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## From Wiluna to Kalgoorlie with GB (Georgina Brown)

Death, life and community[1]

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*This essay is a journey from Wiluna to Kalgoorlie. It is written in a ficto-critical style and draws extensively on Jean-Luc Nancy's thinking of existence as interrelation. Georgina Brown, or GB as she is known, and I are driving to see her dying father in Kalgoorlie. GB has just got back from living out 'my side' as she says, out 'Patjarr way' (half-way between Wiluna and Alice Springs). GB's family was the last family to be living traditionally in the Gibson Desert, and she was about six years old when she was 'brought in' with her family in 1976. Needless to say she's an extraordinary woman. I got to know GB through living with the Jackman family in a little place called Ululla (GB's mother was a Jackman). Whilst there I became attentive to relations, to stories, to movement—to how these things all get caught up in one another. I learnt that what is important is to maintain space and time for others, to enact one's being by connecting with kin elsewhere, a kind of constant interruption of centeredness and stability. As a result this journey to Kalgoorlie is full of fragments, stories and relations; and is marked with imagination, memory and sadness. Thoughts and events take us away. We are moved and forced onwards, elsewhere, by these things that are happening and by what awaits.*

What I try and do here is work that place where we are prepared to be interrupted, where we cannot stand-back, but are thrown towards others in community. This is something I learnt from spending eighteen months with the Jackman family in an Aboriginal community called Ululla. The Jackman family have made Ululla a home (among others), not as an ideal place that would hold and centre an identity, but rather as a place one leaves and returns to, stays for awhile, goes, and then comes back again. Ululla was always changing from week to week, month to month, year to year; it was never the same. There was always a different collection of people, forces and

contingencies working away. The Jackman family have vast regional networks of family that connect to other sites of community: Wiluna, Cue and Meekatharra; Leonora and Kalgoorlie; Warburton Ranges and Alice Springs; Jigalong, Mt Newman, Port Hedland and Cotton Creek. And from these places, further afield again; Perth, Geraldton, Broome. With similar experiences in mind anthropologists working in the central and western desert have noted that what Aboriginal people emphasise is regional relatedness and extensive social ties rather than exclusive or restricted groupings (Myers, 1986; Rose, 1992; Poirier, 2005). There is no centring as such, rather relations are pivotal, turning one towards another without rest.

This extensive nature of relations demands that people travel vastly and imperatively to maintain kin relationships—leaving and returning without rest as a condition of being. What I came to understand was that to think community was not to think of a place, ‘a people’ nor an object, but rather a practice of interrelation. The Jackmans were not keen to objectify ‘the community’ nor present ‘higher level’ structures (shared destiny, immutable values) as a transcendental realm beyond the contingent and changing forces and relations that were constantly happening. People seemed to direct my attention *not* to what community is (as if it could be defined through certain objective characteristics) but would give examples of *how* community takes place, how it *happens*: people would tell stories, stories would happen and take place, people forced me to listen to this as an imperative. It was sometimes like ‘Hello? You’re here, what else do you expect, this is how it is, this is what happens here!’ This *is it*. Sort of like ‘stay with what surrounds you, this is what its like.’ Or as Jean-Luc Nancy puts it ‘the touch of the world, being-together...no secret to discover buried behind this very touching, behind the with of co-existence’ (Nancy, 2000: 13).

Indeed, Nancy (1990; 1991) takes ‘community’ to be not so much a concept but something that is happening to us. This shifts the discussion from working out what community means to trying to gain a sense of what happens to us by being in community with others. We move with Nancy from a capturing of meaning to a sense of community as force, imperative, momentum. As Nancy suggests:

I am trying to indicate, at its limit, an experience – not, perhaps, an experience that we have, *but an experience that makes us be*. To say that community has not yet been thought is to say that it tries our thinking, and that it is not an object for it. And perhaps it does not have to become one. (1991: 26, original emphasis)

This is one of the challenges I took up in my PhD thesis (Morgan, 2008). I tried to conceive of ‘community’ as an experience, as something that happens to us, rather than an object for analysis.

The story that follows is not a discussion of community as such, rather it attempts to enact a thinking of existence as interrelation, something that I was taught by living with the Jackman family. I become attentive

to relations, to stories, to movement—to how these all get caught up in one another. Like being in the midst of ‘a network...that is reticulated and spread out, with its extension for an essence and its spacing for a structure’ (Nancy, 2000: 28). Thus what becomes vital to the writing is not the ‘control of one’s subject’ nor the mastery of one’s object, but rather a preparedness to let the writing unfold and extend through time and space, as if writing itself was a form of *ex-istence* (Blanchot, 1988: 6), an opening to connectedness, as if writing could be an expansive rather than reductive exercise. A writing that encounters and fragments; that withdraws and interrupts. A writing that leaves and departs as much as it returns home, that goes from one-to-the-other. It is about keeping writing in a state of surprise, open to events, contingencies, to memory and affect, prepared to travel with others (Muecke, 2004). It has something to do with an ethics of interruption, of being prepared to be taken away by another beyond the self-same and certain; it is to be moved by another without rest as a condition of being, of trying to write this as if it were an experience of being-*in-common* (Nancy, 1991). It is not about keeping your distance but about that ‘streaming of electricity’ one between the other (Bataille, 1988: 94).

While this approach connects with an experience of community with the Jackmans, it also calls towards another community: the ficto-critical community. As Brewster and Schlunke (2005) note, ficto-criticism ‘wants to turn and touch its listeners and readers and wants to feel their touch back’ (394). Ficto-criticism, as Brewster (2005) notes, is a mode of writing and thinking that ‘incorporate[s] affect – as distinct from objectifying it’ (399), it is ‘performative and poetic’ rather than ‘referential’ and defensive (400). As Brewster continues, ‘there is no solidified, coherent subject here, figured in a linear narrativity, only a reiteration of approaches, insinuations, echoes, anticipations...’ (400). While Brewster doesn’t use the term, to read ficto-criticism is to be close to a subject in a state of ‘becoming’: moving, feeling, not knowing where the end point is to begin with. The story that follows is a road trip from Wiluna to Kalgoorlie, a known destination by a well travelled route. But, what will happen in this journey that will take us beyond the straight and narrow towards the eventful, towards the soft and hard undulations of memory, affect and togetherness? What will happen that ‘eschew[s] the teleological drive of narrative’ and of writing community (Brewster, 2005: 401)?

### **Wiluna to Kalgoorlie**

It was our last day in Wiluna. GB’s dad was very sick in a nursing home in Kalgoorlie. GB had received a call from the nursing staff to come as soon as possible. GB’s sister, Lily, was coming across from Perth, her brother who was in ‘lock-up’ in Geraldton was getting a transfer to the Kalgoorlie lock-up. GB had not seen her brother, sister, or Dad for a couple of months, she’d been out ‘her side’ as she says—*out east Patjarr way*, (approximately half-way between Wiluna

and Alice Springs)—and also in Warburton Ranges and Alice Springs, away from Wiluna.

She liked being out there—away from ‘family’—where she could be independent, free, do her own thing; *looking after myself...away from people in town who put you in—blame you, for any little thing.*[2]

GB knew her dad was dying, that’s why she’d come back to Wiluna. She’d come back two weeks ago, she’d come with her fella in a beaten up 1990 VN Commodore station-wagon, she’d come the back-way, through very rarely used roads, roads even blackfellas don’t commonly use. They’d come across one group of whitefellas and their *shiny Toyotas, full-up* (full of gear), in a 600km journey, both parties were surprised to see one another. But GB was like that, never afraid of much, resourceful, fiercely independent, safe in her country; happy to follow the roads less travelled. GB’s dad had been very sick for a long time. She had tried to look after him in Wiluna and Ululla (5 years before, I was living at Ululla at this stage), but it proved too much. She was also looking after 3 kids under 5; she became ragged and simply couldn’t look after her father whose body and mind were failing. It was hard, watching the stress, concern and worry slowly wearing GB down. Her family, as well as the Wiluna medical staff agreed that the Kalgoorlie nursing home was the only option. But it must have pained GB terribly, and she talked about her sense of responsibility and sadness as we drove to Kalgoorlie. It constantly marked our conversation, yet paradoxically remained a kind of unsayable outside; a subject that couldn’t be fully broached lest that sense of responsibility for others collapse one’s composure. Moments of vulnerability and exposure punctuated and gave a certain rhythm and space and sense to what we said.

We left Wiluna in the early afternoon, GB wanted to sit in the back; she was exhausted and fell asleep. My eight month old daughter Dusty, was in the back as well, the gentle undulations of the road slowly nodded her to sleep. Cath (my partner) and I talked as we drove to Leinster 250km south. Leinster is a mining town built for the intent of providing a community for the miners. It had an Olympic size swimming pool, flood-lit tennis courts, movie theatre, hair salon, café, supermarket, school. All neatly laid out and organised on a grid. A kind of ‘ideal’ community built around work and leisure, built of bolted together steel frames and concrete slabs. We stopped for petrol, cheap petrol—what more could Australians want in an ideal community! We had some lunch in the playground of the school that was deserted in the school holidays. We ate on the grass. *Dusty ate the grass*, fascinated by its lush softness after months in the red dirt, her eight month being all eyes and mouth. We left, GB sat in the front, and talked as we drove on towards Leonora.

Initially, I was worrying that I should be recording our conversation, the anthropologist in me wanting to hear completely (these anthropological feelings are hard to shake), it was important to get

right and I didn't want to leave it up to recollection, memory, affect—those other senses. But I soon realised that sometimes those other senses are the only way to glimpse and sense what lies beyond the present discussion and that calls us onwards, further, toward others. Perhaps by not having the 'back-up' of notes or recordings you strain to listen all the more intently—you stay with what is happening, are thrown into the sense of something—because you realise this is all you've got, this sense that is unfolding and that you try and catch on to.

Her words, which are memories now, traced in glimpses of phrase, the look in her eye, or the flash of her teeth as she laughs. There is a wonderful 'positionality' while driving and talking. By not facing each other, by being situated in oblique proximity, by catching glimpses—a sense on the edge of our sight—perhaps we allow the space for the eyes of the interlocutor to wonder into the horizon. Released from the demand of holding the other's attention and gaze, the eyes glaze into the past or future far beyond the gathering forms that take shape in front of us. We address each other into this space, thoughts and feelings drifting into the horizon.

GB was taken back to the country where she grew up, back to 'the desert', 'the bush' as people in Ululla sometimes say.[3] She's playing with an armful of dingoes in the sand-hills with her sister, her mother is close, her father out hunting. She's with her sister later, when her sister tells her to *go long, don't follow*, to leave her alone as she walks away from the family's camp. Her sister returns later, sick. She lasts the night. GB recalls the terrible night. The family move early in the morning heading for a more substantial rock-hole. Her sister dies on the way as they carry her: as her father carries her in his arms.

GB breaks in, *I still feel that, I have never really forgiven dad for that*—he should have been there, he should have known where she was heading—to a sacred place that she wasn't allowed to go—but more than this still, she can't forgive him for leaving her sister's body as they walk away in the gathering heat to the rock-hole (a place of water). *I got so wild with him.*

I break in, *But that was the way, what else could he do?*

*I know*, she says.

But it accounts for nothing in terms of what GB still feels. I shift uneasily in my seat, GB stares out the window, we do not settle relaxedly into our seats. The cabin of the car circulates in GB's hurt, memories, words. The country unfolds, the motor drones on.

GB still feels the loss of her sister dearly. GB was probably around six when it happened, her sister a couple of years older. She talks of her, like she does her mother (who died in Wiluna in the mid 90s), describing her strength, her vitality and warmth. They come alive

through the certain strength of GB's memories. She recalls a time with her mum and sister, her dad out hunting, when her mum climbed a tree and was knocking cockies (cockatoos) down to the ground that GB and her sister were collecting; I imagine two little girls looking at their mother in the branches of a tree as she hysterically knocks scattering and screeching cockies to the ground. I imagine the ecstatic event trailing into laughter, the joy of seeing your mum climbing a tree. She talks of how her mother gave birth to GB's brother (Boyie) all alone, without any help. GB says it full of pride and amazement for her mum. She talks of her mum's hardships, her loneliness that *she had no help, all the families had left, we were the only ones, just us and Ululla Boss,[4] his mummy and daddy*—but they were elsewhere at the time.[5] Her mother had to endure her father's absence and temper, she was always *looking after us kids*. She talks of her mother with such pride and respect, she tells me how tough and tender she was. GB beams in her memory. She talks of her father, his hunting skills, his patience; *he'd be gone for days with Ululla Boss, come back, we'd have a big feed then*. She told me of a time in the middle of summer, the whole family were hiding behind a windbreak for hours on end. *Boyie (her younger brother) only a baby, my mother shading him, settling him*, as they waited for the emus and kangaroos to come and drink—we *had to be so quiet, we were only little*, we could see the emus and kangaroos slowly circling the rock-hole, getting thirsty, slowly they came in: *dad got two*.

Silence folds in the cabin, things rattle and tremble, little levers and winders and switches vibrate. The kilometre markers to Kalgoorlie diminishing on the side of the road. Losing units of ten as the stories unfold. Cath turns to Dusty; keeps her going with smiles, picks up dropped toys, shows her things that fly past on the side of the road. Cath gestures and shows, we all turn to see Dusty's delighted response, we revel in her becoming in this world.

GB interrupts. She talks about how people in town have been talking about taking Ululla Boss's mum and dad, Warri and Yattungka's (see previous note) bones back to their country, so they can finally rest. *I always feel sad, says GB, when I think of them in the cemetery in town, so far from home, theirs was a one way trip*.

I said that, *I never really got the point why they wanted to bring them back to town, only to die two years later so far from their home*.

*If they really wanted to look after them, they should've camped with them at Mungill[6] (a station about 500km east of Wiluna) or Warburton—looked after them that way, said GB. That's my granny and pop, you know*.

Yeah, I said.

*What about that statue they're putting up about Ululla Boss's mum and dad in town*, I asked.

*He's not really happy, really angry about it, she says.[7]*

*Did they even ask him, I ask.*

*They spoke to some of his family but not to him properly. They (his family) said yes, but Ululla Boss is really angry with them for that.*

*Every time he is in town he'll be reminded that they're so far from their home, I said. It is like their death will always be there, in town, I said.*

*Yeah, ngarru, (an expression of sadness, worry) she said.*

The petrol gauge fell slightly, the windows in their frames were agitating, trembling. I rolled down a little tighter on the handle. I thought of the statue and about the myths we love to memorialise. Here stand Warri and Yatungka, 'The last of the nomads,' I imagined the inscription full of loss and nostalgia. Just next to the Wiluna Information Shelter, their deaths becoming 'informative': a way for whitefellas to orient themselves to country. Your introduction to the town containing a map of the streets and a statue commemorating the end point, the last ones; as if everything had passed with their death, as if GB's memories of growing up were finished as well. I could just imagine the hordes of four wheel drives that come 'to do' the Canning Stock Route and the Gunbarrel highway that both start in Wiluna: their introduction to the country marked with a sign that says the last of the true people are gone. I spleen on, as we drove towards Kalgoorlie and GB's terribly sick father.

GB saves me from myself, that righteousness which is not mine to feel. She talks of going back to the country where she was born, of getting Ululla Boss to show her and her brother and sister *where they found us*. She'd never seen a Toyota before, she remembers hiding behind her mother, scared, mystified by this enormous thing. Her family had been communicating with the search party for that whole day, responding to each other's fires. First on the horizon and then getting closer, until *we could smell it in the air, my brother (who was less than two) would point to the horizon*, she says. The whitefella in the search party had to hide behind the sand hills whilst Freddy (an elder from Wiluna) went in front and signalled to GB's family that it was him, that it was alright. Otherwise, GB says, *my daddy might have speared him*, that whitefella had to hide, out of view, until it was alright. I think of him hiding, nervous, waiting for the word, straining to hear that everything is all right and that he can come out from behind the sand hill. I think of him walking towards the others, uneasy but expectant. *But he was good, alright* she adds. *He gave me his T-shirt, a red one. He's been talking about taking us back to the spot where they found us.[8]*

But as GB said her *dad probably would have never got on (the Toyota) if he knew it was a one-way trip*. He tried so many times to get back to his country, she told me. *But people would stop him,*

*people would call him back (to Wiluna), they wouldn't let him go. It was hard for mum, in the bush all alone, but dad always wanted to be there, but I think mum was better in town.*

We rolled on through Leonora, we talked about the people we knew there, the Jones mob. GB saw Sandra in her front yard. She stole a cautious glance towards her house. Sandra is Boyie's partner. GB and Sandra don't get along, two vital and strong spirits, protective and stubborn at once, meeting head on. GB tells her side of events. It's getting late, the sun is sinking and the roos are beginning to appear on the edge of the road. Dusty is worn out and grumpy.

*Shall we find a camp.*

*Yeah.*

About 20km out of Leonora, I spot a little used track, we overshoot it, we turn around and take it. There is a big sign, slowly rusting, that says: 'Private Station Country, Keep Out'. We ignore it and drive on.

GB gets worried, this makes me worried, *look they've been using it*, she says (the station mob), there are tyre marks less than a few days old.

*Cath says, stuff em', they won't come.*

We go on a little further and find another little track, we take this. We stop in a nice little clearing and get out. We are relieved because we see the remnants of a fire pit, long and rectangular—somewhere where someone has cooked goannas and a kangaroo in the ground. GB points out little kid's footprints. The campsite immediately warms and we relax: this is not a station boss's camp.

*Might be the Jones mob, they come out here*, says GB. GB heads off, in the descending dark to follow an echidna track. Cath and I unpack the swags, roll them out on the ground. Dusty loves this moment, free from the car, she throws herself excitedly across the still warm folds of the canvas, burying her body in the blankets and pillows; she has her little unfolded space marked out underneath the stars.

GB comes back, we make a fire, cook dinner. Dusty goes to sleep. It takes awhile because a few weeks ago she found the stars and now she stares up in amazement. Cath goes to bed and reads. GB and I stay around the fire and talk. GB translates a recorded conversation with Ululla Boss a few days ago where he tells of one of the dreaming tracks that crosses Ululla. GB knew the story, Wati Kutjarra (Two Brothers), but only out her way—*Patjarr side, where they go into the ground near Docker River in Northern Territory*. At times, as she was translating, she would whisper, taking the earphones out of her ears, *that's a law place he's talking about*. She'd then look around behind her back, into the dark, beyond the light of the fire, *can't talk about it*

*really.* I'd turn my head in the direction in which she was intimidating. I'd look uneasily and be happy to return to the intimacy of another around the fire. She stoked the fire with a dead branch, and sparks flew off into the night like meteorites burning up on entry into our atmosphere, leaving traces glowing in the night. Dusty, and Cath, now asleep, were lit up in surges and soft folds of reddish-orange glow. Flickering light slowly retreating to the fire as the log settled down, the girls breathing in time on the edge of light. The conversation GB and I were listening to moved on, another place, another happening, another story took place. Ululla Boss's voice, my thumb on the pause button, GB's translation, my hasty anxious scribbles trying to catch her words (which were catching on to Ululla boss's), were spaced on the edge of the other. Huddled around earphones and a retreating fire we fell into an interrupted, syncopated rhythm. We strained to listen as the story of Wati Kutjarra went into the ground on the edge of Ululla country. Ululla Boss signalled its re-emergence, further east, another happening, another story, but for later. We took the earphones out of our ears and leant back straight from our huddle.

*When I first got back,* GB began again. *The Bondini (Wiluna) kids used to tease me and Boyie, they used to say 'you're from bush.' Big mob of them (kids).* She had to rescue her brother countless times from fights with other kids. She remembers mean and cruel kids making fun of her. She was sent to Cue, a town 250km south west of Wiluna, to a hostel, a mission boarding school.

*Why,* I asked.

*I don't know, they just made me go.* She was in her early teens, all alone, separated from her family. She was locked in at night. She talked of how isolated, lonely and oppressed she felt. I tried to imagine GB as an early teen, locked in dormitories, always thinking of escape. She told of how she fought back whenever she could.

*One time,* she began again, *me and a friend took off to Meekatharra (100km north), we travelled through the night. I was good for walking, but my friend couldn't walk like that, she didn't know.* They camped away from the road during the day, *I had to do all the hunting, getting goanna and lizards, my friend nothing.* She'd cook them, when it got dark, and then start walking. *We almost made it, but they picked us up on the road. They took us back and we got the worst hiding ever.* Yet, the light from the fire more than anything else, showed her steely independence: her stubborn spirit smouldering, full of light. She stared in to the fire, the embers and cinders and traces held her gaze, but took her off. You always got the feeling, with GB, that she was 'good for walking,' she could have always made it by herself.

Silence descended, I shivered from the cold. We stared into the fire, thoughts linking up with other times and places.

*How you feeling about tomorrow?*

She began talking about wanting to see her brother and sister, having the family back together again, feeling those binds coming together.

*Mara punka-punka-ni*, I said.

*Yeah, here*, she pointed to her arm. This is a term people use to describe a tingling nervous sensation in the arm, which signals that family is coming close. GB began talking about her father, then her voice trailed off into the fire. Sparks trailed and faded to black.

We were left with thoughts that could not be spoken. We sat for a few minutes and then quietly went to bed. Shifting, drifting off, finding our rhythm... elsewhere. The world slowly turning, we drifted on its axis.

The morning came, we rustled up the fire and GB cooked a damper. We were packed up and gone before six am, none of us could believe it was so early. We rejoined the highway and watched the roos scamper back into the bush. GB wanted to sit in the back, she talked and played with Dusty. Cath and I talked about things, turning around and leaving the road for glimpses to keep Dusty entertained. GB fell asleep, it caught on, Cath too and Dusty. I drove on, the kilometres slowly sinking towards Kalgoorlie. I thought of everything GB had said yesterday and last night, catching glimpses of her life. I thought of the sadness and sense of togetherness that waited in Kalgoorlie, the nerves that tingle. I couldn't help think of Cath's dad dying two years ago, watching him fight as his body slipped away. I glanced at Cath as she slept and remembered her family's mourning that bound everyone on the edge of their grief a little closer.

Mourning is infinite because death cannot be grasped, writes Simon Critchley (1997: 73). What he means, is that there is no proper account, no grasping of death as such, death extends beyond knowledge, is unknowable and thus we mourn infinitely for that which has no proper account, for that which our only response is 'the speechlessness of sobs' and murmurs trailing into silence (Lingis, 1994: 113). Shared finitude uttered on the edge of grief: there is that sense of death and life, its touch, which retreats.

To speak of death writes Derrida is to 'traverse speech at the very point where words fail us' (2001: 210). We stammer and fumble with desolate sighs and murmurs: tears form when there is too much to say, too much that we cannot say or that can be said, that overwhelms and envelopes and consumes our very being. Tears form in the voice (Derrida, 2001: 201), leaves one gasping, feeling for words. What is said in death has no hold, as Lingis takes up and extends below:

"It'll be alright, Mom" which you know is a stupid thing to say...she does not reproach you for what you said; in the end it doesn't matter, what was imperative was only that you say something, anything. That your hand and your voice extend to her in

accompaniment to the nowhere she is drifting on to, that the warmth and tone of your voice come to her as her own breath gives way... (1994: 109)

In Aboriginal custom, the name of someone who has died cannot be said, their things—clothes, bedding, the house in which they lived, photographs—are either burnt or abandoned, or safely secured to be brought out many years later once present memory has stilled. People are ‘too sorry’ to utter the name or to see the belongings of their relative. Something of the person remains in the name, the belongings, the image; their presence is too close, it still dwells too much, people are too sorry to be reminded. It is not that people want to forget, to be done with the dead and move on, but that one cannot be done with those that have died, that their mark on one’s life still burns and aches infinitely so, that their life is still too close to one’s presence: another still moves in death. Thus the belongings and images of deceased people represents this inexorable mourning—the too close pain of this—that says too much, that consumes all too strongly one’s life, one’s relation to the death of others.

The sun climbed higher in the eastern sky, massive mine tailings dumps banked up, white and desolate against the sky, breaking my thoughts: like some apocalyptic statue of our time. Single men in reflective clothing in Toyotas and groups in buses drove past us with their orange safety lights flashing, their two metre high visibility flags attached to their bull-bars bending against the wind and the accelerator. It felt like another era, but not of the past, some desolate future piling up against the horizon, that awaits us. Middle-aged white men with beards and overalls and steel-capped boots, orange lights flashing on their roofs, travelling up highways in generic white Toyotas. (The characters that appear in studded-leather-pants with arse cheeks cut out in *Mad Max 2* are strangely more comforting; at least they have a sense of fun in their post-apocalyptic environment!)

The others slept and the cabin of our car was like an iron lung, bellowing and deflating in the others’ exhalation as we went down the road. My thoughts materialising and forming into some fantastic Mad Max machine. Strange how thoughts merge with surrounding, how they take you away, take you off and elsewhere.

The motor droned on. The tyres rumbled. Switches and handles and gauges rattled, trembled, fell and rose or teetered on the edge of doing something. Murmurs and cooing and other touch your heart stuff came in sonorous moments from my travelling companions. The force of motor, trajectory, ground and articulation points gently agitated us. Slowly we woke as a voice interrupted.

*Where are we?*

*About one hour out of Kalgoorlie.*

*How long did I sleep?*

*One hundred km's or more.*

*Wow, things have changed!*

We had left the open spaces of marginal desert country, the mulga gatherings and salt lake exposures, the rocky red breakaways and eucalyptus fringed creek-line retreats. We were now in gentle undulations and well-treed gumlet, salmon and wiry gum extensions.

We stopped, changed positions, Cath drove on. GB was happy in the back. I turned, awkwardly to obliquely face GB, the seat belt and action of gravity strained against my neck. She was self-reflective, turned to the window, not sitting side on nor front on, but in-between those two positions, oblique. I watched her eyes flicker across the landscape holding something on the road's verge, like a gauge that rapidly plummets across a field of view. We neared Kalgoorlie. We arrived in the back blocks and were soon in the town. GB looked out for 'who was around' but hid herself in the process, she told us to have 'a spin,' we went up and down a few streets and parked in the main street.

We got out, excited. GB clutched Cath's arm and awkwardly hugged her in the clear winter light of Kalgoorlie's iron, glass and brick main street. We hovered around the car, looked down at ourselves and tried as best we could to rearrange the red dirt and car-travel crumples from our person. Everyone else here was so clean and neat, the smell of shampoo and deodorant trailed like an afterburner after another's passage along the main street. It was so orderly none of this seemed very real. We plucked up the courage, looked at our little group and with thoughts like 'stuff em' we joined the pavement. We found a little park with a water fountain in the main street. GB found some people she knew, we got something to eat, had a coffee and had a look at Kalgoorlie.

GB was anxious to see her dad. We drove to the nursing home. GB wanted us all to come. We asked several nurses, and finally found one that knew GB's dad. We walked through the linoleum hallways, bowing our heads, not wanting to look into the rooms that held frail bodies and blaring televisions. We got to GB's dad's room, Cath took one look and couldn't go in, all she could see was her dad, we broke into 'the speechlessness of sobs' (Lingis, 1994: 113). GB and I went in.

GB spoke to him, told him who it was, *it's me dad, I'm here.*

He slowly turned his head, his soul returning in his daughter's presence. GB kept speaking to him, told him of how Lily and Boyie were coming to see him. The television was screaming, garish, obscene, it flickered fluorescent light, heightening the sense of death.

It was foreign news in French on full volume through plastic speakers. We turned the fucking thing off. We stood either side of GB's dad and held his hands. His head strong, raging against his retreating body. Cath was in tears outside, just beyond the doorway. I couldn't look at her without choking, she couldn't look in without streaming. GB kept talking and reassuring her father, her voice cutting through, keeping us all together. I listened to her, as if that was all I had. I felt awfully exposed when she was silent. GB kept wiping her eyes, looking at her father, keeping his attention, their eyes did not waver. She told him of all that had been happening, where she'd been, *out our way*, she told him of where the family all was. We stayed, GB talking. GB told her father that she had to go and see Boyie (in prison), and that she would come back with Lily, who was coming from Perth in the afternoon. He started to go and 'come to' gently. We huddled in the doorway spoke softly, and then left.

An old woman as we passed by sang out as she sat in a chair next to a window. We went over, *where you mob from*, she told us about herself, she was from Kalgoorlie, this is her country. Her energy, and spunk lifted our departure; she thanked us for 'sitting down' with her for a few minutes. We found the exit. And were outside. We exhaled, breathed the clear crisp winter air, and spoke in a little huddle and held each other's eyes.

We drove around while GB organised accommodation, we went to the prison to see Boyie, and found out when Lily got in. It was late afternoon by the time we got back to the nursing home. GB was worried about being all alone, she was saying this as we arrived at the car-park of the nursing hospital, but Lily was due soon. We were just saying our good-bye when Lily arrived in a taxi. We greeted; GB and Lily waved to Dusty as they went inside.

Cath and I left Kalgoorlie, drove one hundred km's in silence as Dusty slept. It took us awhile but we found a camp. Dusty crawled excitedly, throwing herself on the still warm folds of the canvas swags as we unrolled them. We had a fire, cooked dinner. I sat down and tried to write about the things that took place. We received a call a few weeks later (we were back in Melbourne) to say that GB's father had died. GB, Lily and Boyie were there with him. His funeral was three weeks later in Wiluna.

This cannot account for death, sorrow, grief. But perhaps there is a sense that relationships with others are the life force itself: what we share with others is this exposure, this opening towards life and death, exposed by being in the world. Death doesn't mark life's limit, but shares out again, burns again an infinite exposure to the force of life as a vulnerability and sentience to others, we face the death of others in life, in this world with others. A sentience that works, wounds, re-calls another's stubborn, tender vitality, at the heart of being.

### **An Interrupted Community**

People at Ululla have worked a place for community where the point of connection is one's readiness to be taken away, to be interrupted and shown something else by another; to be prepared to turn towards another without rest. A community that is open to the claim that others make; a community that is therefore restless, not complete in-itself, that is not fulfilled by itself, but is always ready to be moved, and to respond to others. Both here and there, both near and far, from now and long ago, in life and in death. A community that, 'interrupts the totality that would fill it' (Nancy, 1991: 61). A community that works the time and space for interruption (the interruption of political projects, self-centredness, total abstractions, 'objectivity'); always getting ready to be taken away by others, to extend one's-being-in-common that is extensive beyond any boundary or absolute resting place. A community

that is thus not an absence [nor a dysfunction or "problem" to be managed], but a movement, it is unworking in its singular "activity," it is the propagation, even the contagion, or again the communication of community itself that propagates itself or communicates its contagion *by its very interruption*. The contagion interrupts fusion and suspends communion, and this arrest or rupture once again leads back to the communication of community. Instead of closing it in, this interruption once again exposes singularity to its limit, which is to say, to other singularities. (1991: 60, original emphasis)

Thus, the question of thinking community rests in maintaining the space for interruption, of being ready and prepared to breakaway. This is about being prepared to break with those projects and forms of representation that have the intent of 'closing it in,' of 'gathering it towards a centre' where one could stand back and no longer be able to face the interruption that is the experience of community. But surely this must say something, some kind of troubling or agitation or passion can be sensed there—that what we seek by being-with-others is not completion or closure, but an infinite exposure to another turning and sense of the world (Nancy, 2000)—that we seek this for ourselves and because of others and because 'we are all in it together' (Stewart, 2003: 439). We seek out another chance to listen to something different, to something else that happens and affects, that takes one away without rest as a mode of *ex-istence*; maintaining a readiness-at-hand for the work of another. We seek this in others; there is an experience of being human there—we cannot be done with others, enough cannot be said, we cannot help but be moved by all these things (time, events, space, the world, modes of articulation) that happen with others.

**Hamish has recently moved to the small Aboriginal Community of Ululla with his young family. He has started a small business 'Narrative Connections' and works on various projects in the Wiluna area. His most recent project was working in**

collaboration with FORM on a prison art project at the Geraldton Regional Prison entitled *Tjukurrpa Kanyininpa*, go to [www.form.net.au](http://www.form.net.au). He also works part-time with the Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health in Geraldton on their cross-cultural exchange programs for Health undergraduates and lecturers in the Murchison region of WA.

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### Notes

1. A note on the following narrative. Almost a year after this event happened I was able to catch up with GB again at Ululla. We sat outside on chairs positioned in the sun in the early morning. I read through what I had written, she provided corrections and adjustments. It was also the first time we had seen each other since her father passed away, and in a quiet, but important way, it was also a moment when GB and I shared our memories and sadness again.

2. I have indicated GB's speech in italics. This is to indicate that it is my recollection of conversations, and is not verbatim speech.

3. GB was born, and grew up 'out bush' with her family. Her younger brother Boyie, was born 'out bush,' but not long after that, the family 'came in' to town. GB was around six years old when her family came to Wiluna, in 1976. Her family was the last family to live in the traditional way; they travelled mostly around her father's country north and east of Mungilli (850km east-north-east of Wiluna). GB's father and mother had come in town in the late 50's (GB's mother is a Jackman) when most of the Martu people had come into town, including the Jackmans. But, GB's father who was about 16 and yet to be initiated, 'took' her mother from Wiluna (it was a 'wrong way' marriage) and escaped out-bush in the mid 60's where they lived for more than a decade.

4. Ululla Boss (Geoffrey Stewart) is the son of Warri and Yatungka. These two are recognised as the last of the Wiluna mob to live traditionally, see below. Ululla Boss got his nickname from spending a lot of time at Ululla in the late 1990s and early 2000s: people in Wiluna gave him that nickname because he became 'boss' of the station.

5. Warri and Yatungka were 'the last' of the Wiluna mob to be living traditionally. This is the central theme of W.J. Pearsley's (1983), somewhat nostalgic book *The Last of the Nomads*. Pearsley writes that it was with the insistence of a senior elder, Mudjon, an old friend

of Warri, that he decided to mount an expedition with Mudjon in 1977 into the Gibson Desert (in a year of severe drought) to find and bring Warri and Yatungka back to Wiluna. (I have since found this to be a misrepresentation. The expedition was actually organised by Stan Gratte, a man who had been on many journeys into the desert with Mudjon. Stan and other members of the Geraldton Historical Society had an interest in following the old explorers' (Carnegie, Warburton, Giles) tracks in the western desert. Stan got to know many member of the Wiluna community, especially Mudjon who accompanied and directed the expeditions towards water sources, camping sites and away from sacred sites. It was Mudjon who asked Stan to organise an expedition to bring Warri and Yatungka back. Stan then invited Pearsley to join the expedition. Pearsley makes out in his book like the whole thing is his idea, taking on the role of heroic and visionary author. Stan has maintained contact with the Wiluna community, and has forged a strong relationship with Georgina Brown over the last few years). But back to the story of Warri and Yatungka. Warri and Yatungka had married 'wrong way' and had escaped far into the desert (at a time when many other countrymen were 'coming in') in order to maintain their relationship. The expedition brought them back to Wiluna. Warri died a year after he was brought in, Yatungka died the following year. Their son, Ululla Boss, when in his late teens, spent considerable time with GB's family in the desert. GB talks of her mother and father looking after him. Ululla Boss's younger brother Romie also lived and travelled with GB's family. Stan still wonders at the ethics of bringing Warri and Yatungka in. However, it was the community's insistence that he use his skills and capacities to bring them back. Stan was paying back his debt to the community, and in a sense the decision was beyond his control.

6. Mungilli became an 'outstation' where people from Wiluna lived, a few years after Warri and Yatungka were 'found.' It is about 700km directly east of Wiluna and about 100km or so from where they were found.

7. The Wiluna shire commissioned a sculptor to create a statue commemorating Warri and Yatungka, it is suitably romantic and nostalgic.

8. GB returned to her country with Stan Gratte and Mariam Hercock in 2007. Stan is the man mentioned who gave GB his red shirt. Stan and Mariam organised a trip to take GB back to where Stan's party found her. This, along with other journeys has enabled Hercock (2009) to write *Born in the Desert: The Land and Travels of a Last Australian Nomad*. The book is largely a biography of Georgina Brown but also includes a geographical history of the western desert.

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