ways of knowing, using traditional modern scientific data of meteorologists and climatologists. To do this we must imagine and try to see some of the blind spots of knowing in our time and place. Governing for climate change means distinguishing between the global and the local. Governing for climate change also means understanding that, the tools for understanding the global, physical problem of a heating atmosphere are only part of what we need to think with if we are to anticipate what will happen across the mosaic of climates of northern Australia. I've identified one contemporary blind spot. But this is just the start of a conversation that needs to identify others and imagine perspectives that might negate them.



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## Emotional Athletes, Brainy Workers and other Hot New Developments: Multiple (re)problematizations of Heat Stress as an object of governance in northern Australia

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This paper presents an effort to think about ‘heat stress’ as multiple objects of governance. In seeking to analyse this ‘object’ we draw on Foucault’s account of ‘problematization’ (1985, 2009). Accordingly, heat stress is not understood as a mere description of an aspect of reality, but instead emerges as an object of knowledge from particular practices in particular times and places which draw together certain elements (Laclau & Mouffe, 2001; Oppermann, 2013) such as concepts, measures and rules:

*Problematization doesn't mean the representation of a pre-existent object, nor the creation through discourse of an object that doesn't exist. It denotes the set of discursive or non-discursive practices that makes something enter the play of the true and false and constitutes it as an object for thought. (Foucault, as cited in Flynn, 2005, pp.26-7).*

Problematized in a particular way, the object becomes ‘governable’. In analysing problematizations as producing a particular objects of governance, we consider four analytical questions: what is made visible, how is it known, how is it intervened in, and what subject(ivities) are produced (Dean, 2010)? That is, why are certain elements considered to be significant and problematic, how are these things understood and communicated, and what techniques and practices seek to manage these things to produce an idealised outcome, population or subjectivity? Because problematizations thus produce the social world as well as ‘represent’ it, problematizations are inherently political.

To trace the problematization heat stress as an object of knowledge and governance, we present extracts from a conversation between the authors,<sup>1</sup> which explored the investigations and

1. This text arises as collaboration between three authors – Matt, Elspeth and Michaela. Elspeth and Michaela are both social science researchers working at Charles Darwin University. Matt is an exercise scientist who works for the Northern Territory Government and runs a consultancy addressing heat stress in industry workplaces and emergency response teams.

interventions of Dr Matt Brearley, an exercise scientist addressing heat stress. Re-telling some of Matt's experiences in trying to 'understand' heat stress brings into focus the contingency through which problematizations emerge. These stories also highlight how objects of governance are not necessarily singular, but can change over time and can be multiple (Mol, 2002). We notice in our conversation the ruptures of a singular heat stress that prompt its emergence as multiple objects, and the work that Matt finds himself doing to (re) problematize heat stress as a local object of knowledge and governance in different places and times.

Having journeyed through these multiple objects produced by different problematizations of 'heat stress', we then raise questions about how these objects of governance may come to relate as they participate in an emerging northern Australian governmentality centred on labour-intensive development.

### **Athletic bodies: life beyond the footy field**

Matt begins the story of his engagement with 'heat stress' by telling of his arrival in Darwin, a city in the monsoon tropics of northern Australia. Arriving during the Dry season, the climate felt quite benign. So it was not something he took particular account of as an exercise scientist training young Australian Football League players. Part of their training regime was to 'load' the athletes' bodies, pushing them to the limits of what they could achieve in strength, speed and endurance, then allowing them to recover and adapt. This established training methodology works by periodically overloading and then unloading athlete's bodies to increase their fitness and capacity. And it worked, until suddenly, for no apparent reason, things started to go sideways:

*We'd want to work on aerobic fitness... but sometimes [the players] would rock up and you would realise early in the session that there's nothing 'there.' You end up going nowhere because you can't get a stimulus into these guys.*

The shift was hard to explain. It seemed that the athletes were suddenly lazy, not trying hard enough or deliberately disobeying the instructions they had been given. The overloading methodology appeared to be occurring in reverse: it was clear the athletes felt their bodies would not carry them as far as they had the day before and limits which had previously been surpassed were suddenly unreachable.

Matt's physiological monitoring of heat stress levels also provided bemusing results. Although the weather had become a bit hotter as the Dry season shifted to the Wet season, the athletes' core body temperatures did not seem to change significantly. They were not working hard enough on field to explain their apparent exhaustion. Why then, were they suddenly refusing to push themselves?

It was not the measurement of the athletes on the field that provided the key to unlocking the mystery:

*I think it was through my own experiences that I started to think about it... I'd ride to work and ride home, about three hundred to four hundred kilometres a week, so it would be pretty hot and I'd be tired. I'd get home and have a [cold] shower and still be sweating, and I would have another shower and still be sweating. I found myself being really grumpy. The penny only really dropped when one day I just 'went off' at my children. I am quite strict, but I am also a clown and like to have fun. I remember going off and just seeing the look in their eyes, highlighting that my response was not justified.*

The look was one of surprise and shock. Matt was surprised and shocked himself, producing a “‘crisis’ moment” (Foucault, 1985 cited in Bacchi, 2012) that prompted him to broaden his account of heat stress to the emotional as well as the physical. The same incident had signaled that heat stress could be known in another way to that of core body temperature on the field: it could not only be experienced but could also be expressed in an emotive fashion. Now that emotion was ‘visible’ as an element of heat stress, new technologies of intervention in this new object became necessary to produce both a calm exercise scientist and well performing athletes:

*We started taking a more global perspective... we were ramping up the work that our psychologist did with athletes, taking it into schooling. Talking to teachers about how [the kids] are going at school, talking to parents, and then you get a better feel for [what] these kids [had to deal with].*

The young athletes were dealing with training as well as educational and social demands. In the Dry season they seemed better rested and had the energy to spend weekends enjoying themselves. They seemed able to deal with parents, boyfriends and girlfriends. Even with the loading of training, the cooler, dryer weather left them with enough energy in reserve to cope with daily life. When the Wet season started, social lives and relationships began to strain. It seemed that the young athletes’ reserves of mental and emotional energy were tapped out, and something had to give. This had an impact on what training could be done, and whether loading in training might have negative effects on daily life, achieving a negative motivational impact rather than a positive one.

Matt’s contingent personal experience of disruption and lived experience of heat stress produced a shift how he understood and sought to intervene in or manage heat stress. This in turn would produce heat stress as a different kind of object through his own practices as a coach and a researcher. Heat stress came to be governed as a much larger object: it now included the educational, social and emotional lives of athletes on and off the field as well as their physical exertion. In becoming alert to, and intervening in, the social lives of the athletes, sport psychologists and families alike expanded not only the way heat stress was understood, but the spaces and means through which it was managed. This meant the lived experience of ‘heat stress’ for the athletes also changed; this object of governance created a particular ‘subject’ not as the athlete-on-the-field but as an athlete-family-member-school-student, to be governed through training regimes that know the athlete’s broader social demands, and bring them into the realm of calculation in the management of heat stress.

These ‘new’ technologies of heat stress management, attuned to this new ‘problem,’ produced a less-heat-stressed athlete by making sense of the ‘old’ elements of core body temperature through the new elements it made visible. This new heat stress object also produced a more ‘effective’ athlete, in part because the subject of the athlete itself was now extended to include emotional wellbeing and capacity as a result of the re-problematization of heat stress.

### **Working heat stress in the workplace**

Our conversation moves to a different situation, where the practices that (re)produce heat stress as a particular object are very different. Matt tells us about working on heat stress in labour-intensive worksites where he learns to operate very differently. Finding staff unreceptive to abstract scientific explanations of heat stress, and with an intervention from a psychologist being an almost laughable proposition, Matt begins using different practices to constitute knowledge of heat stress. He tries to spend time ‘on the floor,’ observing practices, responses

and talking to the employees. Many of the workers have been doing this job for the last thirty years, and they are not interested in someone new coming in and telling them that there's a problem, or that they ought to drink more water, take more breaks or use novel cooling methods to lower core body temperatures. Sometimes it's a matter of pride not to show any weakness in front of their mates, so they don't admit to feeling hot, tired, or nauseous.

Because heat stress is known differently in such locales, it needs to be managed differently as a result. The hierarchical social structures which had enabled interventions in sporting teams are not in play here: Matt's position as a coach and the enrolment of parents or psychologists in the technologies of intervention. So Matt finds himself using a classic liberal strategy of responsibilisation, appealing to extant subjectivities to enroll these in the task of self-government:

*When I go into most worksites, there's got to be a few expletives in [my first few sentences] to shock the crews so they listen to the blunt messages being delivered. And then I talk about experiences with other groups, other work sites, other hard-hat wearers, high-viz wearers etcetera. I think by speaking in those terms the work crews can relate to the message. Not all of it necessarily, but they can relate to [for example] being a grumpy bastard or making mistakes at work.*

Matt's tactic here was to use language, examples and narratives that workers might associate with as a way to open up consideration of their own experiences of heat stress.

This approach to knowledge production does not mean scientific measurements are dropped entirely. One of the tools Matt takes with him into workplaces is a pill-sized gastrointestinal thermometer. This is swallowed, and measures and transmits the subject's core body temperature in real time. This provides hard numbers for just how hot individuals are as they work and how physiologically dangerous their core temperatures might be. Listening to this account, and acting on our own assumptions about the elevated place of quantified knowledge for an exercise scientist, Elspeth and Michaela asked Matt how people respond to hearing their 'numbers.' But he disrupts this epistemological stereotype, making clear that he is also aware of the interpretative 'power of numbers:'

*So [the participants will ask me] 'How are my numbers.' I'll say, 'Numbers are numbers mate, they're good.' I'll try and give them less information because I need to observe them, I don't want them to alter their behaviour because I say, 'You're hot.' No, I want them to listen to their brain... So they're not looking at a number and then responding, but their brain will tell them everything they need to do, they just have to listen to it. I just need to know what signals the brain's getting and that's what these numbers tell me. I don't know perfectly, for instance you might be hot at 39 degrees, I might be hot at 38.5 degrees but it gives me a really good idea to say, 'This guy -- his brain is being inundated with the message 'I'm hot.'*

Heat stress is still visible here as a physiological temperature, but it is being known here in two different ways: through the individual's interpretation of bodily sensations and through Matt's monitoring equipment.

With physiological limits for heat stress still part of workplace legislation and part of Matt's own problematization, it's important to know if people are pushing themselves beyond limits considered to be safe. For these independent adults, who might be monitored on the occasion Matt conducts his study, but who probably won't be monitored on any other day of their

working lives, their 'brains' become the instrument of knowledge for governance. By making 'visible' physical sensations such as thirst, headaches and nausea as elements of heat stress, these act as triggers for interventions through taught practices of hydration, rest and cooling.

*I want them to listen to their brain... I guess my work is to teach them a few strategies so they can do more work and not approach any disastrous limit, keeping them in the safe range so they're not robots in the heat.*

However, such triggers enable interventions only when they are allowed to be voiced. In this particular site, it was the presence of workplace cultures as actively shaping the object of heat stress that produced a crisis of governance for Matt, and triggered a re-problematization of heat stress as also produced by cultural norms, requiring tactics and technologies of intervention sensitive to expletives and stories of 'others like you'. Perhaps most significantly, Matt became aware of his own role in co-producing heat stress as an object of governance through actively re-problematizing its appearance, means of knowing, or methods of intervention. The object of heat stress became re-definable through articulating an indirect route from expletives to an inherent part of labour-intensive work via the re-problematization of heat stress as an object of cultural and identity governance.

### **The 'hot' topic of Northern Australian Development**

It is normal for Matt to travel to various worksites across the Northern Territory, and to speak with the employees as he looks for ways that heat stress might be better managed. However, he also notices that in a lot of workplaces people are profoundly hot and miserable, yet 'heat stress' does not exist as an object of knowledge or governance. In a region known for its tough conditions, there are surprisingly few policies guiding the management of heat stress in workplaces. The policies that do exist often borrow southern Australian practices and benchmarks, which are ill suited to the monsoon tropics of northern Australia. In many instances managers turn away Matt's offer of assistance whilst investigating major incidents because they cannot entertain the notion that there is a connection between wide-spread heat stress, fatigue, reduced emotional and decision-making capacity, and reduced safety and productivity - saying 'no, we've never had an issue with heat stress'.

The elements that Matt and other researchers have collected together as multiple objects of 'heat stress' might be the 'cause' of particular and tangible outcomes such as mistakes at work, 'going off' at kids, or reduced productivity or performance. In our conversation, we wonder: if heat stress presents such a compelling physical and emotional experience in our own bodies as researchers resident in the region, among fit young athletes, and through the daily experiences of workers, how is it still so invisible or absent as an object of governance in wider society? We explore whether there may be other objects or governmentalities already in place that prevent these elements of heat stress being made visible as an 'object,' with the result that heat stress is managed implicitly as a result of something else being governed overtly.

Matt observes that the high wages of workers on major projects in northern Australia distorts the willingness to intervene in or govern heat stress. Intentionally or unintentionally, high rates of pay, which overtly compensate for the 'remote' location and ensure schedules are completed on time, also have the effect of managing thermal discomfort:

*If the pay is right then financial motivation overcomes people's fear of heat and aversion to discomfort and they get into it... When you win the tender, you do so knowing that for every week delay, you will pay an amount [a penalty] to offset*



*that. Therefore to get it done quickly they'll pay crews extra, resulting in crews relocating temporarily or permanently to toil through two years of hell in the Northern Territory... [And the crews do it] to set up a better life for themselves. That's the game they're playing at the moment. The health outcomes... I have heard the reports of various medical and safety teams, but I don't precisely know the percentage of people presenting [for medical care]... but the reports are far more than I deem acceptable.*

This governance of worker productivity indirectly governs heat stress, in the sense of managing its impact on productivity. However, because the physiological symptoms of heat stress are not rendered visible or explicit, let alone problematized in terms of effects on health and wellbeing, they are not being managed explicitly. This object of governance – workplace productivity conceived without heat stress – may be producing heat stress related health risks as well as longer-term declines in productivity.

The usual ethical question posed of governmentality – that it constitutes the subject – is inverted here, by asking: what are the ethical implications of not naming heat stress as an object of governance? The will to know and govern heat stress does indeed create new characteristics of the object, and open up and produce new facets of the 'subject' for technologies of governance. In Matt's stories, we saw this through the work of the exercise scientist, work that could easily be enrolled in a wider governmentality associated with productivity and development through labour-intensive industries.

Not knowing heat stress or the subject in this way might mean freedom from particular technologies of governance and a particular subjectivity. However, it also means that other governmentalities create their own objects of knowledge and governance, which may have less sensitivity to (as well as less control of) the physical and emotional experiences or our bodies as thirst, fatigue, nausea, and indeed, grumpiness. If heat stress is the name given to a materiality which, however differently it may occur, nevertheless names a physical and emotional sensation, what does it mean for the subject when heat stress is unnamed and unattended to? Matt provides the example of one worksite where the object of productivity did not include heat stress as a named or 'visible' element:

*...they reckoned they had about 66% more rework at this worksite compared to all their other sites in the north. Rework is where crews have erred and the job needs to be deconstructed and started again. Because everyone was working long hours they were very tired, just flogging dead horses, and everyone's so tired but the boss thought, well we're behind, so we need to continue putting in the extra hours to complete the job.*

For Matt, viewing the same elements of 'fatigue' and 'mistakes' through the object of heat stress created an alternative problematization of productivity, which prompted a different response to that of 'flogging dead horses':

*They were well behind schedule, you're not going to make up the lost time, so [instead] you've just got to realise [that] to limit our losses, we're going to give the guys more rest and improve productivity and safety.*

Without heat stress existing as a clear object within the workplace, it is difficult for the 'boss' to account for it. Rather than allowing recovery time, the boss pushed the workers harder, making them more tired, and, it would seem, more likely to make mistakes. It seems that here

there was no realisation as to why such unusually high levels of mistakes were being made and certainly no connection made to heat stress. It also seems that heat stress has exceeded – and undermined – the extant governmentality on its own terms, in this case, of profit and deadline driven productivity.

Whether or not heat stress is explicitly problematized within workplaces, the elements that are drawn together as ‘symptoms’ of heat stress, are often already involved in the everyday practices of these workplaces, although they may initially emerge as objects of governance as ‘productivity’ or ‘worker health’. In this way, whether heat stress becomes an explicit object of governance or not, the emergent materiality that is able to be productively discerned or configured as heat stress may also be discerned as participating in the project of northern Australian development. The future configuration of heat stress, objects of governance and the overarching governmentality of northern development, remains an open and inherently political question.

Currently, heat stress in northern Australian workplaces has not been produced as a singular object of governance that configures subjects and practices to improve productivity or safety. However, as the number and scale of major projects in northern Australia increase, they will require large amounts of labour and work delivered continuously. Pushed to meet deadlines, some of the companies involved are beginning to have what Matt calls ‘sentinel moments’:

*I think we need a moment, a period of time where [a major project] is delayed, causing a huge financial ramification. It's delayed because of work force shortage... because we cannot get people to do these jobs because people begin to say that it is just too hot to work to the required schedule...*

Such a moment might bring together fragmentary elements of ‘heat stress’ into an identifiable object, visible at a larger scale. Rather than occurring for one subject here and there, governed incidentally or indirectly, heat stress would be re-problematized as an explicit object to be managed or regulated because of its implications for a governmentality of economic development that presumes subjects are healthy, efficient and productive.

### **Multiple heat stresses as objects of governance**

We have noted in these stories how the specificities of the people and places in which heat stress emerges as an object means that it is a multiple object which often exceeds singular attempts to define it. We have presented some moments of crisis or rupture in which heat stress comes to be re-problematized. Through these transitions, the differing objects that emerge might share elements of materiality that are similar, but may include others that are entirely different. These are made (in)visible through the particular ways of knowing and technologies of intervention that in turn (re)produce certain subjectivities. At stake in these multiple imaginings and management strategies is not just the ‘object’ of heat stress itself, but the experience of the subject and indeed the nature of the subject and of the social. Yet particular problematizations and the objects they produce are also generative of, and limited by, the emergent array of other objects, knowledges and strategies, which produce wider rationales of governance or governmentalities.

While highlighting that elements may be included or excluded, and the production of subjectivities and social lives, we are not presenting an argument here for a particular problematization of heat stress as ‘better’ or ‘worse’. Indeed, the self-fulfilling paradox of all attempts at governance is that any ‘failures’ encourage the re-imagining of the object and the continual extension of governance technologies. In Matt’s experience as a practitioner,

encountering ‘failures’ and re-problematizing heat stress as a result, we have shown just such an extension, which only reveals new planes of encounter, which further extend and embed the object (even as it changes, or indeed because it changes) in a web of relations of knowledge and attendant techniques and technologies of power or intervention. As such, the development of heat stress as a more comprehensive object of governance, and particularly one that interconnects with a dominant governmentality based on encouraging productive labour intensive industry, might enable an incredibly insidious productive power over life, or provide a surprisingly emancipatory platform for critiques of physical and social suffering.

Bringing these multiple objects and the practices that (re)produce them into view promotes the possibility of locally situated interventions into practices of governance and emerging governmentalities. Recognising this we hope that this account may have done justice to our own sense of disconcertment and the feeling of ethical tension we experience in wanting to offer an analysis of heat stress which may contribute to an emancipatory reduction of ‘pain,’ ‘being grumpy’ or needing medical attention in the workplace, without necessarily also becoming agents of the extension of biopolitical governmentality in the process.

Beyond the development of this expanded object of heat stress, it is perhaps the moments of rupture or crisis themselves that have the most emancipatory potential. In all of these stories, locally embodied experience of heat stress has exceeded any particular object of governance or wider governmentality. Yet by following the exercise scientist employed to make athletes or workers more productive, we have not been attendant to the potential for dissent, for exit or re-articulation by the other subjects on stage. It is their bodies, their non-compliant language and behaviour which have challenged Matt to develop particularly local interventions. In the subject’s (re)production of self-monitoring such as Matt’s call to ‘listen to your brain’, opportunities are made for experiential encounters in which a person’s bodily experiences remain a personal and particular part of what heat stress is, and thus operate as a point of critique and departure from any given governmentality.

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## Making Money: Financial Literacy as an Object of Governance

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**Keywords:** Objects of governance, Aboriginal, financial literacy, Yolŋu

### The objects of my research

I had been told a couple of times that I had to clear out from the university server, a great mass of computer files from previous research projects – gigabytes of notes, videos, spreadsheets, ethics applications, reports, notes and reflections – associated with different projects over the years, all rather badly organised. Working in a relatively new, relatively remote Australian university, I enjoy being relatively unencumbered by academic traditions, but am suddenly constrained by the limits of our technology and my ability to use it. I must put all the files on a 'USB Pen Drive' and take them to 'Records and Archives' for storage. Then I must wipe the V: drive. If I want any archived file, I can walk down to 'Records & Archives' with a memory stick and request a copy.

It is a strange feeling looking through all those files. They contain traces of so much interesting work undertaken since the computer server was introduced to store the objects of our work. There was a tinge of pride in all the complex collaborative work I had undertaken with Yolŋu Aboriginal people, and with colleagues and government workers, but that pride was spoilt by the feeling that so much of the material has remained unexamined, and never retold or reworked, and worse, that so many of the papers and reports – mostly to governments but also to industry and NGOs – really didn't lead to much change on the ground. We seem to have been given more and more work over the past twenty years, with those who fund the research paying less and less attention to what we produce.

In my cleaning work, I spotted a folder called 'Financial Literacy Evaluation 2008'. Our cross-cultural consultancy group, which we called the Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultancy Initiative, had been asked to evaluate a program of Financial Literacy training for a small credit union based in the Northern Territory (which I'll call 'Small Bank'), dedicated to serving the financial needs of remote Aboriginal communities. The evaluation was being funded by a major national financial institution (which I'll call 'Big Bank') as part of its commitment to 'reconciliation'<sup>1</sup>. I began to piece back together in my mind why and how we had been invited to undertake this consultancy as I, pretty much randomly, opened up the most interesting-sounding files in what turned out to be a large trove of documents.

There were a few objects that set me thinking. One was the folder of power point presentations developed for Indigenous Financial Literacy, by various government and nongovernment organisations with names like 'MoneyMinded' and 'MoneyBusiness', and adapted for local delivery. The PowerPoints were very attractive, with cartoons of men saving for cars, and

1. <http://www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/reconciliation>

women for washing machines. Bespoke budgeting slides invited participants to estimate how much money they spent per week on board, cigarettes, fares, 'grog', takeaways, CDs, 'ganja', clothes and the chemist, followed by an example of 'Tony's new weekly budget' after deciding to go on a 'SMART' (that is Specific, Measureable, Achievable, Realistic, and Timed) budget by reducing selected weekly estimates. I remember having marveled at their slick graphics back in 2008, looking forward to finding out what the Yolŋu clients had made of them as we undertook the program evaluation.

Another folder contained our final report to the Big Bank which detailed the process, and which can be found with a couple of short videos, on the Yolŋu Aboriginal Consultants Initiative website<sup>2</sup>. These brought to surface memories of wonder, delight and frustration at the complex ways the project unfolded and then, in time, disappeared.

After our Objects of Governance workshop, I began trying to think of Financial Literacy as an object of governance. In Foucault's (2009) terms, both banks could be seen as exercising pastoral-care over Aboriginal clients, a form of care which was taken on as a duty of beneficence while at the same time increasing Big Bank's standing as a good corporate citizen and Small Bank's reach and profits.

What I want to explore in this paper is the ways in which our Yolŋu co-researchers handed the process of evaluation and reporting back to the banks, and how their participation and method revealed to me a keen Yolŋu insight into the governmentality that produced the bank and its practices and clients, and what must be done to develop agreed ways forward for a better practice.

### Financial Literacy as an Object of Governance

As I began my search for an analytic thread, I developed a sense that there are in fact two different monies running through this story. One money was the Aboriginal money imagined by the banks. The financial literacy training materials made quite a deal of the fact that money was an alien thing in Aboriginal society (with graphics of traditional exchange practices contrasted with the arrival of money and its institutions). But to the Yolŋu, money is a very significant participant in the everyday practices of community life. The only thing alien about it is the attitudes and practices of the banks. Where did the banks imagine 'Aboriginal money' comes from and what assumptions and practices did it bring with it? I searched for some background in the literature, and found that Wikipedia like many other sources, treated Financial Literacy as already existing, fully formed, a need for people who are 'financially excluded' and a responsibility for governments and financial institutions to address. Both Big Bank and Small Bank were sufficiently committed to Financial Literacy in remote communities that they invested in an evaluation of their community training program. They wanted value for money. We were asked to evaluate the program, not to research Financial Literacy, but as so often happens, as soon as the Yolŋu consultants became involved, they immediately addressed the whole concept and practice of Financial Literacy and its training regime as an object of governance being visited upon their world. Only after the workshop with Helen Verran (another author in this issue), and some time alone with Foucault (2009), could I see it that way.

Financial Literacy, I discovered with some further research, had come out of the notion of 'Financial Exclusion', one of the 'profound economic and social consequences' (Leyshon & Thrift, 1995, p.312) of financial crises. So here was my first clue. The financial literacy project came from a commitment on the part of Big Bank, one of Australia's major financial institutions, 'to contribute to increased financial and social well-being for Aboriginal and Torres

2. [http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/yaci/projects\\_financial\\_literacy.html](http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/yaci/projects_financial_literacy.html)



Strait Islander peoples ... (to) reflect our corporate responsibility priorities and our approach to respecting human rights' (ANZ Indigenous Action Plan, 2011/2014).

Implicit in the Big Bank Indigenous Action Plan (in its various versions) is the double goal of a) increasing 'financial inclusion' of Indigenous people through b) increasing the uptake by Indigenous people of their financial 'products'. The first goal of the small bank's Financial Literacy project is 'to increase the capacity of ... members to more fully participate in the developing economic base of their communities' (ANZ-Traditional Credit Union, 2008, p.37).

I began to see Financial Literacy not as a human capacity but more as a program. That is the Big Bank is funding the Small Bank to educate the remote Aboriginal population in 'the knowledge and skills required for effective money management'. But at the same time, to engage them with their 'financial products'. So it is in fact a double project, bundled up tightly and polished to hide its fault lines (if not its duplicity), and presented and worked with as self-evident, with no history, and no agenda.

Financial Literacy in its manifestation as a community education program constitutes the banking services and its customers as particular sorts of subjects and objects. One perspective has it emerging as a solution to a crisis, but in another it seems to be creating a crisis, or spreading the domain of a crisis to include remote Aboriginal citizens. As in Foucault's (2009) analysis of the special pastoral nature of western governmentality, the banks' power is over a flock, is held to be beneficent, is taken on as a duty, and creates from the flock, individual customers and account holders. As part of their commitment to 'reconciliation', the shepherd is sacrificing his profits for the flock, and the flock for the individual while at the same time expanding the domain of its governmentality.

### **The story of the consultancy**

Pondering our objects, I thought back about how we had been invited to undertake the evaluation. We had been told that another university had agreed to do the work, and after much delay, had pulled out. The Big Bank had contacted our university (the only one in the Northern Territory where the program was undertaken), our Office of Research had contacted the director of one of the research institutes, and she had handballed it to us. The Director, a colleague, was so far removed from both us and the two banks that it didn't worry her that we had no experience in program evaluation. We were keen mostly because of our commitment to sustainable livelihoods and cultures 'on country', and our desire to involve Aboriginal traditional knowledge authorities in academic research work. They needed their evaluation done (the final dot point in the Big-Bank-Small Bank partnering agreement to do with the Financial Literacy program was 'to support an independent evaluation of the program') and we needed the work and were experienced in on-the-ground cross-cultural consultancy work. John (a non-Aboriginal colleague) and I went along to the Small Bank offices to negotiate the project. We had quite different discussions with the Small Bank General Manager, their Training and Development Manager, the Small Bank/Big Bank Financial Literacy Project Manager, and the Big Bank Head of Group Community Relations. They all wanted something slightly different, and we were already unconvinced, having read the background material, that the solution to Yolŋu financial problems would be a package of financial literacy training. (We had both lived for twenty years on remote Yolŋu communities.)

Sifting through the files on the university server, I find notes on some slightly tense negotiations with the senior management at Small Bank (ANZ-Traditional Credit Union, 2008), getting them to agree to allow us to report on two main focuses:

1. ... what had happened during the 18-month trial period of the Project. ... the effectiveness of the Project, experiences and perspectives of participants, and their recommendations for improvement

2. ... broader financial literacy issues and general Small Bank services.... the banking experience in communities and information regarding the future development of Small Bank services, products and communication materials

It didn't take long to detect some ambivalence on the part of the Aboriginal clients towards the Financial Literacy Program. That ambivalence was shared by the hapless young Aboriginal Financial Literacy educator who had been employed to deliver the program and met an unenthusiastic reception. Here is a typical entry from his field notes:

*I have helped several helping them through and explaining each question and the meaning of things. But in all have explained to them that my role to help and assist them to better manage their monies, not to help them get into debt or claim payments that could get them in trouble. Most I referred to the institution or company to whom they have been dealing with, and informed them of the down sides that lie ahead. In this I have received a lot of flak for and have been asked what are you here for? Your (sic) not here to help us. These people mostly women in the community haven't spoken or even looked at me since....*

He had left the job after only a few months.

When asked by our evaluation team what they felt about the Financial Literacy Program materials (the flip charts posters, etc.), most of the community members had no recollection of ever seeing them. But they were keen to give their feedback on the services they received, and to reflect upon the service in terms of their own use of money, resources and kin. And the Yolŋu consultants, senior members of the community, but paid by us as consultants, were very keen to work with the community members to produce a coherent convincing report for the banks which represented the views of the community on the two agreed focus points.

Producing the report was quite a tricky process, where we (non-Aboriginal) academics worked with the Aboriginal consultants to come to agreement on what should be reported and how. They were learning how to produce a particular sort of object, and we were learning how to pitch a particular sort of argument (or a performance), honestly and persuasively.

After the report had been pulled together and delivered, we all invited the Small Bank staff to the University to discuss the findings and some ways forward for the program. We sat around the seminar room table with a new tablecloth, shared cups of tea and cakes and began to discuss what the consultants had heard in the three different communities they had visited. As the stories unfolded, the dislocation between the banks' and the community members' understandings of the fundamental requirements of financial literacy started to crystallise. The stories encoded in the financial literacy materials – to do with saving schemes, interest, time-payment, account options – were in some ways quite different from the stories of the Aboriginal clients.

As the stories of Aboriginal life unfolded, the program of Financial Literacy faded into the background. We heard stories of the complex exigencies of daily life on a remote community under strict government control. The Aboriginal clients did not resist the message of saving. It would be good, said one, for us all to have a 'Christmas Club' as the Financial Literacy trainers suggested, but what with the importunity of the extended family, demand sharing, the high cost of everyday goods, and the lure of the gambling circles<sup>3</sup>, we never have a chance to save up for big purchases. We always wait for the big wins around the card circles to buy outboard motors or second hand Toyotas.

3. For a review of the role of gambling in the life of money in a Yolŋu community, see Christie and Young (2011).

When it comes to money business, it is clear that the remote community members are pretty savvy. It's not that money is a foreign thing to their culture. In fact it's precisely because money is an intrinsic part of their culture that it operates so differently. So what then, might Small Bank do to help their clients make best use of their 'financial products'? What we really need for our financial literacy, the consultants made clear, is immediate, free access to our account balances ('24/7') – a public ATM in each remote community centre would be good – and, for those people stuck in Darwin (the capital city) waiting for the money to fly home, the chance to swipe their cards at the ATM to find out whether their family has sent the money for the fare without paying \$2 per swipe. We also need good phone support for our banking needs. (There is an 1800 number but the records show that in one year there were over 7,000 missed calls.) The Yolngu in communities offered many very practical solutions.

As the Yolngu vision of financial literacy unfolded through the discussion, the discomfort of the credit union people increased. How would they report the complete failure of the Financial Literacy Program to the large funding bank? They started gently to raise a few objections, which bemused the Yolngu consultants. What worried the consultants was not so much (or at all) the fact that the bank didn't take on board the suggestions they were making for how Financial Literacy could be improved, but rather that they weren't accepting these suggestions in the spirit of good faith, and cooperation. The consultants had acted in good faith talking to the people around the card circles, and reporting back to the bankers. They had been paid properly, and so had the people they had interviewed. We at the university were being paid properly. The payments to the Yolngu consultants and co-researchers had ensured that we and they were working together in good faith.

Now it was time for the bankers, too, to listen carefully and in good faith, and respond to the 'findings'. But this was difficult for them. They had two problems: One, that the Yolngu don't understand how money should be used (they had poor levels of financial literacy); and two that we have no evidence of success to report back to the Big Bank. The Yolngu consultants on the other hand, have two parallel problems: The balanda (white people) don't understand how Aboriginal money is used; and there is no evidence of good will to report back to the community. The credit union people went away bemused. They showed no sign of discerning the complex knowledge practices through which the object of Financial Literacy had the effect of producing them as particular sorts of bank managers, trainers and community engagement staff. Maybe they felt that we had done a poor job of evaluating their program. There was never any sign of their taking on the consultants' recommendations.

### **The governmentalities of money**

I had been reading Foucault's (2009) lecture on why and how to study governmentalities when I stumbled upon the Financial Literacy folder as I cleaned out my V: drive. I thought of the work that the consultants were doing to engage the bank officials in good faith. They began, as did Foucault, by moving outside of the 'institutional-centric' approach, looking at the overall technologies of power – their kin responsibilities, the tyrannies of distance, the poverty and the Emergency Intervention<sup>4</sup>, demand sharing and the avoidance of accumulation. They could see the banks and their Financial Literacy program as an *effect* of these complex technologies, which, at the same time, gave the strategies and tactics of Financial Inclusion concrete expression, intensifying and giving order to its governmentality. Then, the consultants found a way of decentering the Financial Literacy project in terms of its intended function, and replacing it with a clear regime of their own strategies and tactics implemented through the semi-formal face-to-face meeting with tea and buns in a university seminar room. Finally, (Foucault is still helping

4. Northern Territory National Emergency Response see [http://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Bills\\_Legislation/Bills\\_Search\\_Results/Result?bld=r2850](http://www.apf.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Bills_Legislation/Bills_Search_Results/Result?bld=r2850)

me here), they refused the ready-made object (not here madness, delinquency or sexuality but financial literacy). They made no attempt to measure the banks practices and knowledge in terms of Financial Literacy, but told stories about how the changing worlds of money work in their remote lives constituted a field of truth that was the proper topic of discussion over tea and buns.

## Conclusion

Returning to the task of cleaning out the V: drive, I came across another folder – this one called Health Literacy – containing the traces of a number of other research projects around such rubrics as health communication, health promotion, health interpreting, and health literacy. Here once again I could see how collaborative work with the consultants had led us to reconstitute the notion of Health Literacy as a function of a particular governmentality, not one of its effects. I found a definition of Health Literacy we had come up with:

*The capacity to build and generate shared understandings about health, treatment and health services. This definition focuses upon both knowledge and the structures and processes through which agreed understandings and agreed ways forward are negotiated, produced and reproduced (Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH), 2010, p.9).*

Putting together the two folders and the two literacies helps to show up the distinctive nature of the quiet ongoing work of re-thinking objects of governance. Looking through the lens of what Foucault called, the ‘insubstantial and vague domain covered by a notion as problematic and artificial as that of governmentality’ (2009, p.116), we can begin to see the quiet and subtle work of Aboriginal consultants (re)constituting the often false polity of the ‘Aboriginal community’ as an agentive civil society engaging with both big business and the institution of the university, and constituting them (and me) in unexpected and unexpectedly just ways.

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## The Blue House(s)

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**Keywords:** Objects of governance, Aboriginal, multiplicity, aboriginal housing, Kathryn Pyne Addelson

I am the research coordinator at Tangentyere Research Hub, part of Tangentyere Council, Alice Springs. In this paper I am trying to think my way through how we might do some more research work on governance and Aboriginal housing, and in particular on the workings of the Housing Reference Groups that have been set up as part of a radical change in the provision of housing services to Aboriginal communities. Since the land rights movement of the 1970s housing for Aboriginal communities has been a matter for the local Housing Association, provided under a communitarian vision of government as local and intimate – a matter of kinship and belonging to place. All that changed very suddenly under the shift towards “normalisation” which started with a military led intervention into Aboriginal communities in the early years of the 21st century (NT National Emergency Response, 2007) when housing in these communities went from being managed by Aboriginal Housing Associations to being managed by the Northern Territory Government as public housing.

In Alice Springs housing is still one of the very big issues for people living on the Town Camps. Because our job as researchers at the Research Hub is to ‘make a difference’, so we need to keep exploring how we might do productive research in this important area. My concern here is to think about what is going on in the area of housing management, and to do this, I will use what is called in this paper the “Blue House” (others know it more formally as “number 5, Bilson Street”). The Blue House that I use in this paper to explore governance is what many (but not everyone) may think of (unambiguously) as an object. I want to reflect on how the various “players”, other participants in what the philosopher Kathryn Pyne Addelson (2002) would call the “ensemble cast” of housing in an Alice Springs Town Camp, are variously positioned by the house as an active socio-political object or entity (Addelson, 2002, pp.118-136), thus contesting the idea that it is an unambiguous, and therefore stable object.

Here, in a style, rather unconventional in an analytic text, I present three stories of the house. I take this approach because, as Michael Christie (another author in this issue) and I found as we did our field research work looking at Town Camp housing and its management, “wherever we were, we were told stories” (Campbell, 2012). The first purports to be a story that the house itself might tell; then a story from a well-meaning but harried public servant; and thirdly, from an Aboriginal Elder who is a member of a Housing Reference Group. While I assemble these stories I must remain vigilant so as not to fall into the trap of taking the position of the removed analyst, the ‘judging observer’ (Addelson, 2002, p.118), where I may attempt to provide some authoritative account of what everyone’s perspective means when considered together.

What intrigues me as a researcher is that each story-telling figure appears to be talking about a different thing. They are not telling different stories of the “same” singular “thing” – the object



that housing data seems to so strongly imply. At the start, this is what I assumed; that the house, was a house, was a house. They must be talking of the same thing! I assumed that the research process would help me understand the different perspectives on this same thing, and then my job would be to weave an account that was useful and truthful. I saw that as useful in the sense that, since I am positioned as a researcher, I would be able to show different parties how others thought, and thus enable the different people, each with interest in housing and its management, to understand the issue differently as a result of the research.

As it turns out, I am not sure that there is any 'same' thing. The house that I understand to be there is actually many different things: that which my imagined talkative [Blue House](#) thinks it is; that which Connie talks of and negotiates her way around; and an entity which is different again to Ronald. And by extension we can see that this process continues on: the houses are multiple. Other bureaucrats, other Aboriginal residents, other researchers (whether Aboriginal or not) are also seeing, thinking about and working with different houses, not different perspectives on the same ones. At this point I can see that some people would say that the presence of a physical structure means that we have an aggregation- a common starting point – which I am problematising (disaggregating) to find alternative ways of proceeding. I too thought this until I considered that in the real lives of the participants there is no agreed starting point – there is no fundamental agreement around what the house is and it is from this point that we need to proceed.

In the following sections I create three fictitious and partial (but also very real) stakeholder accounts of housing in Alice Springs Town Camps. What I am attempting to do by writing these accounts (and approaching writing this paper in this way) is to show that the various accounts of housing do not yet “hang together” in the way, for example, that atherosclerosis does in Annemarie Mol's (2002) accounts of a Dutch hospital. That is, by allowing it to be dealt with by various players, each in their own ways (that do not compromise the ability of others to deal with it in their own, different ways). It is this lack of hanging together that I wish to draw attention to, showing as it does that there is more work to be done to allow the different houses to come together in a way that the myriad stakeholders deem “good enough” for the purposes of going on together.

## 1. The Blue House's story

*Hi there,*

*I'm a house on the Blue Gums Town Camp in Alice Springs. I'm a lot like the other houses in this camp, and indeed not dissimilar to lots of the houses on the other Town Camps. You could come and see me if you want, I'm painted blue and am the third house on the right as you come in. In the camp I'm known as the [Blue house](#). I look a lot better than I used to; you see I've been refurbished. I'm over 20 years old, but with the refurbishment I almost feel brand new again! I've got three bedrooms, a nice verandah on one side and for the most part all of my parts are working- the shower, the heater, the windows and doors- all those things us houses like to have in working order. It isn't always like this; sometimes I have up to 15 people using me for shelter, and when this happens things can break down. Over the span of my life I've seen a lot of people pass through, and not all of these are what we call today 'tenants'; you see I am host to a steady stream of visitors, some of them from other Town Camps and some from out bush. In fact I've lost count of how many people have slept under my roof over the years. Today though, I'm vacant, I got no-one living in me...and you know what? It feels really, really strange.*

*When I was built, and for the first fifteen years of my life, I was “managed” by my Housing Association, you see every Town Camp used to have their own Housing Association. In 2009 all that changed. Territory Housing took over and started “managing” me, and it was during this time that I came to understand that I was all of a sudden being thought about very differently to how I was when I was younger- and by a new set of people who never used to be interested in me (I put managing in those inverted commas because they all think they are managing me, yet really it is me managing all of them- they just don’t realise it). The big difference I see is that those people in my Housing Association didn’t just see me as bricks and mortar, walls and roof; they saw me as an integral part of their lives and the life of the community. Sure I was there to house people, to provide them with shade, safety and somewhere to call home, but they never saw me as just a physical thing; not as an individual thing that was distinct and separate from all the other ones or in fact to the people who slept and ate and talked in me.*

*My existence is proof of a number of things, of the battles that the old people fought to be recognised, of their right to a place in Alice Springs, not as fringe dwellers but real proper residents. I also help to connect people. I play a role in the stories that people tell about their lives and help to bring people together, across the years and the generations. The other thing too is that me and the Housing Association, we grew up together. Without me the Housing Association wouldn’t exist; without me there would have been nothing for the people of this camp to organise around. In this sense I was more than a house. In the early days I was a symbol of success in the battles that those old people fought, getting title to the land on which I stand. I was also evidence that we belonged together - that I, and this land, belong to someone. Now however, I am a stake in an ongoing battle over who should decide my role and my fate. So I am more than just four walls and a roof, I have a role to play in keeping our community strong. I, along with the other houses, tell a story about who we are, where we came from and the battles we had to fight along the way.*

*Now though my new “managers” think of me differently, and it’s a new way of thinking that I don’t really understand, and for that matter not sure I like. You see for a start they don’t acknowledge or appreciate my history. In fact I think many of them think of me as a problem to be sorted, not an asset to be used wisely. My new managers are seeking to sever my relationships with the other houses and the other people here. Of course even though this is what they seek, they cannot actually do it in the way that they imagine. They do not realise how determined the people of this camp are, or how powerful I am.*

## 2. Ronald's story

*"Good morning everybody,*

*As you know I'm Ronald and I am convening this meeting of the Housing Reference Group (HRG) today; thanks everyone for coming. Today from Territory Housing we have me and Patricia, the Housing Support Officer.*

*Today we need to discuss a few things, including allocating a number of houses to families on the waiting list, as well as talking about the upcoming meeting where we need to renew the membership, which is something we have to do every year. So we'll talk a bit about how things have gone this year, who might want to stay on and who else from the camp might be interested in putting their hand up."*

*Today we are having another HRG meeting for Blue Gums Town Camp. This time we're holding it in the meeting room here at Territory Housing, because frankly it is just much easier for us to have it here. Normally the meetings for this group run pretty well (not like some of the others) but it is a constant battle to try to get them to remember what their role as a HRG member entails. I'm not sure that any of the members really understand the Terms of Reference, but it's too late for that now. I think people are still having trouble coming to terms with the idea that the houses are not their houses any more, and that they are here to provide advice, not make decisions. I know it must be hard, but that is the way things are now...*

*One of the things I don't understand is why people get so up in arms when we try to allocate a family in need to a particular house. Today we have one vacant house, number 5 Bilson Street, and I know that when I bring out the list that shows who is next in line for this house that people will not be happy with the particular family we think should go into this house. It's like all our talk about the criteria we have established to help make decisions about who gets a house - such as need - have just gone in one ear and out the other. Why can't they just see that this is a good outcome - a family in need getting a secure, refurbished house? Surely this is a good thing? I know they feel a bit disempowered; but know that we manage the houses now, not them. Sometimes it seems that they need reminding about this fact.*

### 3. Connie's story

*My name is Connie and here I am at today's HRG meeting as one of the community members. It is being held here in the Territory Housing office in town rather than back at my town camp. Sometimes they do this, I think because they want to avoid humbug from other community members, and to keep the meetings short and air-conditioned, but we think this is wrong. People should be able to see what is going on and be able to ask questions - people have issues that need to be addressed.*

*I feel really torn about being part of this HRG. You see I'm also a member of my Housing Association and in the past we used to make all the decisions about housing in my camp. Now I'm part of this HRG and our role is to provide advice to the Territory Housing about housing; but you know, they make it very clear that they are the ones who make the final decisions.*

*Now this man standing up, Ronald, he is a good man. He's from Territory Housing and I think he's trying to do a good job, but he just doesn't understand how important our houses are to us. Since we lost control over who gets to move into what house we have seen a whole new set of trouble. He knows we were not happy about how that SIHIP mob went about things, but he assured us that through the HRG we could make sure that once the houses were refurbished, we would be able to work together to make things better in my camp.*

*Today Ronald is showing us the list again, with all the people who need to be moved into a house. Some of them have special needs, like people on dialysis, but we can't just put anybody into any old house. We've got to make sure that the wrong people are not put into the houses, because we are the ones who suffer if they put the wrong people in the wrong house. And we are the ones that know that - not them. We know about all these people on the waiting list, and there is a lot of them we don't want to come into our camp, so they've got to listen to us. Ronald goes on and on about the criteria, but doesn't seem to appreciate that we have our own criteria. We also remember what Ronald said back when Territory Housing took over: the repairs and refurbishments were going to make things better - you know, reduce overcrowding and allow young families to start their own houses. Today he is here talking about the [Blue house](#), and who he wants move into it. And he knows we don't want that next family on the list moving in there. You see we've been talking about who should move into the [Blue House](#) and old Rennie and Ningie have been very clear on who they think should move in. It's our job, us mob on the HRG, to keep our elders in the loop, and to make sure they are involved, even though they don't want to be on the HRG or go to the meetings. We have got to respect and support their knowledge and authority in this camp, keeping them strong keeps us all strong - and this whole place strong. I've lost count of the times I have tried to tell this to Ronald, but it seems like it is in one ear and out the other (I think they actually decide who goes into what house in Darwin, while trying to make it look like we are involved). Either way we battle along, what else can we do?*

So the question I'm left with is: what does seeing the house that people interact with as different (rather than as different versions of the 'same' thing) allow us to do, particularly given our job here in the Research Hub of seeking to do work that 'makes a difference'? How can we understand and use productively an object of governance that is multiple?

Seeing the **Blue House** as multiple allows me to ask different questions. Rather than “how do we find a way to agree on what the object is”, we might instead think about how the **Blue House** positions us in relation to the philosophers fundamental question: “how should we live”. The importance of this question emerges because we can see the participants, all of whom are good-hearted, struggling to find ways to go on together that are rewarding and productive. Multiplicity, if taken seriously, can reorient our collective work toward both the maintenance of difference (we are not seeking to create one authoritative account) while working together to produce just outcomes. It can do this because it focuses attention on the way truth claims are made, making visible the values embedded in knowledge practices. When these can be brought to the surface they can be worked with, creating the possibility for situated learning that can lead to new practices and new understanding.

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## Governance and Land Management Fires Understanding Objects of Governance as Expressing an Ethics of Dissensus

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Having worked in science studies for many years, objects of *knowledge* are my usual focus of analysis. In particular in the past I have puzzled about how the objects that scientists know, and objects that practitioners of Aboriginal Australian knowledge traditions know, might be connected and separated. One example of that analytic work involved analysing the objects of knowledge involved as scientists and Aboriginal landowners engaged with each other around land management firing (Verran, 2002a).

In 2014 I find that the character of the entity that is my focus of analysis must change. Epistemic practices as such, are no longer of much interest to those who fund research in Australia. Nowadays it is objects of governance that are of interest. Of course objects of governance come to life as knowable in knowledge practices, but it is not their capacity to constitute enough certainty about the world known that matters nowadays. It is their role in allowing transparent organisational accountability that now matters. And that shift is accompanied by changed institutional arrangements. Research associated with services provision is now largely the order of the day in Australian universities. Thus it is that, near the end of my career, I find myself working in 'GroundUP,' a research group and a services provider located in a policy research unit in Charles Darwin University (see Charles Darwin University's webpage [www.cdu.edu.au/centres/groundup/](http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/groundup/)). No longer a field worker, I am a story-teller who worries at coming up with some useful naming's of what we are doing in our ground-up policy research and services delivery projects.

It is in the context of that groping around for useful accounts of what we do as social scientists nowadays, that here I return to two papers I wrote around the turn of the century focusing on Yolŋu land managers working with environmental scientists on the topic of land management fire. The puzzle I attend to in my paper is this: in working in contemporary Aboriginal communities I have many times been part of episodes where disparate and multiple objects of knowledge are somehow in the event of governance, effected as a *singular* object of governance. This occurs regularly even in collectives where disparate knowledge traditions and epistemic standards are actively in play. I propose that thinking of objects of governance as events, as expressions of a collective going-on together in a particular here and now, offers a means to consider the ethics and politics of a particular going-on doing difference together. This can help reveal what might be involved in that puzzling process of singularising a governance object—a process that necessarily involves multiple objects of knowledge. Here such singular governance objects are understood as an expression of an ethics of dissensus,

operationalised as a politics of dissensus, where we all must *actively* assent here and now to go on together, and recognise that such assent might be withdrawn. I propose dissensus as an ethics and politics of good faith and bad will.

‘Dissensus’ is a neologism from the Latin *dissensio*, ‘disagreement, struggle.’ Note that it is not dissention that I am promoting here for dissention implies recognition of a consensus which can be dissented from. I imagine dissensus as *everted* consensus—consensus pulled inside out, so the inside agreements that get hidden and lost in consensus are on show. One of the aspects of the term I value is its embedding of the root term *sensus*, with its implications of ‘making sense,’ and of involving the senses. We are dealing with embodied and embedded knowing subjects here. For me thinking about ethics starts with ethos, a Greek term referring to ‘the character of the guiding beliefs or ideals of a group.’ I prefer the notion of commitments shared by a group and hence I take ethics as the commitments of a group doing difference in going on together. A group of Aboriginal landowners and environmental scientists engaging over land management firing is just such a group.

‘Doing difference together.’ It has a nice, touchy-feely ring to it but enacting such an ethic is challenging, not least because it presupposes a new political ontology. An ethic of doing difference together involves participants in acting out the aporia of collectivity with its obligations to present, the here and now and its purposes, but equally obligations to myriad other times and places, which can clash with the commitment to the here and now. It can be epistemic and morally alarming to find that such commitments to other times and places are deeply embedded in working ones working categories and concepts. This is an aporia since it is experienced as an impasse, a disconcertment. In an ethics of dissensus, this aporia is managed with good faith and bad will.

In working in the research group and a services provider known as GroundUP, I find myself participating in the collective enactment of the phenomenon of good governance in Aboriginal communities being seen as “a public problem” (Smith, Bauman & Quiggin, 2014, p.15). This status of good governance in Aboriginal communities as a public problem still comes as something of a surprise. In the 1980s and 1990s along with many others (some of whom are my co-researchers in GroundUP), I was deeply involved with governance in Yolŋu Aboriginal communities. There was no public problem then, or if there was, it was a problem of Yolŋu governance being too strong, too explicit, and too forthright. Yolŋu Elders involved in governance in the Yirrkala School Council and the Yirrkala School Action Group for example, regularly took it upon themselves to instruct government officers on proper procedures of governance in Yolŋu curriculum development and Yolŋu pedagogy and Yolŋu institutions.

However that era ended rather suddenly in the mid-1990s when devolved Aboriginal governance of state funded organisations like schools, was firmly shut down, associated with the institutionalising of a normalised and standardised curriculum in Aboriginal schools. Back then, the striking about-face on school governance by government was associated with the early stages of the rise of neoliberalisms in Australia. Now, seemingly paradoxically, under the very ideology that shut down the Yolŋu Aboriginal governance practices we participated in, some of us are retained by the state to attend to what it sees as an absence or a deficit in good governance in organisation in Aboriginal communities. The reasons for that turn around are interesting, involving as they do a re-configuring of state and its people-places, and of their relations. I will not be considering that set of issues here, nevertheless it frames the reconsideration I make in this short paper.

In beginning this reconsideration of episodes I participated in nearly twenty years ago, this time focusing more on governance practices and less on knowledge practices, I point out that in delivering services to do the state’s bidding in meeting our contractual obligations,

GroundUP does not purport to know what governance is in any specific sense. In the collective life of several contemporary Aboriginal communities we find governance as sets of practices emerging as a named public problem; this becoming of governance as problematic emerges in all sorts of contexts. Our method is to attend to each context as a particular, rather than as calling for a general set of skills or techniques to find 'a solution'. Here I implicitly defend that seemingly unprofessional stance, refusing definition of the very process we have been retained to 'improve' in our delivery of services, by suggesting that an open ended focus on objects of governance is ethical. The work of GroundUP is political in attempting to interrupt, to slow down the rush toward formation of too hasty and unsustainable a consensus. Going on together will occur, Aboriginal communities do assent to be governed as a constituent part of the Australian state, but past practices of imposing brittle ad hoc agreements reached under pressure of a government timetable, have a long history of failure in Australia's Aboriginal communities.

In this paper I develop a particular understanding of objects of governance as events, as configured happenings of a present here and now. This is an idea we started to develop in our writers' workshop, in learning from Foucault's notion of governmentality (2007), and from Serres' writing (1995). But I go further by proposing that as configured happening of the present, objects of governance should be read as expressing an ethics of dissensus and as emergent in a politics of dissensus which slows down. Unlike consensus, which requires good will but often entails bad faith, a politics of dissensus requires good faith which necessarily goes along with a judicious engagement in bad will. An ethics of dissensus, expressing a metaphysical commitment to emergence of worlds all of apiece in here and now's, resists established power relations and transforms the negative moment of resistance into the creation of new modes of beings. The emphasis on discontinuous becoming and emergence that this analytic enables, shifts the ethical problematic from the concern with universal (or relativised) norms enacted as consensus, to tasks of transforming here and now's beyond present limits. Since any such transformation occurs within the materiality of a particular here and now, an ethics of dissensus contests givenness in objects of governance. A politics of dissensus, like any politics is concerned with 'What particular choices present in this here and now?', 'What is at stake in those choices?' 'How might those choices be made?' But unlike the politics of consensus where those questions are ruled out of play after a consensus has been agreed, in dissensus those questions continue to remain active. Assenting here and now in going on together doing this, is limited and contingent. There is shared recognition that what we do together is subject to a continuing and active deferral of the always hovering possibility of withdrawing assent, of stopping things in their tracks.

### **My Past Experience of Engagement through Land Management Firing**

In the mid-1990s I found myself working with Mandawuy Yunupingu and others in establishing the Yothu Yindi Foundation (YYF) as a non-governmental organisation offering cultural services to both Yolŋu and Balanda organisations. In 1995 our still newly established organisation teamed up with the Yolŋu environmental NGO Dhimurru, already well known in the then rapidly changing institutional landscape of Yolŋu organisations. Across three years (1995-97), Dhimurru was awarded grants to work with YYF by the NT government, to run workshops in which Yolŋu Aboriginal landowners would instruct invited environmental scientists working in NT institutions (industry, government, and civil). The aim was to demonstrate Yolŋu methods of using fire as a land management tool for those involved in scientific environmental management, for by the mid-1990s it was recognised that the biodiversity index of Aboriginal managed lands was far higher than scientifically managed lands.

I attended two of these workshops in Dhalinbuy (1995) and Wathawuy (1996) alongside Mandawuy as a representative of YYF. My task (being a philosopher of science) was to do cultural brokerage work during the workshops in discussing the philosophical difficulties of translating knowledge based practices like land management firings. With good reason as it turned out, we worried that scientists would be impatient with what they saw as mere culture and belief being passed off as knowledge by Aboriginal land-owners. Here I reconsider some of the empirical material displayed in analysing the knowledge practices displayed in those workshops.

The focus of my reconsideration of these episodes and the analysis I developed from the experience, brings issues of governance to the fore. The papers published over ten years ago proposed worrk (Yolŋu Aboriginal firing work) and prescribed burns as disparate objects of knowledge. I argued that in the workshops we could see that during the shared experience of firing a tract of land together, both scientists and Aboriginal knowers worked assiduously to generate the fire as epistemic objects that met the metaphysical requirements of being precisely knowable in their quite disparate knowledge traditions. Both Aboriginal land-owners and environmental scientists, each in their own way, attempted to meet the epistemic obligations they felt towards fires as objects of knowledge. In the process they each seemed to experience considerable irritation at the 'inappropriate practices' of 'the other.' My claim was, and is, that in generating that mutual irritation the workshops showed themselves as successful.

Making this more explicit still, in a third and more recent paper focusing on a small incident that occurred in the opening stages of the Wathawuy workshop, I have suggested that my work as a cultural broker in the mid-1990s would have been more successful if I had found a viable way to maintain and even exaggerate that mutual irritation in developing a technique that worked as a form of epistemic astringent. In opposing well-meant impulses of good will, designed to cultivate consensus, on the part of both scientists and Yolŋu land management practitioners (but never on the part of the Yolŋu knowledge authorities who were quite uncompromising in their presentations), a few years ago I saw that what was needed was a proposal of acceptable ways for participants to enact dissensus publically and as a group, rather than as separately and rather covertly, as happened during the workshops' evaluation phase (Verran, 2013, pp.141-161). I now develop that argument to propose that explicit dissensus articulated as part of the here and now of the workshop, would have revealed the fires that eventuated as singular objects of governance, as events of going on together explicitly doing difference.

In my paper analysing the Wathwuy workshop as an epistemic episode embedding a postcolonial moment, I proposed it as simultaneously a particular worrk, one that is highly specific to both its timing and its area, and an instantiation of the general scientific category of prescribed burn. Below I present short texts exerted from larger texts assembled by the disparate epistemic practitioner groups. In my original paper these were treated as mere descriptions of the organisation; as accounts of what organisational work was entailed in worrk and prescribed burn. I now propose these texts as explanations of the moral relations work associated with the known fires.

When viewed as explanations of the moral relations involved in firing, as we would expect they are very different. Unsurprisingly firings turn out to be where 'our values', the norms of our society, who is inside and what is outside, are (re)negotiated, along with various other matters. Juxtaposing these accounts of the collective moral work involved in firing as understood by the different expert groups involved, reveals that the event of a firing effects a moral distribution both in modern scientific land management and in Yolŋu land management. Scientific firing and Yolŋu firing by expert groups each judge that moral relations are involved in firing, although

what these relations are, varies. And equally, they conceive distribution in radically distinct ways. Juxtaposing these, as outsiders, we can only offer respect at the considerable political accomplishment of these workshops. The fact that these two groups of experts can go on together is no small achievement.

### **Exhibit one: Wathawuy Worrk**

The land around this area belongs to three Dhuwa tribes: Galpu, Ngaymil and Djapu. All other Dhuwa groups only associate with the land through the history of Wukun - the cloud which is an origin of meanings for Yolngu. The spear (the cloud) is called Djäta, Milpiriny Larrpan.

The bay is called Djarraran, Manybarrmi, Gawinyimi; sea in the colour of the rainbow. Here Dhuwa people sing the Ngamal the stingray and Bukumilan, the shark. The water is called Dhara'mälami. (The work) to reproduce the water and the sea in the bay is known as Mälami dhara'mi.

History tells us that Wukun stood at Wurrumba Galkirrwalkirr and pointed to Watharrandji. Then pointed towards Wotja and then towards the east to Yirrkarpa Djawulpawuy. Then it pointed towards the north to Wayirriwayirri Rarrakala. Then it broke up into small clouds, into the many Dhuwa tribes of Northeast Arnhemland.

We were told that people must respect the land and celebrate it and the ancestors who made it, in taking from the land what was needed and in distributing it in the proper ways. That was what all young people must learn. Making sure that the respect for the land was given back through dancing, singing and holding proper ceremonies.

And when this land burns, the smoke rises up across the day. And helps make that cloud - Wukun. By the end of today we will see the cloud forming and setting off on its journey. So here we are working together in ways we have always done, and remaking the connections between Wathawuy and other Dhuwa places.

(Ngaymil Clan leader, translated by Mandawuy Yunupingu)

### **Exhibit two: Prescribed Burn**

1. Initial planning. A broad plan is devised to reconcile protection of property with conservation needs and cultural heritage. This is done well in advance. Local communities and stakeholders are involved.
2. Preparation. Boundaries are prepared for the fire (fire trails, walking tracks, streams that will hold a fire line, etc.). Where these do not exist, 'rake-hoe' or hand tools are used to construct fire control lines. Fire trails may be upgraded. Boundaries are made more secure. For instance, fuel is cleared from around trees lest they catch fire and fall across the control line or drop burning embers across it. This work can be done some time before the burn. Ecologically sensitive areas may need to be identified and excluded by control lines. Fuel loads are assessed in detail for the entire burn.
3. Detailed operational planning. The fire's likely behaviour is modeled using computer simulations for that precise area ('the burning block') ... The managers know how they want the fire to behave, and from this they can deduce the window of weather conditions they will need.



4. Setting a date. A band of possible dates is set for which it is predicted that suitable weather conditions will prevail. Usually such burns involve local fire brigades and neighbours, so everyone's timetable has to be considered.
5. Division of tasks. Typically, the operation is divided up – different groups have different duties and work in different sectors. One team may be dropping incendiaries from a helicopter while a ground crew (supported by a fire-tanker) sets fires elsewhere at precise points along the established control lines. The operation may also be sub-divided into time stages. The organisation that initiates the overall plan will probably be responsible for mopping up after the burn-off for the following days until it is declared safe.
6. The lighting-up plan. This involves deciding exactly where and in what order fires will be lit. The correct sequence matters; it determines what burns first, and in what direction fires can move. Fires can be volatile when moving up steep slopes so these areas are often lit from above. The fires then burn downwards to control lines (where possible) at the base of hills, or into pre-burnt areas. Humidity also affects the behaviour of fires, so 'time-of-day' lighting-up can help prevent hot burns in sensitive areas, especially if incendiary capsules dropped from a helicopter are precisely placed. This is very useful in getting a 'black edge' for rain forest gullies and stream-side vegetation communities, but one has to calculate precisely. The same technique is often used in remote areas for 'steering' fires.
7. Informing the public. Neighbours should be advised, and the burn pre-publicised through media such as local papers and on radio so that people are not alarmed when it occurs.
8. Arrangements to suppress fire. There have to be enough suitable persons and equipment on stand-by in case the weather changes without warning. Helicopters that can do water bucketing may be needed. They can help crews to hold the more difficult fire lines.
9. Forward control arrangements. A command structure and an agreed system of communications among all parties need to be in place. So too do arrangements for rescue or evacuation of persons who are injured or in danger ...
10. Helicopter planning. Aerial incendiary work needs to be precisely managed, with the navigator and bombardier operating as a highly planned and organised team. Incendiary capsules must be placed at intervals to minimise adverse fire behaviour.
11. Positioning crews. Fire control crews need to be in position to make sure fires do not get beyond control lines.
12. Surveillance. Some crews need to be on standby to patrol the fire overnight. The next day helicopters will be needed to survey the burn, and perhaps water-bomb flames that persist. Managers must make sure the burn is successful, safe and complete.

(Worboys, Lockwood & De Lacy, 2001, p.261).

### YYF/Dhimurru Workshops Dhalinbuy (1995) and Wathawuy (1996): Each a Unique Event Expressing Moral Relations Generating Fire as Particular Objects of Governance.

Each of these short text alerts us that an agreement on distributions associated with firing has been made in the epistemic collectives involved in knowing *worrk* and prescribed burns respectively. As events, a form of implicit social contract, a memorandum of understanding, is expressed in collective acts of land management firing. And importantly land-management fire as collective act of Yolŋu land owning clans, and the collective of professional environmental scientists, speak of different sorts of distributions effected in alternative ways. As moral relations effecting distribution, ‘prescribed burn’ distributes risk in looking forward, whereas ‘*worrk*’ re-effectuates the (past) Ancestral distribution of places as peopled, in looking backwards. The extents to which these collectively imagined (disparate) idealised fires are achieved, are intensive properties of any particular planned land management fire which necessarily eventuates as a particular fire in an episode of firing. In the paper describing the Dhalinbuy workshop firing I described how judgment of the extent of the intensive property we might call ‘proper fire-ness,’ was made explicit by members of both groups of experts. Recognising this retrospectively, as I do here, raises a possibility, missed at the time, of treating future workshops as a politics of dissensus.

I propose future workshops be understood as explicitly enacting an ethics of dissensus in the here and now of the workshop. In any particular engagement firing event those disparate ‘contracts’, respectively looking backwards and looking forwards, distributing ownership and risk differentially, must be honored in a firing pursued together in good faith. There is a strong sense in which the fire itself must be recognised as achieving this. This implies we should change how we (groups of humans who wish to manage land through firings) relate to land-management fires. No longer can we relate to them as mere physical objects that happen in a nature imagined as ‘out-there.’ The fires and the humans become the one ontological category – something that will come as no surprise to those who know through Yolŋu Aboriginal traditions.

A firing is a doing of a collective here and now, a particular present; it is emergent. Each land management fire whether a *worrk*, or a prescribed burn, or both (and neither) pursued simultaneously is a singular, unique, active event of governance. We might think of ourselves as relating to the land management fire as like the ball in Serres’ (1995) observed game of children’s football.

*Look at those children out there playing ball. The clumsy ones are playing with the ball as if it were an object, while the more skillful ones handle it as if the ball were playing with them: they move and change position according to how the ball moves and bounces. ... The ball is creating the relationships between [the children]. It ... creates their team, knows itself and represents itself. Yes the ball is active. It is the ball that is playing with the children (Italics added, p.47).*

The land management fires *play* lands and their interested stakeholders and land management practitioners as the ball *plays* the children. This is so irrespective of whether it is known as a Yolŋu Aboriginal *worrk* or a scientific prescribed burn. But Aboriginal and scientific ‘teams’ play quite different ‘fire-games’. *Worrk* and prescribed burn are games with quite different rules as indicated by the texts I reproduce in the boxes. And when Aboriginal land managers and scientific land managers come together in episodes of encounter and engagement, we have differing “fire-game teams” being played by the one fire. Teams of practitioners getting irritated with each other as teams repeatedly interact with the fire with incomprehensible moves and routines – seemingly messing up the game. In engagement, the difficult task is

to learn to negotiate such singular events together; to learn enough of ‘the other game’ to allow each game to be played well enough, all the while taking care to do difference along with that strategic connection. In such a situation each engagement must be treated on its own terms, recognising that as a single event it is styled as differing distribution of collective moral precepts, in expressing an ethics of dissensus. What governance is is emergent. Every collective act of governance engagement is singular, its own moral passage. This is the principle that informs GroundUP practice.

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## Final Comments: Objects of Governance as Simultaneously Governed and Governing

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In 2013 a perplexity we had been experiencing for some time around the apparently unstoppable proliferation of contexts in which “the public problem” of Indigenous governance emerged came to a head. As members of an informal consultancy team established within the Contemporary Indigenous Knowledge and Governance Group in the policy research institute where, near the ends of our careers, we find ourselves based, we were asked by a group of concerned government officers – both Federal and Territory, to intervene in ‘governance training’ in five Aboriginal communities. Top-down delivery of Government funded training services on a fly-in-fly-out basis has become a huge industry in Aboriginal Australia, yet a bad smell of failure persistently hangs around these programs. The amount of funding we were offered for our work was significant, but still the size of a ‘rounding error’ in government budgets for governance and leadership training in Australian Aboriginal communities. And like much useful research funding, it was offered to us at short notice, at the end of a financial year. Our very different research-informed approach to services delivery was seen as an alternative to what was not working, and we were approached by people in government with whom we had established relations of confidence and trust. Contracts were duly signed and we found ourselves deeply involved with a group of younger scholars in delivering the ‘Indigenous Governance Development and Leadership Project’ (IGDLP). This in part is the origins of our writers’ workshop on objects of governance, and this volume.

While that 2013 writers’ workshop and this collection of papers emerge as part of our response to the challenge of thinking about governance, there are also other emerging practices and structures. Another outcome of the challenge we felt on beginning this project is a Governance Lunchtime Discussion Group. This group arose from the sense, voiced urgently by Juli Cathcart, a member of our IGDLP project that many other groups in our policy research institute were ‘working on governance’ and we never talked to each other about it. This scholarly isolation was clearly an expression of the phenomenon we were grappling with in the IGLDP project. Our governance as a scholarly community is significant surely. The papers here express the work of this collective as much as the discussions of the writers’ workshop, which having been held in August 2013, are by now a fading influence.

In this summing up end-paper we first consider what, when taken together, the papers might offer the reader who is puzzled about the relatively recent emergence of the pervasive concern with governance in Australia (and internationally), particularly governance in northern Australia and its Aboriginal communities. Then we look at the papers as we have loosely grouped them

around themes emerging from ‘stories’ from other times and places (usually known as theory) which have informed our thinking and writing about objects of governance. These are the texts of philosophers Michel Serres, Michel Foucault, and Kathryn Pyne Addelson. In concluding we briefly consider what the analytic approach displayed here in the form of eight short papers, might offer in terms of generative engagement with the new “Indigenous Advancement Strategy” – the first stage of which is about to be operationalised by the Federal Government.

So what does this collection of rather short analytic texts offer? One insight the collection allows concerns the initial confusion that accompanied our call for expressions of interest in attending a writers’ workshop on objects of governance. Did we mean objects that were governable or objects that in some way governed? In asking potential participants to write on an object of governance were we asking them to write about an object that could, or perhaps should, be governed? Were we asking for ideas on how norms might be instituted in rules of governance? Or, were we asking them to write about objects that somehow were involved in the actual work of governing, seeming to have some agency? This response to our question raises a debate that is very old in Western thought. Do things drive history, or do particular historical periods call forth particular technologies. This is the technological determinism/social shaping question that flourished in the academy during much of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The texts collected here show a way out of that sterile 20<sup>th</sup> century debate – the challenge we were posing was for analysts to consider objects of governance as simultaneously both governing and governed. The writing task we set was to conjure up the ‘lives’ of complex objects. We hope readers see inspiration in the resulting stories.

In together ‘performing’ an analytic that focuses on the challenges associated with the new emphasis on governance in many arenas of Australian life through a focus on the objects that “do” governance in that complex manner, the papers here exemplify an analytic framing that is perhaps still unusual in Australian analytic talk. This is a framing that sees worlds as emerging all of a piece in the present – governed and governing simultaneously. Here the easy assumption of givenness, of an object world “out-there” to be governed and a human world “in-here” which does the governing, exists only as one possible (and costly) accomplishment of a particular mode of modern governance.

The analytic approach to governance and to objects that the papers collected together here exemplify has left that parochial analytic framing of old modernity behind. While this abandonment of givenness is not unusual in academic writing, especially in the humanities and social sciences, it is still unusual in the natural sciences and in the ordinary work of government. Our hope is that the accessible short texts focusing on objects both specific and small (e.g., a cyber safety poster that had a peripheral life in three Aboriginal communities) and vague and large (quality assurance in Australian child care or financial literacy) will begin to change that situation. The stories we have collected here might begin to make the analytic that considers governed and governing as realised simultaneously in the present seem less arcane, its generativity more evident.

Each of the papers, either explicitly or implicitly incorporates a reference to a philosophical text – Serres, Foucault, or Pyne Addelson. In an analytic of givenness such texts are usually identified as ‘social theory’. There the idea of theory is juxtaposed with empirics. Theory is supposed to articulate principles of social life in a society that is given and found. In an analytic of emergence the analytic categories of “theory” and “empirics” become something else. By grounding analysis robustly in the present, what (in an analytic of givenness/foundness) used to be ‘empirics’ becomes ‘stories of the here and now’; what used to be ‘theory’ becomes ‘stories from other times and places’. The resources available for analysing the happening of the present either arise in the here-and-now or are carried into the here-and-now from various



then-and-there's. And in this 'carrying in' great care needs to be exercised. The question "Will this story from that then-and-there implicate us in commitments that will get in the way of us engaging openly with the here-and-now?" needs to be posed again and again. In the context of working with many Aboriginal Australian communities in northern Australia, an example of such a commitment is the commitment most scientists maintain to the figure of matter set in space and time, which is a necessary element in that old modern analytic of givenness/foundness.

The three 'stories from other times and places' that the authors of the texts collected here bring into their analyses arose during the 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the work of French philosophers Michel Serres (1995) and Michel Foucault (2007), and the American Pragmatist/analytic philosopher Kathryn Pyne Addelson (2002). Having brought Serres' message, an image of a ball playing skillful children in a game, into the time and place of our workshop, we played it as much as it played us. The same could be said of the messages of these other authors, and you see the outcome in the texts we present here. Serres' message becomes entangled with ghost nets that land on the beaches of Aboriginal communities in northern Australia in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, and with stories, and items for sale on an art centre website; with a storied cyber safety poster that circulates, and with multiply textualised land management fires. The same fate befell fragments of Foucault's texts and Pyne Addelson's texts in the texts generated from our workshop.

From within the entanglements of these fragments of text which have mingled and abraded with our own remembered and rearticulated experiences, new stories, insights and ways of seeing began to emerge.

Emily learnt that if we are shown how to dig them out of the sand, we can help make and follow objects of governance. She gradually began to notice how ghost nets become objects of governance as they become bags, and how their reception as art objects depends upon the aesthetics at work in the Aboriginal Art industry. The buyers of the bags buy into environmental politics (saving the nets from their destructive work and drawing attention to the problem through art objects), the utilitarian Aboriginal craft work, the bright but earthy and primitive look, modern-traditional hybrid, the canny art supervisor and the women who had come seemingly from nowhere 'to instruct the artists' in net-working. The bags came to life materially and discursively in particular ways; and understanding that process allowed Emily as a particular sort of scholar, to find opportunities for more and similar collective action with more people and things.

Trevor found that we can help objects of governance come to life if we work well enough with the right people on both sides of the divide. Working with Serres' image of playing ball, a cyber-safety poster can be seen as designed by canny people to promote the work of good governance. Happening in spite of rather than because of government initiatives, allowed the GroundUP team to think and work through the local situated agreement-making-under-authority practices to design a poster which would allow people in the collective action of traditional governance on ancestral ground to collectively design cyber-safety as they engage with the object, each other, and redefine the public problem.

A four year old boy told Mel the meaning of quality assurance at a time when, through the outsourcing of the adjudication of quality infant education, Mel was herself becoming configured as an expert in particular ways. Through her work she was becoming entangled in processes ensuring that she acted independently and safely, amidst and alongside new scientific developments, and in relation to the emergence of neo-liberal educational policy principles ("belonging, being and becoming"). However, it is only as these efforts are reconfigured and revealed as a small Aboriginal boy becomes part of the collective action, that she is also able to discern a thoroughly revised notion of quality reconstituting quality assurance as a quite different object of thought.

A 19<sup>th</sup> century climatograph made Chris sweat, and reflect upon his sweating and his engagement with the north. Seen as a technology of governance, the climograph could be recognised as simultaneously produced the livability of colonial settlement, and rendering invisible Indigenous livability and its knowledge of environment and climate. It is by understanding the work of climatograph as produced by and producing a particular governmentality 'then and there' that we might, perhaps, find assistance as engaging openly with the here and now, particularly with local and Indigenous knowledge practices.

Matt Brearley and the other researchers began to deal with heat stress much better by understanding it as multiple. Beginning to notice the ruptures and reconfigurations within Matt's engagement with this strange object, heat stress also begins to emerge as an object which is different in differing contexts, which has both visceral and mathematical manifestations, and as a risk borne unequally by various parties. Perceiving this multiple materiality allows for a more generative political (and ethical) engagement with this object of governance in situated interventions.

Financial literacy becomes another way for Yolŋu to show Michael that there is an honourable way of fulfilling multiple accountabilities, differences notwithstanding. As financial Literacy emerges in contemporary governance, financial institutions use it to sell their 'products' and to contribute to the 'increased financial and social well-being' of Aboriginal people. However, at the same time Aboriginal consultants gently set up some discursive and nondiscursive practices which help us see both the 'object of thought' and the researcher within a quite different play of truth and falsehood, and a new understanding of the generative work of good faith.

The [Blue House](#) shows Matt Campbell how its multiplicity may allow him to strategise in new ways. The Public Housing [blue house](#) is without a history, just a present and a future, achieved through severing its relationships with community, land and other houses, normalising bureaucratic allocation processes and spaces. However, on the other hand, the Aboriginal [blue house](#), being done quite differently by different people at different times, they can be seen as constituted through history, politics, and place. Noticing the work of the Housing Reference Group (HRG) members behind the scenes widens the ensemble cast (the 'criteria') in order to (re)produce an Aboriginal [blue house](#), and the [blue house](#) emerges as multiple as the researcher revises his role.

Finally, fire tells Helen how working carefully with those multiples, dealing with them as they emerge, we may find ways of doing our work more ethically. In a retold story of Yolŋu and scientists working together using fire for environmental management, carefully preserving dissensus becomes generative in our going on together, not only in good faith, but ethically, as we renegotiate our norms and values in ways resonating beyond the particular problem of the moment.

In amidst a pervasive still growing concern with governance in Northern Australia, these stories have helped us to perform an analytic which has conjured up the 'lives' of complex objects. This is an analytic we have worked with in connecting with some of the challenges arising around a proliferation of new objects and contexts through which Indigenous governance is emerging as a 'public problem' being enacted in various ways.

However, beyond worked accounts generated in this text, is this an analytic that may also offer other avenues for generative engagement?

In 2014, six months after the Objects of Governance workshop had been convened, The Australian Government announced a new Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS). The stated aim of this strategy is to reduce Indigenous disadvantage, particularly in remote communities, and commits to allocating \$4.8 billion over the next four years towards "...achieving better

results for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in three priority areas - getting children to school, adults into work and building safe communities' (Department of Prime Minister & Cabinet (DPMC), 2014a).

The promise of the strategy was that there will be "no more off the shelf solutions designed in Canberra" being mobilised to engage with issues arising in remote indigenous communities. Rather a key thrust of the IAS is the "participation" of individuals, groups, agencies and most notably corporations, working particularly to foster regional and place-based approaches to developing joint solutions to presenting problems. Part of the process of allocating funding through this strategy is the streamlining of the over 150 existing programmes and activities through which federal funding flows to indigenous communities and organisations, into five consolidated streams: Jobs, Land and Economy; Children and Schooling; Safety and Wellbeing; Culture and Capability; and Remote Australia Strategies. This consolidation is to provide "unprecedented flexibility" within the means through which funding may be sought and applied for through the strategy (DPMC, 2014b)

Almost anybody with a 'legal personality' is eligible to apply, however, the only sticking point is the "outcome indicators" which, in the guidelines are listed at the bottom of each "program and outcome" and which talk a lot about numbers, percentages and rates (e.g., of attendance). These are a series of targets which are embedded in the policy, and we have been told that our funding applications will be assessed specifically in terms of those "outcomes".

Might thinking with and through objects of governance support us to work generatively with and through this strategy as we grapple with the new objects it is bringing to life?

Our stories help us to notice the strategy as clusters of objects generating complex socio-political global-local configurations. And to see the relations of these objects as labile, provisional, and contingent, in a manner similar to that of our own work. Just as we have participated in the production of the objects of governance in this text, we might think of ourselves as both participating in the ongoing production of the strategy, and an effect of it – our imaginations, practices and possibilities all in the process of being changed by this new and energetic object.

As we begin to work on grant applications, we are implicitly encouraged to choose which "public problem" to focus on, and who and what our partners might be to help us with theory (then and there) and practice (here and now). Thinking with and through our stories might help to sensitise us, and broaden our vision to some of the scope and variances of our choices as we promote ourselves within the strategy as it emerges. But we may also wait, as we so often have, until we are invited to join collective action on a particular here and now problem. As we do so, we are aware that the notion of "advancement" carried by the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*, bears within it a certain deficit model which underlies the push for normalisation; and that while 'public problems' are implicit in the text of the documents, our collective action looks to produce objects which govern and are governed differently.

Working with objects of governance, we are tracing some of the ways in which we engage with governments and the people and places of Northern Australia in terms of what Miller and Rose (1990, p.24) have termed "advanced liberal governmentality" – what others also call more generally neo-liberalism. In Miller and Rose's (1990) terms, the authority of the authors of our collection is increasingly detached from state rule, and we as experts are being 'relocated' in a market governed by the alternative rationalities of 'competition, accountability and consumer demand'. Gone, in this scenario, is the "old public administration ... that combines conscious structural design with an integrated culture" of government (Christensen, 2006, p.448). Structural design and integrated culture are now up to us and to the "heterogeneous communities of allegiance" we may work with through the *Indigenous Advancement Strategy*.

So we rethink our reluctant expertise towards a more generative engagement in collective action. We may find the opportunity, (like Emily) to be shown the raw material buried in the sand, and to help make and follow emerging objects of governance which engender healthy sustainable creative remote communities of allegiance and allow us to generate consumer demand for our services as we are simultaneously governed by these objects. Or, (like Trevor) we may help objects of governance come to life to take an active role in the governance work of community Elders over their heterogeneous communities of allegiance which include ourselves.

Small boys like Boris may help us (and Mel) engage more generatively with the changing rationalities of accountability and consumer demand in quality childcare. And strange old objects, like a 19<sup>th</sup> century 'climatograph', may help us (like Chris) to see the traps and opportunities of mapping and of history getting in the way of open face to face engagement in collective action over problems of the moment. We are beginning to see objects (like Matt's blue house or the other Matt's heat stress) as multiple rather than just multiple views of the one object. And we are struggling to learn how multiple objects (like our environmental fires and "financial inclusion") when taken as fundamentally multiple, may lead us towards more ethical engagements in going on together. We see the dissensus upon which generative theory depends as a special case of the rationality of competition which frees our work in important ways from state rule.

By the time this special edition of our Learning Communities Journal becomes a hard object we may have cast our lot in with one or another of the projects everyone is talking about today. The policies and rules of the Indigenous Advancement Strategies may have changed. We will have.

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## NOTES

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