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## **Becoming postcolonial: getting lost with Stephen Muecke's No Road and retelling Australia**

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**BECOMING POSTCOLONIAL  
GETTING LOST FOR A WHILE WITH  
STEPHEN MUECKE'S *No Road*  
AND REMAKING AUSTRALIA**

Lisa Slater

Stephen Muecke's *No Road* (1997) is a travel book that generates profoundly new ways of thinking about Australia. Muecke proposes that if Australia is to become postcolonial than we must change the stories we tell and the way that we tell them. To take up the challenge he transforms the archetypal journey into a road that leads nowhere and explores instead an Australia overflowing with stories and potentiality. *No Road* is a hybrid text that weaves together Muecke's real and imagined travels throughout Australia, travels in which he pursues a dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous histories. It is an experimental text, which juxtaposes memoir, theory, poetic reverie, letters, anecdotes, historical enquiry, personal speculation and Aboriginal oral narrative, positioning itself between fact and fiction. Muecke generates a critical practice that does not survey and classify Australia, but rather participates in and produces new cultural practices. He suggests:

Something new begins when the answer the local gives is not forced into a universal language of rationality in order to have an understanding determined by this interrogator from a more powerful place.

Something new begins if such interrogators have to invest something of their subjectivity, if they have to negotiate, change, and learn to belong. (*No Road* 184)

In this paper I pose the questions: *what* begins when one attempts to learn to belong through negotiation and investing one's subjectivity in the local and Indigenous world? In assembling such disparate texts, voices and stories, what is Muecke *making* of Australia and subjectivity? How does changing the stories we tell transfigure inhabitation?

Storytelling is a way of attempting to transform space into place. Generating knowledge of a country is a way of belonging and inhabiting the country. Thereby, for all fictocriticism's interrogation and unsettling of Western knowledge, the writing subjects are participating in inscribing their presence in the country. As Muecke travels the country he encounters other subjects and other knowledge and self-reflexively records the effects of otherness upon himself. *No Road* is a heteroglossic text that destabilises and contests colonial history and confronts it with what it represses—the intersubjective colonial encounter. However, Muecke is attempting to find new ways to write Australia and forge alternative forms of belonging. He inscribes his interpretations of the country and, as James Paull (1997) argues, he thereby constitutes (alternative) histories (146). However lightly Muecke travels across the surface of the country, he nonetheless generates a poetic history, or what could be called *becoming* postcolonial, which has transformational capacities.

In attempting to forge a sense of belonging Muecke acts to reaffirm his subjectivity. Muecke's methodology, in which he gathers and assembles textual remnants to construct a dialogic text that reworks ways of knowing the country, could also be understood as the generation of a place from which to speak. This textual site, in the hope of forging a dialogue across cultural difference, both unsettles and confirms his subjectivity. The act of constituting a heteroglossic text is an unmaking and re-making of ways of knowing the country. It is, however, an anti-colonial making of history, knowledge and interpretative practices that does not settle, but keeps moving. Postcolonial belonging and subjectivity are constituted through dialogic storytelling that is not accumulative or progressive, but rather invites participation and dialogue. Muecke suggests the possibility of generating a homeland through narrating everyday experiences of negotiating intersubjective, intertextual and cross-cultural relations, which result in a subject becoming other than what they are. In so doing, Muecke sets forth a vision in which Indigeneity operates as a transformational force in this country and he sees postcolonial Australia as highly culturally miscegenated.

As Muecke argues, the exposure of mainstream Australia to Indigenous knowledges affirms different forms of cultural life. This not only challenges Australian identity, but also strains at narrative forms

(*No Road* 228). Dominant narratives not only tell stories, they prevent stories being told. They prevent questions being asked that might lead to answers to contemporary problems. As Stuart Hall (1984) argues in an interview, ideologies, whether explicit or implicit, construct the framework of interpretation and understanding:

narrative tells a story into which it is impossible to enter or introduce any questions at all. I think one is then aware in retrospect of the degree to which historical reconstruction wraps up or moves around the contradictory interpretations, which are always there when one deals with a historical event. (O'Hara 4)

Particular, singular events acquire historical significance by being imagined as conforming to a narrative model. The particularity of the event is abstracted at the cost of that which is in excess of the narrative frame (Fineman 74). Western historical narratives privilege causation over the contingent and the accidental. To write of the particular experiences of individual lives risks being ahistorical. However, to conform to narrative models risks marginalising and excluding alternative experiences and histories. If we continue to tell stories in the same way, to paraphrase Hall, those stories, or ways of telling stories, write the storyteller (O'Hara 17). What might be repressed in normative narrative forms is the experience of living in a colonised and contested country.

Muecke rightly asks, "what kind of story do you tell on the road if you don't want to write like an Imperial highway, on the road to further colonial expansion [. . . ]?" (*No Road* 192). One could argue that in the face of such difficulties and restraints, the writer who desires to write Australia otherwise, is doomed either to be ahistorical or to romanticise otherness. Despite the problems of resuscitating the romantic imagination, which has the potential to efface difference by synthesising alterity into one's desires, the political urgency of contemporary Australian race relations requires risks. However, Muecke both takes risks and proceeds with caution, by juxtaposing the "literary" with the theoretical and self-reflective. In so doing, he limits his imperialising, romantic imagination. As Muecke writes in questioning his methodology:

for the moment I was a tangential tourist, refusing to do "disciplined" research in favour of the interdisciplinary mode of enquiry. That seemed to call for a judicious mix of the anecdotal and banal backed up by the "solidity" of theory so that one can relativise the position of

the theorist in relation to the so-called objects of research. But at the same time having to remain rigorously cynical and unenchanted by the "usual" tourist spots, an attitude typical of the "bourgeois" traveller. (*No Road* 32)

Muecke chooses a fictocritical style because contemporary intellectual engagement has not only failed to solve contemporary problems of race relations, but also has obscured them. Indigenous people have long played the role in the national psyche of "the absent people from the 'dead centre'" (*No Road* 227). Through the rise of the land rights movement, coupled with the official enquiries into black deaths in custody and the stolen generations, Aboriginal people were transformed, in the national imaginary, from objects of history, to subjects of history. Indigenous historical perspectives have denied the closed narratives of colonial history, challenging the narrative of benign settlement and the rightful political sovereignty of non-Indigenous people. Furthermore, the exposure of Aboriginal knowledges affirms different forms of cultural life, which might in turn reconfigure the social imaginary, and therefore the civic body. An uncertainty has infused the country. White authority is being undermined as Australians are reinterpreting their country and history.

Muecke answers the failures of contemporary politicians, writers and academics to respond to the challenges of contemporary cross-cultural engagement, by renovating "disciplinary textual spaces" (Kerr 119). *No Road* begins with the problematic of "what language can I use to carry this story?" (15). Muecke suggests that representations of Aboriginal people are utilised to fill a lack in non-Aboriginal Australia, that of the "eros to our thanatos" (*No Road* 15). This has resulted in Aboriginal people being deployed to play out a limiting and prescriptive role upon the stage of white Australia. Muecke deploys writing as a method of enquiry, a partial and provisional form of storytelling and textual vulnerability, in the hope of forging new social connections. Muecke affirms that:

getting to know may mean leaving home and getting lost for a while, to admit that there may not be a road going anywhere that we all agree on, but that somewhere along the road is a local guide [ . . . ]. (*No Road* 130)

Muecke's writing acts, like the local custodians who guide him, as a guide for his readers. *No Road* interrupts the readers' interpretative

process, unsettling them from normative ways of knowing the country, and opening up a site of uncertainty, which might induce new ways of thinking about Australia, and in so doing generate new cultural forms.

## Making Stories Up

Muecke emphatically states that "[i]f Australia is to be changed, for example, by becoming a republic, then the kinds of stories we tell about Australia will have to be changed" (*No Road* 220). In response to the impossibility of speaking for the other, the ethical imperative of negotiating and respecting incommensurabilities (Kerr 120), and the need for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians to co-exist, Muecke proposes alternative forms of storytelling. As Heather Kerr (2001) argues, the other's voice is unrepresentable without synthesising it or recuperating it into a dominant narrative (120). However, one must not only "realise" the other, but also take account of the little histories or unrepresentable voices that unsettle and disrupt master narratives. Although Muecke's nomadic text runs the risk of essentialising, romanticising and synthesising the other into his imaginative gaze, his textual incoherence—shifting between the personal and the theoretical—sets limits on his poetic imagination. He is returned to speaking for himself—a self who continually exposes his limitations. However, by accumulating fragments of little histories and unrepresentable voices Muecke composes an assemblage that articulates anti-narratives of Australia. In so doing, he proposes an alternative country in which to live with and be remade by difference.

*No Road* can profitably be read in terms of Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the nomadic text. To insist, as does Muecke, that getting to know might mean getting lost for a while and relying on local guides is to generate nomadic thinking. Universal authority is deferred to the local. New assemblages, moreover, are continually disbanded, to initiate new connections and prevent local knowledge becoming codified into normality. *No Road* is a nomadic text, an enunciative assemblage, which refuses disciplinary boundaries in the interest of privileging local knowledge and little histories. It incorporates what Leelha Gandhi (1998) calls historical non-players (173), whose speech acts fall outside of recorded historical consciousness. In attending to local knowledge Muecke forges new alliances in an attempt to negotiate the impasses of

cultural differences. Each chapter of *No Road* operates as a *plateau*, a site where seemingly disparate theories, anecdotes, incommensurable cultural perspectives, experiences and sensations are assembled in an attempt to forge new connections. In short, what in *No Road* could be read as textual incoherence, I understand to be a site in which differences are assembled, not as a gesture of cognitive mastery, perpetuating Imperialism, but rather in an attempt to "realise" the other(ness), without synthesising otherness into the same. In the fragmentary style of the text, Muecke urges the reader to consider what might happen if we were to conceive of Australia as already full—"not lacking anything so that we have to look to others to complete our national psyche" (*No Road* 225).

### Making Room for Anecdotes and Little Histories

How can white writers represent cross-cultural engagements that tell of reciprocity and exchange without falling into the trap of speaking for the other? In juxtaposing his commentary on the straight roads of the Nullarbor Plain, on which he set out as a young academic, with his rich and transformational friendship with Gloria, Muecke hints at an answer to the question he poses—"what language can I use to *carry* this story?" (*No Road* 15). Muecke's answer to this question is in the posing of it. It is the fragments of a story, in this case the anecdotal, which disrupt and exceed representative narratives as they open the narrative frame to "complicitous alternatives" (Fineman 74). Anecdotes introduce into the empty historical time of modernity the singularity of events. In so doing, they interrupt and challenge the type of historical narratives that purport, through abstracting from experiences, to represent historical truths. The anecdotal—"elements of a story"—reintroduces history's other, the particularity and singularity of events that cannot be contained within conventional narratives.

The anecdote ruptures historical and racial discourse as it privileges the *experiences* of history. Gloria relays to Muecke an incident in which she met a local Aboriginal man in Darwin. She is greatly charmed by the man but perplexed by his answer to a question she poses to him. He invites Gloria to his country and she asks, "Is there a road out there, is it a good road?," to which he responds, puzzled, "Road? No road . . . NO ROAD. Bitumen all the way. Bitumen aall the way" (*No Road* 18). In incorporating this "second hand" anecdote Muecke reveals that

like him, Gloria also negotiates cultural differences with Indigenous people. Muecke suggests similarities between himself and Gloria without negating their differences. He incorporates Gloria's voice into his text by acknowledging her as the source of a story he shares with the reader. He addresses the story to his now dead friend. Gloria's anecdote, from which the title of the book is taken, is not only a technique for "realising" the other, but also a means whereby Muecke can introduce the voice of the other without assuming authority over it (Kerr 120). By borrowing the words of Gloria, Muecke dialogises his text, inferring that both his text and himself are composed from intertextual and intersubjective relationships.

There is no beginning, as such, to *No Road*; instead the reader is positioned, like Muecke, in the middle of an assemblage of thinking. Several times throughout the text the reader is introduced to writing projects that Muecke is setting out on, all of which involve him leaving Sydney and principally heading into "remote" Australia. Muecke frames the text to give the impression of candour. The anecdotal style and seeming conversational ease and meditative tone of the text give the impression that readers are privy to what would normally operate as the outside of the finished text, that is, the context of Muecke's writing, what motivates him both personally and professionally, and his influences and desires, in all their multiplicity and diversity. When he sets out to write, in collaboration with other artists, a book on the Bungle Bungles, he visits one of the traditional custodians of the country, Bonnie Edwards. He meets her with the expectation that she will share her stories and knowledge of the Bungle Bungles. Instead she entertains him with anecdotes and takes him camping with her family. Muecke speculates that Bonnie "cannot, and doesn't want to, tell stories of the Bungles. Or not yet, and in the meantime *gardiya*<sup>1</sup> talk is weaving the fabric which will recreate the site as a National Park" (1997: 144). Muecke suggests that dominant white narratives, which limit the terms of inhabiting and co-existence in Australia, are further territorialising the country.

His project of recording stories of the Bungle Bungles appears to be stalled or derailed by an absence of Indigenous knowledge. It is, however, this blocked way that forces him to listen and attend to Bonnie Edwards on her own terms. Muecke poses the question:

With what voice do I speak, and why have I in this case sought witness in the voice of Bonnie Edwards, the voice supposedly without force? Why is it that I cannot simply write with an inherited authority, continuing to footnote the great European authors, dragging their old dreams from the cellar and packing them away again in the attic? (*No Road* 141)

Muecke inserts Bonnie's voice, a voice supposedly without force, as a means of exposing himself, and his non-Indigenous readers, to the limitations of ourselves and our powers of conception. The power of dominant white Australia is maintained by having the right to decide on the interpretative context and in so doing mainstream white Australia denies justice to many Aboriginal people. Muecke the cultural studies academic, with his ready tape recorder, has no place here. However, when camping Bonnie inserts him into her "social architecture" that is organised according to age and gender. Muecke is deterritorialised from his authority as white academic and positioned in accordance with Bonnie's cultural knowledge. Different social codes are in operation from those of the cosmopolitan academics. These alternative social codes slow down Muecke the cultural theorist. This deceleration loosens Muecke from his academic authority and opens him to accepting the authority of someone else's alternative knowledge.

Furthermore, by inserting this anecdote into his text Muecke takes up his own challenge that the "task of contemporary thought is to attribute a value to the strangeness of others, and to provide occasions for giving this value a force and a usefulness" (*No Road* 182). Muecke gives a value to Indigenous cultural knowledge by attempting to belong according to Bonnie's social codes and also by retelling this story and disseminating alternative cultural knowledge. Muecke writes that he thinks that culture is "a set of competing forces" and that it is productive (*No Road* 220). He argues that writers, in producing books, concepts and stories, create forms of subjectivity (*No Road* 221), since stories trace a path for readers to follow. Writing forges connections between seemingly disparate fragments, stories and cultural knowledge and in so doing reconfigures the way people perceive the world and their subjectivity. By including the story of how he was inserted into Bonnie's social architecture, Muecke suggests that Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural knowledge are not in opposition to each other, but rather can and do co-exist.

The racial discourse that establishes uncrossable distance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people ignores, at Australia's peril, the diverse possibilities of co-existence. *No Road* represents a diversity of anti-colonial forms of co-existence. In the section entitled "textual suburbs" Muecke reflects upon the time when he first began to write, wanting to learn about the medium of writers—language. He did a lot of study and went to lectures on linguistics: "They kept telling me that language is a system, a 'system of meaning' [...]. I learnt a lot about the infinite power of language to generate words" (*No Road* 20). However, in "keeping quiet for a bit" (*No Road* 22), and thinking about language, he comes to a different understanding:

A language like English is like a group of textual suburbs [...]. In each suburb the language is like the architecture, like spaces it vibrates in [...]. There is no overall system, no capacity for infinite generation. We can sometimes find ourselves in a space where a word has never been used before, where that is just the right word to use in that time and place. Sometimes we travel to the edge of the city and the words run out at the same time as the houses. Then we might find ourselves in a culture and a community where words might have a completely different purpose to the one we imagine they have: the landscape changes colour, we begin to lose our grip (*No Road* 22-23).

Muecke's textual topography imaginatively takes the reader to places where "words might have a completely different purpose" (*No Road* 23). He situates the reader at a point of cross-cultural contact. At this site, someone else's place, Muecke privileges negotiation and co-existence.

## The Power of the Word

If we can no longer assume that how we perceive the world exists in the world prior to discourse, then inserting alternative knowledge into a representational terrain potentially reconfigures interpretation. As Muecke insists in "Lonely Representations" (1992), if the

subject is always partially constituted in advance by discourse, and there is never a general world or structure behind each utterance, but only the specific linguistic rituals that make each social occasion function, then one can argue that words are not used primarily for referral or representation, but that words are interventions [...]. While "things" are continually changing, and these changes provide the occasion for speech (things intervene in language), it is also the case that speech has the power to instantly transform things through,

for eg, performative speech (judge sentences defendant). Words and things, in their mutual interventions, can anticipate each other, be retrospective, speed up or slow down their effects, but there is never a priority of the one over the other, or a strict causality; one is not the referent while the other is always representation [ . . . ]. The chain of speech is like a chain of commands, instructions for living, not because language "tells us about the world," but because acts of speech are, for the most part, all one has to go on. (39)

Therefore, language is not so much a vehicle of communication, as of power. It is a means to make people act. As Muecke recognises while at Fitzroy Crossing, where the words of tourism do not belong, the locals act in ways that are different to tourists' expectations. To protect Aboriginal sites and to inform tourists of significant Aboriginal sites, the state has erected signs that read "*Site of Significance*." As Muecke insists:

Significance is the wrong word, these sites are not full of meanings, cluttered with signs like a library. Ask the locals: *something there* they will say, it *moves*, there's a *power*. But if you put up a sign saying *Site of Power*, the authorities would laugh: mumbo jumbo [ . . . ]. But you have to ask yourself, what has that site been doing over the years, getting people to do things or producing meanings? (*No Road* 35)

The power to fix meaning, that is the context of interpretation, requires, as Derrida argues, a community of consensus (Caputo 1997). The state's tourism body is one community of consensus that determines that traditional knowledge is "mumbo jumbo," and another community, the local Indigenous community, recognises it as their truth. Of course the state has more power to determine the context of broader interpretations and the locals' interpretation is dismissed by mainstream Australia as pre-modern. But, as Muecke insists, there are places where the "words you have brought with you are radically implausible" (*No Road* 35). Although the traditional custodians hold very little authority beyond Fitzroy Crossing, when at home they hold the power not only to unsettle the self-assured Western visitor's "truth," but also to realign visitors' interpretative practices. The visitor is reminded that this is contested country and there is a continual struggle over meaning.

To traverse the cultural differences that he experiences at Fitzroy Crossing, Muecke defers to local knowledge. In investing something of one's self in local knowledge one acts to help create new enunciative sites for marginalised knowledge. Marginalised people affect the powerful discourses of nation making and therefore participate

in creatively remaking the world. By introducing these voices into his text Muecke establishes a dialogue with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories. He cannot return from his foray across the "other side of the frontier" with Indigenous knowledge, but he can, in his storytelling, trace emergent, hybrid cultural forms, which are and have always been possible in colonial Australia.

Muecke tempers the desire to enfold otherness into an unrestrained romantic imagination by deferring to local authorities. When listening to a story on Aboriginal television,<sup>2</sup> Muecke ponders, "what gave one the right to follow" (*No Road* 197). The story tells of travellers coming to Alice Springs and only being able to enter through Honeymoon Gap escorted by an elder. The travellers must follow in the footsteps of the Elder: "each footprint on top of the other" (*No Road* 197). He goes on to write that there is:

a lesson here for thinking about getting to know places, or texts—it's all in the approach. If you want the opinion of the Aboriginal custodians of sites, then you have to observe the protocols. In observing the rules, that is, the footsteps, you can get new insights into places and their meanings. (*No Road* 198)

Muecke suggests that forms of knowing can be experienced by following in the footsteps of local custodians, either literally or, in the case of texts, metaphorically, rather than mapping a site with knowledge from elsewhere.

Muecke exposes himself to a different way of knowing the Bungle Bungles by following in the "footsteps" of a local, Joy, a young Aboriginal woman, who tells Muecke that

she likes to let her gaze rest on the empty space which other people leave behind. In such moments, it seems, she lets her body go, a body which has become responsive through intense multiple relationships of Aboriginal social life. She encourages, without judging it, the feeling which is growing in her and at this very moment lets herself be overcome by a sensation of liveliness and power. (*No Road* 109)

Joy's local knowledge acts as a guide for Muecke to disrupt his interpretative process and to be open to Indigenous ways of knowing. Muecke writes:

"What would it be like if I wasn't here?" the post-tourist might ask, or "How can I lose myself in this place by following a track to the point of disappearance (instead of earnestly and quickly crunching around spectacular sites until they are gone)?" Instead of imagining myself "at

one" with a place, a plodding spirituality, might I not just imagine I'm already gone—that much *will* be certain—and in this lightness lift ever so slightly off the ground so that objects are only faintly touched, real seeing is in the glimpse, sounds reduced to a whisper [ . . . ]? (*No Road* 135)

Muecke's reference to a "plodding spirituality" could be read as a reference to non-Indigenous people's desire to reaffirm their self-identity by imposing an imported knowledge upon a place. Hence the "plodding spirituality" is a recuperative gesture. Indigenous knowledge is reduced and limited to something similar to Western knowledge, which leaves the "tourist" untouched by difference and not subject to another's knowledge or ethics. Muecke perceives the Bungle Bungles through the prism of his understanding of local, Indigenous knowledge, in an attempt to offer Indigenous knowledge a broader cultural value. Furthermore, he advocates "faintly touch[ing]" as an anti-colonial gesture, as grasping at knowledge reduces it to an object and disavows knowledge as lived and always in process. Readers are offered a trace to follow that is a complex, dialogic path in which desire and writing have been realigned toward Indigeneity (Paull 147).

Muecke's speculation that "getting to know may mean leaving home and getting lost for a while" (*No Road* 130), paradoxically suggests that to see contemporary Australia one needs to lose sight of oneself and one's country. Muecke's juxtaposition of Bonnie Edward's light and entertaining anecdotes and her more serious cultural knowledge with his mediations on alternative understandings of Australia, suggests that his 'getting lost' is supported by taking a place in the local social network. The artistic project that he is setting out on (the book on the Bungle Bungles), is one in which he wants to imagine himself out of European enculturation. Arguably, this is a futile endeavour. However, although one cannot cleanse oneself of cultural knowledge, one can gain new insights and alternative perspectives by talking and listening to people hitherto designated as "other." Bonnie acts as a local guide, not in the sense that Muecke had initially wanted. Muecke is hoping that Bonnie will be able to share her traditional knowledge of her country. Instead Bonnie entertains him with anecdotes about shoplifters in her local store. Her generous and humorous storytelling sustains him in the comfort and care of friendship, a space in which he is safe not to know himself, and thereby safe to make his self available to

knowing differently. In Bonnie's "safe house," in which she is the host, hospitality is extended according to a law that Muecke must attend to as a guest. The effect of Bonnie's storytelling is to slow Muecke down: his project disappears, only to reappear transformed, having found a new way. In slowing Muecke down, Bonnie is not a site for the collection of meanings, a utility from which whitefellas might procure "other" knowledge; rather she acts to reassert reciprocity into cross-cultural engagements. Muecke learns, or relearns, that knowledge and insight are not the accumulation of facts, but negotiating living together.

Muecke attempts to negotiate the impasse of cultural differences, not by driving along the straight roads and Imperial highways of Western knowledge, but by getting lost and being pulled into affective encounters with others and otherness. The textual topography of *No Road* opens up spaces between one text and another—one voice and another—in which in nobody (no body) owns the representational ground (99). In this third space, between identities, one is made aware that "I" is other-constructed, and thereby one has reciprocal responsibilities to the other. Furthermore, this space is the site of socialising forces—a shared space in which in order to travel across cultural differences one must forego a coherent, cohesive identity. The results of these affective encounters with others are new cultural formations and subjectivity. Muecke's answer to the question he poses—"what language can I use to *carry* this story?" (*No Road* 150)—is to reconfigure the representational terrain by acknowledging and accepting his place in a network of Indigenous rights and obligations.

Muecke ends *No Road* by playfully tracing cultural growth that is generated from a dialogue with cultural difference. In his retelling of the story of Captain Cook's shoes, he suggests that the "postcolonial is, ideally, a way of thinking oneself out of imperial and Oedipal stories about Australia. And recognising Aboriginality will help forge a new postcolonial Australia" (*No Road* 237). In the story (perhaps fictional) of Captain Cook's shoes, which have been abandoned on the beach and become a local song, Muecke wonders about the wonders of cultural convergence and transformation. As he writes, "the anticolonial gesture is to chuck out those shoes and to create a song—a resonance—not to tolerate the intolerable, but to transform it into artful politics" (*No Road* 238). This is the path that *No Road* takes and Muecke encourages his readers to follow. Situated in *No Road's* plural and



heterogeneous textual landscape, in which no one text or perspective dominates, both the writing subject, Muecke, and the reader's interpretative authority are continually blocked. As Caputo argues, there is no justice when the way is not blocked, when "we are just sailing along on automatic with cruise control and with our hands barely on the wheel" (*No Road* 135). Within Muecke's dialogic textual landscape, the reader is reassured that there is always a local guide, who leaves a friendly trace (*No Road* 197), if one is willing to be open to the other and learn to belong according to the ethics and laws of the locals. In so doing, Muecke remembers colonisation. Muecke recognises the country is overflowing with stories and generates a form of anti-colonial storytelling in which the white writer is at home with discomfort and dislocation. In so doing, he makes Australia different.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Gardiya is Gooniyandi (Kimberly language group) for White person; see Thieberger (1994): 209.

<sup>2</sup> Muecke footnotes (*No Road* 249) that he was watching *Wedgetail Eagle Dreaming*, CAAMA, 1991, Arrente/English, Presented by Rosalie Riley, Narrated by Harold (Ross) Ellis.

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