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# 10 Voicing the 'Other': Reading and Writing Indigenous Australians

Jim R. Martin

## Orientation

In this chapter I will look briefly at interdisciplinarity in the context of cross-cultural communication. The communication I'm interested in is between Indigenous peoples and European settlers in contemporary Australia – specifically, the ways in which the settlers' voice represents the voice of the Indigenous 'other'.

My own experience with what might be referred to as interdisciplinary work has been mainly in the fields of linguistics and education (Hyon, 1996; Johns, 2001), where I worked with linguists alongside educators developing Australia's distinctive genre-based literacy programmes (Hasan and Williams, 1996; Christie and Martin, 1997; Christie, 1999; Martin, 2000). The success of this enterprise as far as intervention in various sectors was concerned depended on overlapping expertise – the extent to which functional linguists became expert in language education and language educators expert in functional linguistics. In Australia's bilingual education programme for Indigenous languages a role was conceived for teacher-linguists, with this kind of hybrid expertise in mind. The changes we had in mind for literacy teaching would never have got off the ground without the pioneering work of our theoretically bilingual educational linguists.

As a result, it has seemed important to me that interdisciplinary work be more than a matter of cooperation across disciplines, with experts dividing up a problem according to their expertise – handing over to another discipline when one's expertise wears thin. Over time, I have tended to prefer the term 'transdisciplinary' to 'interdisciplinary' in order to focus attention on the need for shared expertise (in the case of my language in education work, shared expertise about language and education). This not only enables changes to practise at sites of intervention, but also encourages cross-fertilization across theories. The chapters in Christie (1999) display a number of such engagements, with linguists contributing to the development of

Bernstein's work on pedagogic discourse and educators contributing to our understanding of social context, via register and genre theory.

Genuine transdisciplinary dialogue is of course a costly exercise because of the time involved familiarizing ourselves with another discipline. Consequently, it is important to have theories that fit and people who want to change the same kinds of things about the world. Bernstein's work on pedagogic discourse (1990, 1996) and Halliday's systemic functional linguistics (1994) have proved fruitful partners for this kind of exchange because of their ongoing concern with issues of language and education. Bernstein is unusual among sociologists in making a place for language in his theory, just as Halliday's commitment to linguistics as an ideologically committed form of social action is relatively unusual for linguists. The scope of their perspectives means that issues can be tackled from more than one perspective at the same time, and the complementary gazes generate real dialogue. Being able to see language development as a process of socialization in the home and at school was the key to renovating pedagogy and curriculum.

In this chapter I will exemplify the benefits of this kind of transdisciplinary gaze by drawing on functional linguistics and social semiotics to analyse modernist and postmodernist representations of indigenous Australians in multimodal discourse (including verbal and non-verbal representations).

### Modern initiatives

Muecke comments that the 'most "obvious" history to write is the one which celebrates the achievements of the powerful, using the language of the powerful' (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], p. 143) – a practice Rose characterizes as a form of denial which 'engenders a complicity with all that has gone before... the past is concealed; and the living become accomplices in the continuation of injustice' (1991, p. 259). Elision of this kind has been a long-standing concern in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), and is pursued in some detail for the discipline of history in Martin and Wodak (forthcoming). Complementing this style of critique, here I will be more concerned with attempts to address this imbalance – to unleash the hidden histories of the powerless – focusing on the voice of Indigenous peoples in Australia. I will limit the scope of the discussion in the first instance by concentrating on the walk-off by Aboriginal workers at Wave Hill station in 1966, which is generally taken as the beginning of the land rights movement in Australia; and will be concerned principally with the presentation of Indigenous accounts in Aboriginal English, setting aside translations from the vernacular such as those presented in Hercus and Sutton (1986).

A useful place to start is Frank Hardy's well-known 1968 account of the walk-off – *The Unlucky Australians*. Hardy makes room in his autobiographical

recount for Aboriginal people to tell what happened in their own words, with Hardy writing down their stories. Vincent Lingiari, generally positioned as leader of the Gurindji people involved, begins his recount as follows:

**I am Vincent Lingiari from Wave Hill. That's my proper aboriginal name. Tom Pisher and that Bestey\* mob called me Tommy Vincent. My people are Gurindji. Who live in Wave Hill area. That we country. They live here longa time before Cudeba. I have had Gunabida ceremony. Gunabida is the mother of all the Gurindji people, and the corroboree dances tell the story of a man and him son spewed up by the rainbow snake near Wattie Creek in the Dreamtime. I am Kadjieri man of Gurindji people. But Bestey mob don't understand 'bout that.** The manager of Wave Hill was Tom Pisher. Bestey man, Tom Pisher. Always when big plant start to go out from station when mustering start, they go out two, maybe three month. Aboriginal men out in bush all time. White ringers come back to station ebery Friday night. That not right. I think to mesel' about that longa time. And think them Bestey mob don't treat Aboriginal native people right way. Some them white fel-las play bloody hell with black gin women, leave Aborigine natives out in bush for that. When Aborigine stockmen come back they have to pack up and go away again. That not right. (Hardy, 1968, p. 71)

As we can see, Hardy preserves many of the features of Lingiari's Aboriginal English – commenting on the spelling as follows:

**\*The Gurindji language has no F or V sounds so they substitute P and B for these when talking English.**

No doubt some editing has taken place in the transcription process; this cannot be a completely faithful rendering of spoken language, as anyone who has written down recorded speech will recognize. But the normalization process that has taken place is certainly comparable to that Hardy uses for speakers of standard English in his book (normalizing false starts, repetitions, interjections and the like). I think we can be confident that as far as the transcription goes, the Indigenous voice has not been unduly compromised.

It is useful to contrast this strategy with discourse that speaks on behalf of Aboriginal people, as opposed to quoting them. Middleton (1977), for example, offers a history of the Australian Aboriginal people which is politically closely aligned with Hardy's account. But the actual stories told by the Gurindji about the walk-off are left outside her text, as primary sources. Middleton mentions the Gurindji stories (italics below), but then paraphrases them for us; and she uses indirect speech to report what Lily Punai

said (italics below), rather than quoting her directly. Thus Middleton tells us what happened in her own words, based on the Gurindji recounts:

The reaction to the Commission decision was immediate and dramatic. On May 1st Aboriginal pastoral workers from Newcastle Waters station went on strike and most of them left the station with their families. They were followed shortly after by employees from Wave Hill and other Vestey stations. The majority of the strikers were Gurindji people. By the end of the month most of the strikers had moved to a temporary camp on the banks of the Victoria River near the Wave Hill Welfare Settlement. The *story* of the first days is still often *told* by the Gurindji – a column of men, women and children, the older children and adults sharing the burden of carrying the younger ones when they got tired and the babies, their blankets and what little possessions and food they had been able to bring with them; a noisy crowd, excited, some happy, some frightened, some worried, surrounded by their dogs as they walked through mile after mile of rough bush country.

Lily Punai had been doing ironing at Wave Hill homestead where she was employed as a domestic. A white stockman came in and told her that everyone else had gone and asked if she would stay. She *said* she would go. She put the iron away, rolled her swag and at the age of 55 set out alone to walk about 15 miles to join her people. (Middleton, 1977, p. 113)

There is no question of denial here; Middleton is just as concerned as Hardy with telling non-Indigenous Australians what happened to Indigenous peoples. But in the traditional discourses of history there is a degree of silencing, since the Aboriginal voices are not directly heard. Rather they function as evidence – the material basis for higher level interpretations. Middleton's leftist reading of the walk-off concentrates on the full award wages issue, which she interprets as directly responsible for the strike. In the outline of her argument below I have used indentation to show her progressive movement from this interpretation through to evidence. In linguistic terms this involves a transition from evaluated (*immediate, dramatic*) abstractions (*reaction, decision*) to concrete activity (*she put the iron away, rolled her swag and ... set out ...*); Martin (1991) presents a more detailed account of transitions of this kind in history discourse.

In addition the Commissioners decided that payment of the full award wages should not come into operation until nearly three years later ... (Middleton, 1977, p. 112)

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Rose (1991), in a book entitled *Hidden Histories*, addresses this degree of silencing by incorporating Aboriginal voices directly into her account – by including her primary sources as it were. Instead of subsuming Aboriginal voices like Middleton, she quotes extensively from them – indenting her quotations, separating them from her text by skipping a line before and after, and giving them prominence by placing them in a larger font than that used for her own discourse.<sup>1</sup>

Hobbles told of a conversation at Daguragu between Tommy Vincent Lingiari (usually styled the leader of the strike), Vestey's representatives and Welfare Officers. For an Aboriginal audience in the Victoria River country, this story is a delicious unmasking of hypocrisy – European officials telling striking Aborigines that they must return to dependence on Europeans because they will not be able to get along without European goods. In refusing, Tommy Vincent invokes remembrance as the key to independence. His words are laden with sarcasm; the very goods he is told he cannot do without are those which have been denied for so many decades:

Lotta Vestey mob and Welfare came up, trying to get them back.

'You can get your money.'

'No, we don't worry for money.'

'How you going to get a feed?'

'Lotta feed in the bush.'

... [13 lines elided]

'Don't live here. This the one for Vestey.'

'Vestey only got cattle, horse, but not land. That's mine. Might be Vestey had me one time, but not now.'  
 ...[16 lines elided]

In a few words Hobbles Danayarrri captured the resistance which had remained covert for so long: 'Tommy Vincent told Lord Vestey: "You can keep your gold. We just want our land back."' (Rose, 1991, pp. 228–9)

Like Hardy, Rose appears to normalize the transcription to some extent while preserving distinctive features of Aboriginal English; in addition she includes in parentheses information she thinks readers might require to follow the Indigenous discourse (for example, who is speaking in reported dialogue, glosses on distinctive usage, 'missing' words and explanatory contextual information).

Rhetorically, Rose's discourse is not unlike Middleton's in its movement from interpretation to the material basis for her evaluative abstractions. We hear much more from Rose than from Indigenous speakers, both before and after they 'speak': she interprets; they are primary sources. Rose uses metasemiotic terms (italicized below) to introduce their speech, and often paraphrases it for us before presentation. Using the indenting technique introduced above to display this movement, Rose's discourse unfolds along the following lines.

Technically speaking, Rose's metasemiotic nouns and verbs (*conversation, story, words, letter; told, telling, refusing, told*) project the Indigenous voice, which then grounds her interpretation – including both her abstractions (for example, *remembrance as the key to independence*) and evaluations (for example, *delicious unmasking of hypocrisy*). Here are some further examples of Rose's interpretations of quoted material from her chapter on the Wave Hill strike (with projecting nouns and verbs in italics).

Hobbles spoke of Sandy Moray working on behalf of Aborigines, and Riley Young spoke of him travelling south and establishing contacts with unions; Riley's story appears to date from about 1950: '... ' (1991, p. 226)

Riley told what Sandy Moray used to tell the unionists... His aim, as Riley explains it, was to enlist union backing for a strike which would radically alter Aboriginal people's lives materially with respect to land. '... ' (ibid.)

Big Mick has never gone in for modesty, false or otherwise. He *described* his role in the strike in a *letter* he sent to Bob Hawke and Clyde Holding in 1984: '... ' (ibid., p. 230)

Jack Doolan was a Welfare Officer before and during the strike. He *described* the VRD mob this way: '... ' (ibid., pp. 233–4)

For an example of Indigenous voices that take primary responsibility for telling the story of what happened as opposed to simply illustrating it, we can

turn to Wright (1998), an Indigenous writer whose *Take Power Like This Old Man Here: An Anthology of Writings Celebrating Twenty Years of Land Rights in Central Australia 1977–1997* was commissioned by the Central Land Council, an Aboriginal agency based in Alice Springs. Her section on the Wave Hill walk-off does begin with a brief account by Wright contextualizing the texts which follow:

Drawing the line: the Gurindji walk-off and the birth of land rights  
 ...

On 22 August 1966 the Grindji people, working as stockmen and station hands in the north-west of Central Australia, walked off Wave Hill Station, then owned by England's Lord Vestey. Soon after, they set up a permanent camp nearby on part of their traditional land at Daguragu, a waterhole on Wattie Creek. A ten-year battle led by Vincent Lingiari followed, which moved from a strike for wages and better working conditions to a political struggle that eventually led to the *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976*.

Then Prime Minister Gough Whitlam handed over the lease to Daguragu Station in August 1975 by pouring a handful of soil into the hands of Vincent Lingiari and saying the land would belong 'to you and your children forever'. The 3236 square kilometres of land was purchased from Wave Hill Station with money provided by the Aboriginal Land Fund. However, in October 1979 the Northern Territory Government said it would resume the land in twenty-eight days because the traditional landowners had not kept the pastoral lease conditions. The Gurindji prevented the resumption when they demonstrated that not only had the lease conditions been met but the property was well managed. To secure the title to their and the Gurindji lodged a land claim over the property.

Twenty years after the Gurindji walk-off, in April 1986, the Gurindji were given inalienable freehold title to Daguragu under the Land Rights Act.

This is followed by five accounts of the walk-off, the first four of which are by Indigenous Australians – two in Aboriginal English and two in Gurindji, followed by translations<sup>2</sup> (the fifth account is by a non-Indigenous Australian involved in the struggle). Wright's introductions to these texts are minimal:

This is Mr Inverway's story, told in 1996 at the thirtieth anniversary of the Gurindji strike at Wave Hill Station.

[none for Mr Rangiarri]

The translation<sup>3</sup> from Gurindji to English has been done by Kalkaringi Resource and Language Centre.

The translation from Gurindji to English has been done by Kalkaringi Resource and Language Centre.  
[none for Ted Egan, whitefella]

Wright's voice thus takes up much less space than that of other speakers, and compared with Rose there is far less interpretation. Wright functions more as an editor than a historian, compiling an anthology of Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices (with Indigenous voices taking precedence over non-Indigenous ones). One might argue that Indigenous voices have taken over history here, although Wright's own discourse would be hard to distinguish from that of Rose or Middleton and it does still ultimately frame the meaning of the oral history described by Wright as the Indigenous accounts.

Looking over these initiatives, we can see a spectrum of possibilities – Hardy stepping aside now and again to let an Aboriginal person be heard; Middleton speaking as sympathetically as her politics affords<sup>4</sup> on their behalf; Rose taking pains to explain to us what they mean, and Wright giving her own people the floor. There are various complementarities at issue here. Hardy offers more of an eye-witness account; Middleton, Rose and Wright look back across time. Middleton and Rose offer historical interpretations; Hardy and Wright let the stories speak for themselves. Hardy, Rose and Wright quote directly from Indigenous people; Middleton subsumes their voice into hers. Hardy, Middleton and Rose enclose the Indigenous voice in their own; Wright lets other voices dominate her editorial role.

It is tempting of course to see this in evolutionary terms, with writers making more and more room for Indigenous voices in their texts. And there is some truth to this. Writers *have* struggled self-consciously against silencing the 'other'. And we should not lose sight of role played by female writers here – Hannah Middleton, Deborah Rose and Alexis Wright. Looking over the complementarities reviewed above, however, it might be just as wise to read developments as an expansion of the discursive terrain, with an ever increasing play of voices replacing the denial and silencing which shrouded Indigenous history in the past. As a note of caution, modernist historians, for example, might balk at the idea that Lord Vestey was anywhere near Wave Hill Station during the land rights struggle there, even though both Indigenous voices (in Wright's anthology) and non-Indigenous ones (for example, Kelly, 1999)<sup>5</sup> place him there, jousting with Lingiari. For Aboriginal oral historians this is probably not a case of mistaken identity; Rose would probably be quick to explain that figures such as Lord Vestey absorb individuals, especially those representing them, in Aboriginal (and perhaps all) oral history (see Rose, 1991, p. 18, on Captain Cook's invasion of northwestern Australia). So the pastoral care given to Indigenous voices in Middleton and Rose has an important role to play in bridging cultures and avoiding misunderstandings and discreditations which might derail the fragile Australian reconciliation processes already underway.

## A postmodernist intervention

Alongside this emerging play of voices, Muecke's poststructuralist intervention (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996]) becomes ever more relevant for the ways in which it interrogates modernist initiatives – by writers like Hardy and Wright, historians like Middleton and anthropologists like Rose. Muecke's project involves himself writing as a poststructural theorist<sup>6</sup> compiling an 'archive of fragments which are representative of just about everything that has been said about Roebuck Plains' (ibid., p. 256); the archive foregrounds the 'successive negations' of Muecke's poststructural theory (in words and photographic images), stories by and dialogues with Paddy Roe (as Indigenous 'other') and a series of paintings by Krim Benterrak, a Moroccan artist who studied in Paris and went to Western Australia in 1977. Muecke styles the book, *Reading the Country*, as a 'record of Paddy Roe's dreaming at its most important nexus: the country itself' (ibid., p. 19), 'sensitive to Aboriginal understandings of the country, one that wrote nomadically, constantly deferring its authority to other sites and their guardians' (ibid., p. 23).

The archive first appears in a larger 'coffee-table' edition (1984) and later on as a very slightly revised smaller book-shelf edition (1996). Promotional material on the first page of the 1996 edition describes the book as 'a new dawn of literature... radical, innovative, unparalleled... absorbing, beautifully produced... inspiring for its integrity, optimism and humility' and as having 'the quiet intelligence and turbulent tension of a poem'. From these evaluations we can perhaps see that *Reading the Country* has a different provenance from the texts we've been considering so far; indeed, Rose (1996) and Rose and Clarke (1997) do not refer at all to Muecke's archive,<sup>7</sup> although they are concerned with tracking Indigenous knowledge in Australian landscapes – a project which looks to a naive linguist such as myself to be closely related to *Reading the Country's* composite desires. We can perhaps glean as well that I can only touch on some of the interrogations arising from such a multivocal initiative, which is after all a resource designed for ongoing dialogue, not closure.

Let's begin with the issue of rendering Aboriginal English, glossed over in the comments on normalization and transcription above. Writing as a linguist, Muecke comments on the phonology, grammar and semantics of Paddy Roe's variety, which he describes as somewhere between a mild accent and a full-blown creole (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], pp. 270–1); and he includes a glossary to deal with unfamiliar lexis. In addition, Muecke's transcription of Paddy Roe's speech tries to capture the 'orality' of his discourse – including both the rhythm of the narratives and their dialogical nature. Muecke scribes Roe's stories into paragraphs according to discourse markers, changes in content and movement from place to place; and within paragraphs he divides the text into lines, with pauses indicated by a dash at the rate of about one per second. He instructs readers to observe 'this alternation of speech and silence'

when reading the texts aloud (ibid., p. 271). Here's the beginning of Roe's story about how he avoided becoming a member of the 'Stolen Generation':<sup>8</sup>

P'lice was gonna pick me up –  
Well err all the half-caste childrens you know p'lice pick-em-up whole lot –  
But my mother didn't want to let me go  
*Krim: And she hide you ...*  
Yeah I went er well –  
When we left sheep station –  
they took me out –  
when we got –  
we got up to the last windmill anyway –  
then from there no more windmills –  
we camped there  
*Krim: Right*  
So –  
next morning –  
old man was still sleeping –  
mother making tea –  
before sunrise so we can leave windmill you know –  
An' mother look –  
We seen the –  
He<sup>9</sup> seen dust in the road you know –  
*Krim: Yeah*  
Yeah –  
Horse and cart road, no motor car those days (Laughs) ...

As we can see, Muecke resists normalizing Roe's speech as writing, faithfully scribing 'false starts and repetitions' and including dialogue with Benterrak – the oral features elided by Hardy, Rose and Wright. And Muecke's punctuation and layout is designed to scribe the rhythm of the story as it unfolds, one wave of information per line in a serial chaining texture. This is of course an unusual presentation for written narration, perhaps foregrounding description over transcription – and authenticity over translation. At first blush, the stories look like poetry – and Muecke construes his archive in poetic terms so explicitly that naive readers would have to be forgiven for mistaking them as such.

But with three authors one cannot imagine that the book is guided by any poetic unity or harmony. On the contrary, the poetry is of a different sort, one that responds to our times. It is a poetry of fragmentation, contradiction, unanswered questions, specificity, fluidity and change... (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], p. 15)

Paddy Roe, for instance, constantly talks about the *bugarrigarra* as story, as song, as a power he controls and as things to do with *particular places*. To talk *bugarrigarra* about these places is to talk about 'spirits' one cannot see, about the 'rainbow snake' rising up out of springs; it is to talk in a special way which disrupts the uniformity of everyday language. It is a bit like the talk which we call poetry, attributing it with special qualities of transcendence. Could it be that the dreaming is no more than this? Since, in Paddy Roe's case, there is none of the fear which has been associated with 'primitive belief' (no superstitions, no hobgoblins in the dark), only a joy in telling stories and singing songs, then haven't European Australians made a mistake in calling it 'primitive belief', and comparing it unfavourably with 'science'? Someone who talks the discourse of the dreaming deserves to be treated in the same way as a novelist or a poet, but one who comes from a particular culture.

The dreaming is not a set of beliefs which is being lost because it is no longer valid, it is rather a way of talking, of seeing, of knowing, and a set of practices, which is as obtuse, as mysterious and as beautiful as any poetry ... (ibid., pp. 18–19)

But for both Aboriginal and 'general' readers there is a pleasure in the text of *bricolage*, a pleasure in seeing the edifice of language tremble a little as it becomes a kind of poetry. (ibid., pp. 171–2)

Reinforcing such a reading is the juxtaposition of Paddy Roe's discourse with Benterrak's landscape paintings and Muecke's poststructuralist writing – originally compiled as an attractive coffee-table edition. The Indigenous voice takes its place as 'poetry' alongside fine art and cultural theory, a radical transposition if compared with the down to earth, eye-witness, bald-faced recounts in Hardy, Rose and Wright. Whatever value we might place on recontextualization of this order, Muecke's transcription problematizes the issue of representing oral history in writing for literate consumers. It makes us re-read transcription as translation, orality as poetry, storyteller as novelist, dreaming as theory, orator as intellectual and so on – interrogations Muecke would no doubt be pleased to have instigated and equally reluctant to resolve.

Questions of representation also arise in *Reading the Country* with respect to imaging. I'll set aside Benterrak's fascinating dialogue with landscape here (his tilt at windmills and horizons) and focus on Muecke's photographs, which are in many respects as interrogative as his presentation of Paddy Roe's speech. McGregor (1991) draws on Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) to survey the photographic representation of Aborigines in a corpus he has collected over several years. His framework for analysis is shown in Table 10.1. The results of his survey are not hard to predict, with a predominance of representations foregrounding values such as 'powerless, not cultivated, passive, not engaging viewer', and so on. Photos of Indigenous people in Hardy,

Table 10.1 McGregor's photographic iconology

Opposition	Iconographic representation
powerful/powerless	high/low
cultivated/not cultivated; or paternal/not paternal	seated on chair/standing or seated on ground clothed/unclothed
civilized/savage	vector/no vector
active/passive	tool vector/sight vector
transformer/observer	non-profile/profile
person/thing	gaze at/away from viewer
engage, not engage with viewer	motion towards/away from
entering civilization/wilds	gaze directed up/down to viewer
dominated by/dominating viewer	foregrounded/backgrounded
person (nurture)/setting (nature)	close-up/medium/long shot
more or less personal involvement	

Source: McGregor (1991, p. 130).

Middleton, Rose and Wright are infrequent, and when they do appear they are not as radically divergent from McGregor's corpus as one might expect, given the politics of those ventures.

Muecke, however, photographs Paddy Roe and his friend Butcher Joe in different terms, at times explicitly drawing attention to the oppositions in McGregor's iconology by way of deconstructing naturalized readings of them. The first photo in *Reading the Country*, for example, is a close-up of Paddy Roe (head only), who is facing us and looking sharply to his left (our right). Muecke's caption reads (cf. 'engage/not engage with viewer – gaze at/away from viewer' above):

You are looking at Paddy Roe while he is glancing to his left. Will your gazes ever meet? If so, will you recognise each other? Will this recognition be based on sameness or difference? (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], p. 21)

The second photo in the book is of a camp scene, a long shot of (viewing left to right) Butcher Joe, then Paddy Roe, then Muecke (who is scribing), sitting in a semicircle on the ground. Muecke's caption (cf. 'cultivated/not cultivated – seated on chair/on ground' above):

*Paddy Roe said: 'You want a chair? I always sit on the ground – more better, can't fall down.'* (ibid., p. 27)

In further photos we look both up and down at Paddy Roe, who may be near or far, who is clothed, active, pointing, drawing, using tools, chatting with Butcher Joe (who is himself presented laughing with Benterrak). We see in other words a powerful man in full custodial care of his land as he shares his

dreaming with Benterrak, Muecke and prospective readers. Muecke's images embody Roe's discourse in place, and thereby demonstrate that giving voice to Indigenous Australians is a multimodal project in which verbiage and image (and other modalities as well) work in tandem to construct readings of the 'other' – a potential which is not really taken up in the relatively monomodal texts reviewed above by Hardy, Rose and Wright. Once again, we can value Muecke's multimodal project in various ways. One thing his clearly framed proliferation of modalities (theory, 'poetry', painting, photography) opens up is the possibility of 'tactical' readings which attend partially to his desires – simply breezing through his photos and captions, for example, or dwelling on Benterrak's artwork. Would such partial readings undermine the politics of Muecke's archive? Theoretically speaking, could he care?

This brings us to the uneasy tension of deferral and proscription in Muecke's writing, as we may have come to expect from poststructuralist positions in a highly charged politicized context such as reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia. I'll pursue just one succession of negations to illustrate this here. *Reading the Country* is subtitled *Introduction to Nomadology* and dedicated to the nomads of Broome. Towards the end of the book, in an interview with B.R. Coffey, Muecke comments that he has 'not, of course, made any claims for Australians having an essentially nomadic way of life. The word is used metaphorically' (ibid., p. 259). In the first section of the book Muecke comments:

When I sought an underlying theme or a book which emphasises place, the movement from one place to the next, I found it in 'nomadology', the study of nomadism (Deleuze & Guattari, 1980). One has to admit that this philosophy is rather adventurous; Krim and Paddy were both brought up within so-called nomadic cultures and that gave us something to talk about. (ibid., p. 19)

But:

Nomadology is not a general theory, a summary of observations ... and is constantly in flight from ideas or practices associated with the singular, the uniform, the central authority, the hierarchy ... (ibid., p. 20)

Without:

... for all that ascribing to any form of anarchy. (ibid.)

And:

It is descriptive ... it might talk about things people do in their travels ... (ibid.)

not there. What we have instead is a stance realized through a particular way of writing, a specific set of practices for texturing a gaze. Certainly this gaze encloses Paddy Roe, as Muecke explicitly laments (*ibid.*, p. 258); but where he pronounces on Benterrak's paintings, he resists interpreting Paddy Roe's discourse for us – and yet he does interpret it. Looking back at Rose we could say that Indigenous voices in her history illustrate her points once she's explained to us what they mean; with Muecke there is more of a dialogue between Paddy Roe's voice and his own.<sup>10</sup> One informs the other, enhances the reading of the other... but the Indigenous voice is not paraphrased, thus in some sense owned.

How we value this is once again an important concern. It does take work to read Paddy Roe's discourse – more work than for the tamed discourse in Hardy, Rose and Wright. The layout is more time consuming, the Aboriginal English more distant, the place oriented meanings less familiar, and so on. And it takes work to read Muecke's poststructural theory. Elsewhere (Martin, forthcoming (b)) I have argued that postmodern discourse takes the abstract discourse of modernity and re-embeds it, as it were, in a discourse of semiotic abstractions. So whereas modernity has abstractions acting on abstractions instead of people acting on people and things, postmodernity has discourse acting on discourse. Muecke's defence of theory illustrates this point:

I wanted a reader who would become the prey of the text, seduced by its movement, reaching a breathless and mobile conclusion, ready for action and debate in relation to those issues which are most pressing for our survival in this country. The later fragments may seem too theoretical to some but in my opinion theory is not all that abstract, theories are the readily available frames in which certain questions and assumptions are allowed, and certain statements appear... in this way they have concrete effects. (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], p. 259)

Here the text seduces readers, readers reach conclusions, frames allow questions and assumptions, and theories have concrete effects. In everyday life, processes such as *seduce*, *reach* and *allow* can be directly related to concrete events: *someone reaching home perhaps, allowing someone in, and the pair seducing one another*. Turn this into modernist abstraction and we have something more like *arrival home and subsequent entry permission led to seduction* – the discourse of professions, disciplines and institutions (Martin, 1993). Turn this into postmodern semiosis and we get text, readers, frames and theories as agents affecting readers, and effecting conclusions, questions, assumptions and concrete effects (which nominalization is, of course, anything but concrete).

Thinking about the kind of education it requires to master discourse of this order, I can feel Muecke's readership shrinking. How many of us will bother to read? Will we simply end up browsing through the pictures after all? Over coffee, while chatting with friends? And what if we aren't

That is:  
it aims to describe practices, ways of living, (*ibid.*)

While:  
...avoiding the pretence of describing a whole people. (*ibid.*)

But:  
It is... also analytical and creative ... About abstract journeys taking place while one is sitting down; trips in intensity which involve working with a kind of avidity to keep words and images on the move. (*ibid.*)

Thus:  
... this book is not about Aborigines. We have tried to avoid the us-and-them division by having three authors, three sources of author-ity, as it were. Also the focus on reading, on the means of communication, shifts attention away from people or society (the concern of anthropology) and from the linear depictions of events in time (the concern of history). (*ibid.*)

But:  
In correcting some things, other gaps appear. Women's voices play only a small part in this book ... (*ibid.*)

And later, in the final section of the book:

For them (Deleuze & Guattari) nomadology is the study of nomadism ... and it is a philosophy which has been developed in recent years by scholars looking for ways to contest the Graeco-Roman philosophical traditions which have grown up with advances of Western capitalism and continue to be its support. (*ibid.*, p. 241)

A counter-strategy:  
... is to call nomadism a practice and a knowledge potentially present in relation to any event, potentially effective in relation to any struggle for survival. (*ibid.*)

The play of counter-expectation in writing of this kind is designed to unsettle modernist readings and makes it impossible for me to sum up Muecke's discourse around Paddy Roe's succinctly here. I can't distil the theory; it's



interested in art? Will we take the book off the coffee table? Would we buy it at all? Is the new, smaller edition of *Reading the Country* an attempt to recast it for a more rarefied academic sphere?

## Readings and writings

### Transdisciplinarity

In this chapter I have drawn on Systemic Functional Linguistics (hereafter SFL) and social semiotics (Multimodal Discourse Analysis, hereafter MDA, in particular) to analyse modernist and poststructuralist representations of the voice of Indigenous peoples in Australia. Functional linguistics was deployed to analyse the language used to introduce the voice of the 'other' – the kinds of projection and metadiscourse deployed, and the kinds of expansion connecting one voice to another (elaboration or extension). MDA was used to consider the use of images in relation to this verbal material. One thing a focus on imaging draws attention to is the significance of graphology as a resource for foregrounding Indigenous voices in texts that otherwise enclose the 'other'.

Although I have not foregrounded it in this chapter it is important to note that the MDA used by McGregor and myself was designed by Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) on the basis of Halliday's systemic functional analysis of English grammar. So one might argue that beyond a transdisciplinary project with overlapping expertise such as that I described at the beginning of the chapter, what we are in fact looking at is the emergence of a transdisciplinary theory – systemic functional semiotics (SFS?) transcending SFL and MDA (Lemke, 1998; Martinec, 1998, 2000a, 2000b, 2000c, 2001; Baldry, 1999; O'Halloran, 1999a, 1999b, 2000; van Leeuwen, 1999; Kress et al., 2001; Kress and van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen and Jewitt, 2001; Unsworth, 2001; Martin, 2002a, 2002b, forthcoming (b)). And this raises important questions about what kind of theory can function in this way. One thing I would emphasize here is the importance of a multi-perspectival perspective – a theory that looks across modalities, using a range of complementarities such as metafunctions (modes of meaning), strata (levels of abstraction) and ranks (units of different size). Poststructuralism has served us well as far as deconstructing theories and discourses is concerned; but its successive negations make it less than effective as a tool for intervention. Perhaps it is time to begin constructing theories that transcend the grand monovocal and inherently reductive systems of modernity, with multiperspectivity as a key ingredient for practically oriented transdisciplinary work.

### Voicing

We have taken just a glance at reconciliation discourse in Australia here, focusing on representations of the Wave Hill walk-off and Paddy Roe's country (Roebuck Plains). As far as giving voice to Indigenous Australians is concerned

we can already see a range of disciplines involved – writers, historians, anthropologists, linguists and cultural theorists. And typically authors and editors play more than one role at a time – Hardy as writer and historian, Rose as historian and anthropologist, Muecke as linguist and cultural theorist. Whatever their composite roles, giving voice involves producing texts, and so there is a role for critical discourse analysts to play in understanding what is going on. And since the texts are multimodal ones, this analysis itself will have to be a composite one, involving analysis of both language and image (and other modalities as they arise) – implicating both linguistics and social semiotics, as these disciplines are now conceived. One thing I am trying to suggest here as far as an interdisciplinary gaze on an interdisciplinary initiative is concerned is that we look at positive developments – at sites where people strive to make the world a better place – alongside our more familiar (and perhaps more comfortable) deconstructions of semiosis as it enacts hegemony at sites of crisis and enduring malaise around the world (Martin, forthcoming (c)).

As for giving voice to Indigenous Australians, we have surveyed a range of possibilities, including discourse that subsumes their story (Middleton), that paraphrases and interprets it (Rose) and that backs off to let it stand alone (Wright). One thing we need to keep in mind in evaluating these strategies is that however hands-on or hands-off our approach, a text is still a meaning potential. It will be taken up and read in different ways, according to the interested social subjectivities involved. For example, I first read Paddy Roe's story about avoiding being taken from his mother and sent to Beagle Bay Mission as an amusing anecdote about Indigenous people outsmarting the police. Years later, now I understand a little more about the Stolen Generations issue, I read the story more as an exemplum about genocide and shudder at the cultural implications of his narrow escape and others' tragic misfortunes. Anecdotes, exemplums – these are of course my Western narrative frames (Martin and Plum, 1997); but that is just the point – I cannot read through non-Indigenous eyes. Muecke's poststructural interrogations take up this issue of interested readings in important ways. He's not just striving to let Indigenous Australians speak; he knows that that is not enough. Beyond giving voice he wants us to think about how we hear – how we read the voices that are presented to us, and how we read the discourse enacting those presentations.

How we value this range of interventions in relation to reconciliation is for me a matter of time and place. I suspect that for people struggling to move out of modernity into a postcolonial Australian world, then Rose's strategy is a supportive one. Her texture (of interpretation, paraphrase and illustration) forms a bridge from 'our' culture to 'theirs' – a path across if we want to take it. An avenue for sympathy, perhaps empathy; for respect, perhaps understanding. This is paternalistic of course; but perhaps a charitable outlook is the best that mainstream Australia can manage in these reactionary times when

rapid economic change unnerves the populous and shameless politicians blame any 'others' they can find for what is going on.

Looking further ahead, Rose's strategy doesn't really involve genuine dialogue. For that we need other possibilities, including those in which Indigenous voices give voice to us. Reading through the Indigenous papers in, say, Graddon (2000), or listening to the Indigenous band Yothu Yindi (1992), I am both shamed and heartened by the generosity of their framing – 'their' willingness to share with 'us'. Yunupingu sings and writes of double power (1999), two-way education (1990) – discourse for negotiation, from which invaders have so much to learn.

## Notes

1. Personally, I found this graphological foregrounding quite disconcerting when first reading *Hidden Histories*, often feeling confused about who was quoting whom – which attests in no small part to its ideological significance.
2. As noted above, translated material is beyond the scope of this discussion, but mention should be made here of Hercus and Sutton (1986) which includes two sections on the Wave Hill walk-off – a recount by Johnny Kijngayari and the 1975 handover speech by Vincent Lingiari (1986), both translated line by line from the Gurindji and annotated by Patrick McConvell. Hercus and Sutton briefly contextualize this material before handing over to the Aboriginal voices.
3. We should keep in mind of course that the transcriptions of Aboriginal English by Hardy, Rose and Wright all involve some degree of translation – across modalities from spoken language to writing, and across dialects from less standard forms to more standard ones; for discussion of Aboriginal English in trial, see Eades (1995), Hill (1999).
4. Writing from a left union-oriented position, Middleton (like Hardy), tends to read what happened at Wave Hill as a strike over wages, as opposed to, say, a protest concerning land rights and culture.
5. Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody's popular land rights anthem, 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' was released in 1991 and has certainly introduced more Australians to the Gurindji walk-off than any other account. They invent some punchy dialogue for Lingiari, who is presented as an Aussie battler taking on the British Lord (see Martin, forthcoming (a), for discussion).
6. And occasionally as a linguist (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], pp. 270–2) and social semiotician (some of his readings of images throughout the book), two discourses in which he also has professional expertise.
7. Nor to Muecke (1992) for that matter.
8. As Muecke explains: 'In the first decades of this century, when the first generation of part-Aboriginal children was appearing, the practice of authorities was to collect the children and send them to Beagle Bay Mission, north of Broome. This practice effectively blocked their traditional education. This book would never have been possible if Paddy Roe has not avoided the police' (Benterrak et al., 1984 [1996], p. 264). This was the first I'd heard of what was to become widely known in Australia as the 'Stolen Generations', following publication of *Bringing Them Home* (1997); see also Bird (1998), Manne (1998, 2001), Read (1999, 2000), Reynolds (1999), Tickner (2001).

9. As Muecke footnotes, 'Aboriginal English does not indicate gender in the pronoun. "He", therefore, is "mother"' (1996, p. 264).
10. Muecke does, however, explain Butcher Joe's songs, inserting them into his section 'The song in the story' in a manner akin to Rose.

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