

intuition and feeling – reading bergson with neidjie and country

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This article strives to connect Henri Bergson's intuition of duration as the basis for thinking the universe as an enduring Whole in *Creative Evolution* with the teaching of feeling articulated by the Australian Indigenous elder Bill Neidjie in his book, *Story About Feeling*.¹ This is a difficult relation to engender because these two thinkers belong to vastly different traditions and each thinker elaborates a conceptual world that is irreducible to the world of the other. The reasons that I wish to connect their thinking are political and ethical as well as philosophical. For all of the differences between Neidjie and Bergson, both thinkers elaborate rigorous methods for thinking as participation in the rhythms of life. Each thinker in his own way, teaches that participation in the rhythms of life is participation in the love of the world, the love of becoming, the love of the places in which we live and that we are. These teachings are crucially important in an age increasingly

pervaded by nihilism, regression into xenophobic fantasies and wall building.

In order to connect Bergson and Neidjie, I will not try to incorporate the ideas of one thinker into the framework of the other.² I aim to relate Bergson's intuition of duration and Neidjie's method of feeling, without either thinker's conceptual world becoming the master discourse in which the other's thought is understood. I argue for resonances between their philosophies, which is to say that I compare their ideas and find some commonalities between them, without seeking to elide the incompatible aspects of their respective conceptual worlds.

Maintaining the irreducibility of Bergson and Neidjie's projects is especially important in the case of Bill Neidjie because he is an Aboriginal thinker who needs to be heard in a context that is dominated by the logic and regimes of settler colonialism. According to Patrick Wolfe's influential formulation, settler colonialism is primarily about territory, and it elaborates a logic of elimination.³ Settler colonialists seized the lands of First Nations peoples, and in order to expropriate First Nations lands, settlers strove to destroy existing native societies, their conceptual worlds, and their regimes of sovereignty. In place of what they sought to eliminate, the settler colonists imported their own ideas, practices, and regimes of sovereignty from Europe. Their worlds are founded on the exclusion and destruction of Indigenous worlds.⁴ Crucially, as Wolfe and other theorists emphasise, settler colonialism does not merely designate events in the past, such as the British Empire's invasion of the continent now known as Australia, it is the organizing structure that maintains settler societies to this day.⁵ Despite the annihilating logic and practices of settler colonialism, Indigenous peoples and their conceptual worlds survive and resist.⁶ In Australia, there are many First Nations, with many languages and many countries.

Bill Neidjie was a senior law man of the Bunitj clan of the Gagadju. His education includes knowledge of the language, laws, ecology, philosophy, ceremony and songlines not only of his own clan, but also of neighbouring Aboriginal clans.⁷ His book *Story About Feeling* is based on transcriptions by Keith Taylor of audio recordings that Taylor made with Neidjie in 1982 on Bunitj clan lands in Western Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory in Australia. Neidjie elaborated his narratives in Kriol rather than his first language, Gagadju, and he referred to the narratives recorded by Taylor as 'story about feeling.' A monograph with this title was published as part of a project of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre through an Aboriginal managed press in 1989.⁸

The fact that Neidjie composed *Story About Feeling* on his traditional country is crucial. ‘Country’ has a specific sense in Kriol and Aboriginal English. For many Indigenous Australians, “... country may be mother or grandfather, which grows them up and is grown up by them. These kinship terms impose mutual responsibilities of caring and keeping upon the land and people ...”.⁹ Country designates a relationship between people and land of belonging, mutual respect and love.¹⁰ This relationship is intrinsic. As Akarre elder M.K. Turner puts it: “The Land *is* us, and we *are* the Land.”¹¹ Country is not only land in the western sense. The Gay’wu Group of Women write, country is “... also the waters, the people, the winds, animals, plants, stories, songs and feelings, everything that becomes together to make up place. Country is alive for us, it cares for us, communicates with us, and we are part of it.”¹² To say that Neidjie’s thought is elaborated on his country, is to say, as C.F. Black notes, that Neidjie’s ancestral country is an addressee of his discourse; and a participant in the narrative of *Story About Feeling*.¹³

Phillip Morrissey cautions against framing Neidjie’s thought as impersonal and primordial wisdom. For Morrissey, the technology of the book is taken up by Neidjie to reach a bigger audience than he could through oral teaching. His book is a direct engagement with the “challenge of modernity.”¹⁴ While I agree that *Story About Feeling* is a reflexive and self-conscious engagement with the myriad of crises of this age, it must also be emphasised that the authority impelling *Story About Feeling* is “story with spirit” and this is coming from another order of time-place which overflows settler-colonial modernity. Neidjie gives a special sense to the word “story”, which is widely used in Aboriginal English and Kriol. It designates a sacred story, in which the story itself has spirit and can feel the reader as the reader feels the story.¹⁵

Story about Feeling is a complex work speaking to multiple interlocutors: people and country of Neidjie’s Bunitj clan, Aboriginal people and countries of other First Nations, non-Indigenous Australians, and “anyone” who is able to listen to Neidjie’s teaching.¹⁶ His narrative is not merely addressed to human beings. As I said earlier, country is a participant and addressee in Neidjie’s narratives. This includes places in which his text is read, not just in Australia but all over the world.

Bergson’s metaphysics belongs to the tradition of modern western philosophy. As decolonial scholars argue, this tradition is central to positing the western form of man as if it were the human itself. This figuration of man and related Eurocentric claims to define the universe are dependent on the denial of other ontologies.¹⁷ In conformity with the dominant forms of the tradition in which Bergson worked,

there is a hierarchical tendency in his philosophy that valorises the human as the highest achievement of evolution on this planet.¹⁸ In the terms of my argument, his concept of the human is modelled on the western form of man; it did not occur to Bergson that there are existing different ways of being human than being a species dominated by intellect with a fringe of intuitive knowing at edges of the intellect.¹⁹ There are also related strands of explicitly colonial racism in Bergson.²⁰ These tendencies in his project are plainly at odds with Neidjie's thinking with country. And yet, there are other tendencies in Bergson which can be taken up and related fruitfully to Neidjie's teaching.

In addition to valorising the human, Bergson strives to elaborate a philosophy that goes beyond the limits of the human condition.²¹ His celebrated intuition of the self as duration is the basis for thinking beyond the human self, for discovering the universe as the duration of the open Whole. While he thinks that only humans engaged in intuition can do this, Neidjie offers a resonant method of thinking, which he calls feeling and Neidjie teaches that practices of feeling are elaborated by all sorts of beings. I claim that Bergson's method of intuition has a real affinity with Neidjie's method of teaching his listeners about feeling. Further, I claim that Bergson's affirmation of intuition as "mind itself" is resonant with Neidjie's claim that feeling makes the world.²²

We must not go too far in claiming resonances between these thinkers. While some of the differences I have already indicated between them may be amenable to transformation, at least in re-reading Bergson's thought – Bergson invites his readers to go beyond him, acknowledging that his argument in *Creative Evolution* is too sharply drawn and calling for a collaborative and open philosophy of life – there are contradictions between Neidjie and Bergson that cannot be overcome.²³ Neidjie's conceptual world includes aspects of contingency and novelty but is fundamentally grounded in laws of country that never change. In contrast, for Bergson, the only constant in life is change, or duration. The fundamental and sacred status of country has decisive implications for Neidjie's relationship to knowledge and for my reading of his text. Where Bergson strives to articulate his philosophical intuition as fully as possible, Neidjie is explicit about not disclosing everything he knows.²⁴ He is sharing aspects of sacred knowledge of country and keeping profound things about country secret because in his culture that is the law. I have sought to listen to his teaching of feeling and to describe it but I do not seek to analyse or to transform what Neidjie says because I wish to respect his teaching of country and what *Story About Feeling* elaborates will always remain irreducible to the conceptual worlds of western philosophy and its traditions of

interpretation.

REAL BECOMING

Bergson's founding intuition is that the psychic life of the human self is nothing but duration, a constant alteration that ceaselessly engenders novelty. In *Creative Evolution*, reflection upon the self as duration is the basis for the thinker to intuit the very becoming of life. Bergson argues that the Whole universe exists in the manner of a consciousness. The Whole endures.²⁵ This is to say that the Whole is not a totality but necessarily open and becoming. The main image that Bergson deploys to figure the open Whole, is famously, the *élan vital*. This image gives a sense of the virtual source impelling the very happening of evolution.²⁶ This virtual is 'one' in the sense that there is a common source of evolution. But it is also 'many' because this 'one' consists of an extraordinary 'plurality' of different tendencies. Strictly speaking, evolution is not many nor is it one; it is outside the order of number; a qualitative multiplicity of interpenetrating aspects. Bergson writes, "...regarded in itself it is an immensity of virtuality, a mutual encroachment of thousands and thousands of tendencies which nevertheless are 'thousands and thousands' only when once regarded as outside of each other, that is, when spatialized."²⁷ The Being of the *élan vital* is psychic but not in an anthropomorphic sense. The *élan vital* is absolutely impersonal and pre-individual. This virtual, this source of evolution, 'consists' in what Bergson calls a "need of creation".²⁸ The need of creation does not articulate a program or fulfill a superhuman will; it just creates.

While the *élan vital* does not fulfill a plan, its need to create is a need to differentiate 'itself'. This is because the inclinations making up the virtual whole are extremely unstable.²⁹ These inclinations provide directions to the movements of evolution while also leaving significant aspects of the *élan vital* open to indetermination.³⁰ The dissociating of inclinations into diverging tendencies proceeds in a branching series of differentiations rather than in a unilinear movement.³¹ The dissociating movements impels the evolution of starkly different tendencies of life – matter and consciousness, and within consciousness, diverging tendencies of protists, plants, animals and fungi. The tendencies of sexual difference actualize as aspects in many of the diverging tendencies.³²

Bergson's argument that there are directions in the evolution of life is a postulation that acknowledges partial determination in the becoming of life in the creation of new forms. On Deleuze's reading of Bergson, the determinations

of the *élan vital* do not exist ready-made, and are themselves created “along with the act that runs through them.”³³ Bergson’s proof for determination is found in his famous account of the emergence “identical organs” in extremely diverse species. He takes up the example of the emergence of the eye as a response to the problem of light. For Bergson, the organ of the eye is defined by its function rather than the organic material that composes it. He compares the eye of a mollusk and the eye of a vertebrate and argues that the processes of creating the eye of the mollusk and of creating the eye of the vertebrate are so divergent shows the creative and contingent ways that extremely different species have responded to a determination from the virtual to the problem of light.³⁴

For Bergson, all forms of life are bound to fulfil a fundamental law, which he calls the law of attention to life.³⁵ Responding to this fundamental law is necessary for survival. The faculty of thought in human beings is no exception. What he calls the intellect has prehuman roots and evolved first of all in mammalian species as a response to the demands of practical life. Bergson thinks that intellect develops its greatest sophistication in human beings. He claims that intellect structures human understanding but he argues that it is possible to go beyond the human state and the demands of human action and to think differently.³⁶ This is why metaphysics is possible. But a philosopher must engage in tracing the impact of the demands of action on the faculty of knowing before striving to attain knowledge for its own sake; otherwise the philosopher’s results will remain relative to the demands of action.

In *Creative Evolution* Bergson’s account of the genesis of the intellect is presented in counterpoint to the evolution of another form of consciousness, instinct. He argues that the intellect articulates thought in terms that exclude change and duration. This form of thought has evolved to work with inert matter, which it treats as wholly inert. It posits static frames and concepts and operates in the medium of homogeneous space. The intelligence can apply these frames *ad infinitum*. On his argument, the intellect is indispensable to the requirements of human practical life and to science. Tool making is an essential feature of intelligence. It is pre-eminently, “... the faculty for the manufacture of artificial objects, especially tools to make tools and of indefinitely varying this manufacture.”³⁷ But the intelligence is limited by its adaptation to inert matter. It is characterized by a natural inability to understand life and even treats living beings as if they are inert because its procedures are modelled on its work with inert matter. Bergson writes: “Whatever is fluid in the real world will escape it in part and whatever is life in the living will escape it altogether.”³⁸

In stark contrast, instinct is a form of consciousness that knows life from within. It is sympathy, in the etymological sense of the word. Bergson focuses his discussion of instinct on certain species of Hymenoptera, though he also notes that the autopoiesis of cellular life is directed by instinct-knowledge.³⁹ Instinct is an implicit consciousness; it is felt rather than thought. To cite one of his best-known examples, there are various species of wasps that paralyse their prey without killing their victim and then deposit their eggs in the prey's body. When the wasp's larvae hatch, the larvae can feed on the still living prey's body.⁴⁰ From an intellectual point of view, which is a formal knowledge of external relations, the sophistication of the wasp's knowledge of its prey's anatomy and vulnerabilities seems magical. But there is no magic here: instinct is naturally attuned to know the prey from within. Bergson says that if instinct 'could talk' it could "... give up to us the most intimate secrets of life."⁴¹ This does not happen because instinct is an unreflective knowledge focused on specific tasks and organized materials that meet the demands of life. For Bergson, the unreflective and narrow focus of instinct on specific tasks renders it a lesser form of consciousness than intellect. Unlike instinct, intelligence is a tendency to establish formal relations that can be applied to any material whatsoever. It is reflective and speculative. Nonetheless, intellect cannot grasp the becoming of life because its forms are spatialised and static. In the study of life, Bergson says: "There are things that intelligence alone is able to seek, but which, by itself, it will never find. These things instinct alone could find; but it will never seek them."⁴²

For Bergson, intuition is the way of knowing that exceeds the tendencies of intellect and instinct. In a sense, intuition is a grafting together of aspects of instinct and intellect: intuition is sympathy with the vital *and* generalized and self-conscious reflection on relations. But intuition is different from both intellect and instinct because it is disinterested knowledge no longer riveted to the demands that confront living beings in the fulfilment of their bodily needs.⁴³ Bergson thinks that intuition is restricted to humans because

... it is from intelligence that has come the push that has made it [intuition] rise to the point it has reached. Without intelligence, it would have remained in the form of instinct, riveted to the special object of its practical interest, and turned outward by it into movements of locomotion.⁴⁴

Intuition is self-conscious and reflective sympathy with life. This form of knowing

is fleeting and partial because human beings are dominated by their intellectual faculty.⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Bergson suggests that the more intuition is practiced by philosophers, the more that a real knowledge of life will be revealed to philosophy. For Bergson, this is "... mind itself, and in a certain sense, life itself ..."⁴⁶ It is philosophy beyond the human condition.

Neidjie's teaching of feeling resonates in important respects with Bergson's intuition of life as duration. Feeling is a spiralling that makes 'the world' or country in the Indigenous sense. To know feeling is to participate in the becoming of country. Neidjie's teaching also diverges from Bergson substantially; Neidjie's concept of feeling is not a way of knowing unique to human beings and he is not a thinker of creative evolution.

RESPECTING THE LAWS OF COUNTRY

Country is nothing like an intellectual framing of the earth as inert matter that can be divided up infinitely. Bergson's account of intellection is meaningful, though, for thinking about the regimes of settler colonialism. For instance, the sense of property law institutionalised in Western legal frameworks and imposed upon Indigenous country in the making of the Australian settler colony conforms to Bergson's account of the intellect. In property law, land is rendered a commodity, as passive, and entirely at the mercy of human action upon it.⁴⁷ Bergson's insight that the intellect cannot understand life is also meaningful for thinking about the incapacity of the dominant settler colonial frameworks to problematize the utter violence, danger and destruction of industries such as extractive mining, logging and agribusiness.⁴⁸

From Neidjie's perspective, the settler colonists and their descendants must listen to Indigenous people who belong to country, because they "got story."⁴⁹ This is not story in the ordinary sense. Neidjie is speaking of story with spirit which comes from a source that is more than human and never changes.⁵⁰ In Neidjie's language, Gagadju, the source is called Djang. Djang is the law, the cosmic force ordering the world.

Neidjie has the authority to speak of Djang because he is a senior law man with direct experience of law ceremonies, including the Dreaming of Indjuwanydjuwa and the Dreaming of Iwardbad or King Brown Snake.⁵¹ What Neidjie shares about *Djang* is offered "outside" of the sacred "Ring-places" where the law ceremonies take place. He cannot disclose what happens "inside" ceremony, and he warns that the "Ring-places" are places that no-one should stay, walk through or even

go to close to. They can only be entered by initiates when they are engaged in ceremony.⁵²

The awesome power Djang is the “biggest one.”⁵³ There is much that Neidjie does not know about this power; Djang exceeds comprehension. He explains that for a long time, Aboriginal people didn’t speak to non-Aboriginal people about Djang because it is sacred knowledge.⁵⁴ He relates aspects of the law about Djang because of the ongoing devastation of the environment through heavy industrial production, land clearing and extractive mining.⁵⁵ His teaching is especially directed at warning about the dangers and pollution of the operation of the Ranger Uranium Mine, which is built on a very sacred place on Mirarr clan lands, that are also sacred to the Bunitj and to many other Aboriginal people.

We sitting on top that Djang.
You sitting on this earth but something under,
Under this ground here.
We don’t know. You don’t know yourself.
I don’t know myself but that story.

Because that Djang we sitting on under,
e watching, that Djang, what you want to do.
If you touch it you might get heavy cyclone,
heavy rain, flood or e kill in another place ...
other country e might kill im.⁵⁶

Breaking the law of Djang by entering a sacred Ring place and mining the ground has terrifying consequences. These consequences are felt not only in that sacred site on Mirarr country, but elsewhere in the world.⁵⁷ Yvonne Magarula, a senior law woman of the Mirarr people, says that the Fukushima Nuclear Reactor disaster in 2011 was caused by the damage to Djang in the extraction and use of uranium from the Ranger mine.⁵⁸ For Neidjie, speaking in 1982, extractive mining is killing the world:

But that man e need plenty money ...
e digging alright but e killing himself.
Killing his body where e digging.
Killing his granny or grandpa ... no-matter e white!

E want badly that money but e killing it himself.
Killing us.⁵⁹

In this age of climate catastrophe and pervasive exploitation of the Earth by corporations and governments, Neidjie's and Margarula's calls to respect the sacred laws of the Djang and to care for country are meaningful and urgent all around the world. But how are people with little sense of connection to the living milieus in which they live to do this? How are people living in cities to do this?

LISTENING TO STORY WITH SPIRIT

Neidjie's philosophy does not offer a map on how to dismantle the regimes of settler colonialism or how to overthrow global capitalism, but he does suggest a method for feeling story with spirit and this is crucial for learning an ethics which is sensitive to the milieus in which we live, the milieus which we are. Listening to story with spirit can be learned "by anyone" who is able to "listen carefully."⁶⁰ This is the opening of his book:

Well I'll tell you about this story,
About story where you feel ... laying down.

Tree, grass, star ...
because star and tree working with you.
We got blood pressure
but same thing ... spirit on your body,
but e working with you.
Even nice wind e blow ... having a sleep ...
because that spirit e with you.

Listen carefully this, you can hear me.
I'm telling you because earth just like mother
and father or brother of you.
That tree same thing.
Your body, my body I suppose,
I'm same as you ... anyone.
Tree working when you sleeping and dream.

This story e can listen carefully, e can listen slow.
If you in city well I suppose lot of houses,
you can't hardly look this star
but might be one night you look.
Have a look star because that's the feeling.
String, blood ... through your body.⁶¹

In this account, feeling is sensing spirit between a star and a person. In the situation Neidjie describes, a person participates in feeling with a star, a person participates in feeling with grass, a person participates in feeling with a tree. Relations of feeling – string and blood – extend throughout the cosmos. Participation in the universe of feeling is underlined in Neidjie's repeated use of the pronoun 'e.' As Tristen Harwood explains, in Kriol and Aboriginal English, 'e' is an ambiguous gender-neutral pronoun. Harwood suggests that 'e' is open to and contingent on everything in the cosmos.⁶²

Feeling is not seen with the eyes or heard as sound but it can be felt while looking at and listening to a tree as it is moving with the wind. Alexis Wright's citation of Quandamooka poet Oodgeroo Noonuccal in her advice to artists is a valuable elaboration of this idea; Oodgeroo speaks of the invisibility of feeling in the following terms: "as the lark sings and the eagle soars ... Paint what you feel more than what you see."⁶³ Feeling is inaudible and invisible, nonetheless, feeling is happening as the lark is singing and as the eagle soars. This happening of feeling comes through the artist's body, feeling also comes through the eagle and she soars and the lark as he sings. Feeling is not possessed by beings, rather, feeling makes beings what they are. Feeling inspires the lark's singing and feeling inspires the eagle soaring, feeling inspires the artist as she paints.

Feeling make you out there with wind, open place
Because e coming through your body
Because you're like that.
Have a look while e blow, tree
And you feeling with your body
Because tree just about like your brother or father
And tree watching you.

Someone can't tell you.

Story e telling you yourself.
E tell you how you feel because tree or earth
Because you brought up with this earth
Tree, eating, water.

That way they give us talk.

So I'm saying now,
Earth is my mother or my father.
I'll come to earth.
I got to go same earth
and I'm sitting on this dirt is mine
and children they playing.
Tree is mine.
In my body that tree.⁶⁴

Listening to feeling in Neidjie's terms has a fundamentally ethical, or more precisely, lawful orientation – feeling teaches kinship and belonging with country, kinship and belonging with the cosmos. An aspect of this teaching resonates with Bergson's intuition of duration, Neidjie's teaching of feeling is an inner knowing of life as intensive rhythm. There is another locus of resonance between them, like Bergson acknowledging that intuition is something that a thinker must do for herself, Neidjie points out that he cannot explain, "Story telling you yourself."⁶⁵

In Neidjie's conceptual world, listening to feeling guides people in meeting their practical needs. He describes how the creator being, who he calls Warramurraungi, or First Woman, teaches people which foods to eat, how to eat them, and which animals must not be eaten.⁶⁶ In contrast to the sense of humans as a species of *Homo Faber* in Bergson's *Creative Evolution*, Warramurraungi and the Bunitj, who follow her law, do not value the production of technical inventions over what is vital in the living. For example, Neidjie speaks about hunting magpie geese with wooden spears as a child. A good spear that will strike geese cannot be dry and light. His elders tell him to put the spear in water during the day so that he can keep it and use it for months. Neidjie asks his elders why he cannot just cut a fresh branch off a tree to make a new spear whenever he needs one. They respond emphatically, "No! You can't cut new one. You cutting all that tree and cutting yourself."⁶⁷ In Neidjie's teaching of Warramurraungi's laws, there is care for the self. This self includes not only Neidjie himself, nor only his clan and Bunitj

country, the self is the entire cosmos. “Because you love it, this world.”⁶⁸

The source of story about feeling is Djang, the cosmic force ordering the world. To hear or feel story is to experience an emanation of this ordering law. An open and attentive reader, accesses feeling as she reads Neidjie’s *Story About Feeling*. This feeling guides the reader’s engagement with his text. It is also, of course, an invitation to engage in practices of feeling with other living beings. To do this, Neidjie says it is best to be outside and engaged with beings such as trees or the stars in the night sky. He acknowledges that some people will struggle to access story with spirit; they “must listen hard.”⁶⁹ Some people just “will not worry about this story”, or as Morrissey puts it, they will be “impervious” to Neidjie’s teaching.⁷⁰ Then there is what Neidjie calls the “no good man” who cannot listen. She, they or he can be Indigenous or Non-Indigenous. This person feels something else, something destructive.⁷¹

THE INVISIBLE BREATH OF LIFE

There are pronounced and irreducible differences between Bergson’s intuition of life and Neidjie’s world of feeling. The concept of duration at the heart of Bergson’s thought is a constant principle of change, which ensures that the virtual Whole is a becoming of unforeseeable novelty. For Neidjie, the world is ordered by the laws of country, including the laws of First Woman, Warramurraungi, and the King Brown Snake Dreaming.⁷² These eternal beings and the laws of country are fundamental and never change.⁷³ In this conceptual world there is also change and novelty. Neidjie speaks of the cycles of life, for instance, he anticipates that he will die and return to the earth and that new people will be born, and he speaks of trees that pass away to be replaced by new trees.⁷⁴ These cycles can be read as repetitions of the new.⁷⁵

Neidjie suggests to his readers that they feel the rhythm of Djang in relation with other living beings. Feeling in Neidjie is does not originate in ordinary perception such as vision but in sensing the invisible spiralling of Djang. This can happen while listening to or looking at other beings. The relationship that Neidjie describes between a tree ‘watching’ me and me ‘watching’ a tree is not a formal intellectual knowledge of a relation between distinct things. It is an interpenetrating feeling. As Neidjie says, “in my body that tree.”⁷⁶ Bergson’s teaching of the inner knowledge of life as continuous multiplicity is suggested to a reader as an act of introspection on the psychic life of ‘my’ enduring self without recourse to the spatializing habits of intellection. His emphasis on focusing inwards to discover

intuition could come across as solipsistic in comparison to Neidjie's teaching of feeling the rhythm of Djang in relation with other beings. But Bergson is writing in the context of European modernity, in which the static framework of intellect is hegemonic. His direction that this intuition involves a withdrawal from the external world and a plunging into the inner life should be read as an effort to escape the idea of the static individual ego that is presupposed in intellection.⁷⁷ This withdrawal is a passage to the impersonal, a passage to learning that 'my' duration is mingled inextricably in the vibrations of the extraordinary multiplicity of durations making up the becoming of the universe.⁷⁸ Bergson's intuition of the self as duration offers those of us raised in the intellectual framework a method for getting beyond our spatial egos and into a common universe of becoming. Neidjie speaks from a culture that is far less atomised than Bergson's culture; Neidjie presentation begins with feeling as an extensive-intensive becoming in common with others.

Feeling in Neidjie should be read in contrast and resonance with Bergson's concept of intuition more than in relation to his concept of instinct. In Neidjie's conceptual world, feeling involves reflection and awareness. Reflection and awareness of the world are practiced by animals, plants, winds, waters, earth, people, songs, stories and feelings. Like people, these beings are conditioned by laws of country.⁷⁹ Country is alive.

There is a final connection I wish to make between Neidjie and Bergson in this article. Neidjie's *Story About Feeling* is a teaching of love. This is proximate to Bergson, for instance, when he celebrates exceptional mystics in their inspiring love for the whole of nature in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. To listen to feeling in his sense is to learn respect for this energy, "... because you love it, this world."⁸⁰

There is a sense of life as love suggested by Bergson in *Creative Evolution* which is not restricted to the occasional human mystics as it in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. This sense is widely accessible to intuitive thinkers.⁸¹ In this passage, Bergson is drawing a contrast between the dynamism of the interpenetrating multiplicity of life and the individuation and differentiation of species, impelled by the finitude of the *élan vital's* creative energy.

Life in general is mobility itself; particular manifestations of life accept this mobility reluctantly, and constantly lag behind.... They are therefore relatively stable, and counterfit immobility so well that we treat each of

them as a *thing* rather than as a *progress*, forgetting that the very permanence of their form is only the outline of a movement. At times, however, in a fleeting vision, the invisible breath that bears them is materialized before our eyes. We have this sudden illumination before certain forms of maternal love, so striking, and in most animals so touching, observable even in the solicitude of the plant for its seed. This love, in which some have seen the great mystery of life, may possibly deliver us life's secret. It shows each generation leaning over the generation that shall follow. It allows us a glimpse of the fact that the living being is above all a thoroughfare, and that the essence of life is in the movement by which life is transmitted.⁸²

Here, Bergson describes feelings of love that are manifested in relations between animal mothers and their young and between a plant and its seed. The examples are species specific and for him, species are concerned only with their own vitality and disregard the living of other species. For Bergson, the self-absorption of species is one reason why there is so much terrible discord in life.⁸³ In this respect, what Bergson calls "the essence of life" is not incarnated in a specific relation; the intuitive reader must imagine maternal love beyond the concrete situation of a specific maternal relation or beyond a specific plant-seed relation and extend this feeling to the universe as a need of creation.⁸⁴ A highly sensitive reading of this passage from *Creative Evolution* that is attentive to Bergson's poetic phrase "the invisible breath" inspires feeling in an open reader as she reads. This trans-individual sense of life is close to Neidjie's teaching of the spiralling of feeling as love. In Neidjie, the love of life extends throughout the cosmos and throughout the cycles of generation. Where Bergson's intuition of life is a way of thinking that is only attainable by human beings, Neidjie's teaches that feeling extends throughout the cosmos.

Neidjie's philosophy does not naively proclaim an existing harmony in the world, there are many conflicts in his world, for instance, between the 'white man' and Aboriginal people, among Indigenous people, and within the world of nonhuman animals and plants.⁸⁵

Neidjie's call to love the world is a command and invocation, a call to attend to the generative becoming of country as feeling. It is a teaching from which those of us seeking ways out of the all too pervasive calculating and objectifying conceptual world can learn much.

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NOTES

1. Henri Bergson, *Creative Evolution*. Trans. A. Mitchell. London: Macmillan, 1911. Bill Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*. Ed. Keith Taylor. Broome: Magabala, 1989.
Unless otherwise indicated, in this article, I deploy the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” to designate collectively the First Nations peoples of Australia.
2. The method of this article is influenced by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro’s essays, “The Relative Native” and “And” from his book, *The Relative Native: Essays on Indigenous Conceptual Worlds*. Chicago, Hau, 2015.
3. Patrick Wolfe, “Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native” *Journal of Genocide Research*, 2006: 8(4), December, p.388.
4. Ibid, p.388.
5. Patrick Wolfe, “Nation and Miscegenation: Discursive Continuity in the Post-Mabo Era” *Social Analysis* 1994: 36, October, p.93; Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race*. London: Verso, 2016, p.34. See also, Irene Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law: Raw Law*. Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2015, pp.1-10.
6. Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law* p.1.
7. Black, C. F., *The Land is the Source of the Law: A Dialogic Encounter with Indigenous Jurisprudence*. Routledge: London and New York, 2011, p.17.
8. According to Keith Taylor, Neidjie was born between 1910 and 1913 on the East Alligator River in the Northern Territory in Australia. He spent his childhood on his father’s Bunitj country and attended a Christian Mission school for two years around 1928. After Neidjie’s father died, he lived with his mother at Cooper’s Creek. Like many Aboriginal people of his generation, Neidjie lived much of his adult life being paid only in basic rations for his labour. He worked in the Northern Territory, in jobs including the hauling timber for loggers, hunting, cleaning, gardening and lugging on a boat. In 1979 he returned to Bunitj country. He devoted a lot of time in these years to sharing and recording his knowledge and campaigning against environmental devastation, especially mining. Neidjie passed away in 2002. See Taylor in Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p. viii.
9. Arthur quoted in Christine Nicholls “‘Dreamings’ and dreaming narratives: What’s the relationship?” *The Conversation* February 6, 2018. <http://theconversation.com/dreamings-and-dreaming-narratives-whats-the-relationship-20837> Accessed 8 September 2021.
10. “First nations law speaks to principles. One is respect. In our law there is a ‘respect law’ for all things – not just humanity but the whole environment. Respect law provides a base-line for human functionality.” Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law*. p.31.
11. Turner, M. K. *Iwenhe Tyerrtye: What it is Means to Be an Aboriginal Person* as told to Barry McDonald Perrurle with translations by Veronica Perrurle. Alice Springs, IAD Press, 2010, p.8.
12. Gay’wu Group of Women. *Song Spirals: Sharing Women’s Wisdom of Country through Songlines*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2019, p.ix.

13. Black, *The Land is the Source of the Law*, p.26.
14. Morrissey, P. "Bill Neidjie's *Story About Feeling*: Notes on its Themes and Philosophy" *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature*, 2015: 15.2, pp.1-2.
15. Neidjie, *Story about Feeling*, p.19.
16. Ibid, p.3.
17. Decolonial theory is a large and growing area of contemporary research. Compelling and influential diagnoses and critiques of Eurocentric modernity or coloniality, include Enrique D. Dussel "Europe, Modernity, and Eurocentrism" *Nepantla: Views from South*, 1.3, 2000, pp. 465-478; Nelson Maldonado Torres "On the Coloniality of Being" *Cultural Studies*, 21:2-3, pp.240-270, 2007 and, especially, Sylvia Wynter's brilliant "Unsettling the coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument" *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3.3 (2003) 257-337.
- In the terms of sexual difference feminism, the valorization of western man is also predicated on the exclusion of woman. See Luce Irigaray. 1985. *Speculum of the Other Woman*. Trans. Gillian C. Gill. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. I address Irigaray's philosophy at length in Rebecca Hill. 2012. *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle and Bergson*, New York, Fordham UP, 2012.
18. See my "Beyond Man? Rethinking Life and Matter" Chapter Six of *The Interval: Relation and Becoming in Irigaray, Aristotle and Bergson*. This chapter argues that Bergson's thinking of life is, on the one hand, marked by a tendency to privilege what I call phallic anthropomorphism, and, on the other hand, by a tendency to valorise the anti-hierarchical thinking of becoming concrete extensity. His anti-hierarchical thinking of concrete extensity is valuable for feminist anti-humanist philosophy. The idea of becoming concrete extensity is also the tendency in Bergson which can be brought into fruitful relation with the thinking of a cosmos of feeling elaborated by Neidjie.
19. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.281.
20. Bergson. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*. Trans. R. Ashley Audra and C. Brereton. New York: Henry Holt, 1935, pp.138-9. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.277-281. On Bergson's support for Empire, see Larry S. McGrath "Bergson's Views on Colonialism: Education and Empire in North Africa after the French Third Republic" 2020 Global Bergsonism Research Project Webinar November 6-7, and 13, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WkB7Qfm3Wdo&list=PLe2Z4p5NJMQcoat8Nj-XIznkImLJRDMKf&index=5> Accessed 1 September 2021. For a nuanced reading of Bergson's methodological reliance on the figure of the "primitive" in juxtaposition to the Christian mystic in his elaboration of closed and open morality in *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion* see Alia Al Saji, "Decolonizing Bergson: The Temporal Schema of the Open and the Closed" *Beyond Bergson: Examining Race and Colonialism Through the Writings of Henri Bergson*. Ed. A. J. Pitts and M. W. Westmoreland, Albany, SUNY Press, 2019.
21. Bergson, Henri. *The Creative Mind*. Trans. M. L. Andison. New York: Philosophical Library,

- 1946, p.228.
22. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.282. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p.237. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.168; p.170.
23. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.xiv.
24. See Bergson's remarks on the impossibility of the philosopher expressing his [sic] intuition. While Bergson is discussing other philosophers, these points clearly apply to his own project, *The Creative Mind*, pp.128-9. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, pp.78-79.
25. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.10-11.
26. *Ibid*, pp.55-55; pp.92-102.
27. *Ibid*, p.272.
28. *Ibid*, p.275.
29. *Ibid*, p.103.
30. *Ibid*, p.91.
31. *Ibid*, p.103.
32. See my "At Least Two: The Tendencies of Sexual Difference" *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 43.1, 2017, pp.25-40.
33. Deleuze, Gilles. *Bergsonism*. Trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam. New York, Zone Books, 1991, p.94.
34. *Ibid*, pp.91-93.
35. Bergson, Henri. 1911. *Matter and Memory*. Trans. N. M. Paul and W. S. Palmer. London: George Allen and Unwin, p.226.
36. Bergson, Henri. 1946. *The Creative Mind*, p.228. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.xii-xiii.
37. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.146.
38. *Ibid*, p.162.
39. Bergson affirms that the tendency of instinct is at work in many species and at myriad levels of life in and between complex and rudimentary organisms. Instinct "... only carries out further the work by which life organizes matter... When the little chick is breaking its shell with a peck of its beak, it is acting by instinct, yet it does but carry on the movement which has born it through embryonic life", p.174. On the following page, he writes, "When we see in the living body thousands of cells working together to a common end, divide the tasks between them, living each for itself at the same time as for the others How can we help thinking of so many instincts? ... In extreme cases, instinct coincides with work of organization." p.175. For Raymond Ruyer, instinct-sympathy is characteristic of all life. See "Instinct, Consciousness, Life: Ruyer Contra Bergson" Trans. Tano Posteraro. *Angelaki*. 2019, 24.5: 124-147.
40. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, p.153-155.
41. *Ibid*, p.174.
42. *Ibid*, p.159.
43. *Ibid*, p.186.

44. Ibid, pp.187-188.
45. Ibid, p.282.
46. Ibid, p.282.
47. Watson, *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law*, p.31.
48. Bergson's remarks about the brutality of intelligence when confronted with life are apposite. He does not name colonialism or extractivist industries but the violence of policies in the history of Hygiene and Medicine. See *Creative Evolution*, pp.173-4.
49. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.168.
50. Ibid, p.19.
51. Ibid, pp.78-9; p.103; Morrissey, "Bill Neidjie's Story About Feeling", p.4.
52. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, pp.79-80. Law ceremonies are fundamental to upholding and renewing the law in Indigenous civilizations throughout Australia. Ceremonies express the law. Watson describes the Ngarrindjeri relationship between ceremony (Murrabina), law and country in the following terms:
Laws are inherent to the Murrabina where ceremony serves to gather community and to pass on knowledge of law and culture. It is law in action. Murrabina is law as it connects cycles, land, song, story, dance and the people, through the ceremonial gathering of people. Murrabina is the honouring of the law. It sustains and revives the law. And is the collective song for law and the life of a people. Murrabina is a celebration of the renewal of life and the changing of seasons; this is law. Murrabina is a declaration, an agreement with the spirit world, the air, earth, water, fire, animals, plants, rocks, the fullness and oneness of the natural world. It is an agreement for the continuance of law, land and peoples." *Aboriginal Peoples Colonialism and International Law*, p.31. For more on the intrinsic relationship between law, ceremony and country see C. F. Black, *The Land Is the Source of the Law*, passim.
53. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.81. In contrast to the phallogocentric culture of the Eurocentric traditions, Neidjie's culture is a culture of two different sexes. He speaks of a woman creator, Warramurraungi, as well as male creators, and, of sexed laws as an important reality in his society. Neidjie's teaching emanates from his knowledge of Bunitj men's law and he specifies that Bunitj women have different sacred laws and knowledge and places to which he does not have access as a man (Ibid, p.94; p.102). Sexually specific and differentiated laws are found throughout Indigenous societies in Australia. See Watson *Aboriginal Peoples, Colonialism and International Law*, and Turner, *Iwenhe Tyerrtye*.
54. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.78, p.81, p.82.
55. Ibid, p.78, pp.81-83.
56. Ibid, p.81.
57. Ranger Uranium Mine was closed in January 2021. The Mirarr people have expressed grave concerns about the willingness and commitment of ERA, the mining company, to fulfil their contractual obligations to remediate their land from the immense damage of the mine and

- heavily contaminated soil and water. See Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation website <https://www.mirarr.net/pages/uranium-mining> Accessed September 8 2021.
58. Gundjeihmi Aboriginal Corporation and Environment Centre Northern Territory *Dirt Cheap, 30 years on...the story of uranium mining in Kakadu*, 2011. <https://vimeo.com/73373709> (accessed 23 January 2021).
59. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p. 155.
60. Ibid, p.3.
61. Ibid, pp.2-3.
62. Tristen Harwood, “The Forgetting - Of That Forgetting, Memory of The Future” paper presented as part of the online seminar, From Here; For Now - Spaces that can be occupied, where some things can be done, June 24, 2020. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FXLoEUSjscM> (accessed 5 December 2020).
63. Alexis Wright, ““A Weapon of Poetry: The poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal” *Overland*, 193, 2008: 19-24. p.24.
64. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, pp.168-170.
65. Ibid, p.170. Bergson, *The Creative Mind*, p.195.
66. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, pp.42-52.
67. Ibid, p.51.
68. Ibid, p.153.
69. Ibid, p.121.
70. Ibid, p.121; Morrissey, op. cit., p.1.
71. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.102; Morrissey op. cit., p.5.
72. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, p.19, p.166.
73. Ibid, p.4, p.19, 99.
74. Ibid, p.8.
75. There are other transformations in the universe described by Neidjie, which are utterly foreign to Bergson’s philosophy. There are beings that change form, for instance, from “man” to “bird.” Neidjie does not explain to his readers how these transformations take place. Perhaps because it is sacred knowledge. See, *Story About Feeling*, p.15.
76. Ibid, p.169.
77. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.3-4.
78. Ibid, pp.11; *The Creative Mind*, 220-221.
79. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*, *passim*.
80. Ibid, p.153.
81. Bergson’s comments in the conclusion of “Philosophical Intuition” on the joy that philosophical intuition can give also strikes me as resonant with Neidjie’s teaching of love. See *The Creative Mind*, p.152.
82. Bergson, *Creative Evolution*, pp.134-5.

83. “And we must remember, above all, that each species behaves as if the general movement of life stopped at it instead of passing through it. It thinks only of itself, it lives only for itself. Hence the numberless struggles that we behold in nature. Hence a discord, striking and terrible, but for which the original principle of life must not be held responsible.” *Creative Evolution*, p.268.

84. A highly sensitive reading of this passage from *Creative Evolution* that is attentive to Bergson’s poetic phrase “the invisible breath” inspires feeling in an open reader.

85. Neidjie, *Story About Feeling*. For instance, see pp.146-161, pp.164-166.