

Epistemic attunements: Experiments in intermedial anthropology

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Funding information

Australian Research Council, Grant/Award Number: DE140101607 and SR200200346

Abstract

‘Epistemic attunements – Regenerating anthropology’s form’ is a collective experiment in expanding the expressive and analytic repertoire of anthropology and related disciplines. It features eleven peer-reviewed research articles published on a standalone website that has been designed, built, and maintained by our editorial collective, independent of Wiley’s infrastructure and oversight. The result is a unique off-grid adventure in academic publishing that seeks to contribute to the re-orientation and outward opening of a discipline long committed to finding new ways to apprehend—and respond to—worlds undergoing constant, messy, and often-brutal transformation. In this essay we describe the making of this double special issue of *TAJA* to make the case for intermedial research and co-design as regenerative praxis.

KEYWORDS

creative research, epistemics, intermedial, media anthropology, multimodal, regenerative research

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What catches my eye is primarily that word ‘relations’, in combination with the preposition ‘inter-’, which is particularly dear to me, as I have explained more times than I care to remember. Briefly, ‘inter-’ stands for, or is, relation, rather than accumulation.

—Mieke Bal, *Beyond Media Borders*

Intermediality to me is a way to ... engage media epistemology, to primally engage the relation between how we know and what is unknown. And composition is a way to perform that engagement ...

—Steven Feld, ‘Epistemic attunements’

It's a new type of kinship for me ... It's a new dance, a new vocabulary. A new *nga-waarr*, a new storm.

—Fiona Wirrer-George Oochunyang, ‘Epistemic attunements’

What does it become possible to know—and so to argue and to value—when writing is reformulated as a practice of intermedial curation, assemblage, design, and composition? What kinds of social relations come into view—what new demands for care, creativity, and critique arise—when scholarship finds novel form and expanded reach within the interactive contours of a purpose-made, digital-only publication? How might such an approach foreground, engage, and amplify the imperatives of Indigenous and other non-Eurocentric knowledge traditions? How might such an approach enable an expression of communicative registers that exist outside, beyond, and in excess, of human language?

‘Epistemic attunements’ is a one-off and likely never-to-be-repeated edition of *The Australian Journal of Anthropology* (TAJA). It has been conceived and curated as an experiment in stretching the form of the genre of journal article through practices of intermedial design and composition. The results have been set in motion and made accessible beyond corporate infrastructures and paywalls through the interactive, media-rich affordances of a web-based publishing platform designed and built by our editorial collective.

Why build a website to host TAJA articles when a well-worn infrastructure already exists? This introductory essay explains the whys and hows of ‘Epistemic attunements’. The introductions to each issue, ‘FORM: Anthropology as design’ and ‘REACH: Research as regeneration’, unpack the thematic logics of our curation and offer insights from the design process as further enticements to attune.

A shared, and a perhaps uncommon, love of what anthropology is, and can be, compels this project. When we began, we could not have imagined the various and surprising ways it would find form across the collection. At the heart of ‘Epistemic attunements’ lies an invitation to others—to you—to come to know the world differently, and again. In the process, we invite you to do the same with anthropology.

INTERMEDIAL COMPOSITION AS REGENERATIVE PRAXIS

Our editorial collective embarked on this ‘off grid’ adventure in academic publishing united by a keen interest in form and formal innovation—and an enduring commitment to anthropology as a discipline of relational reach. We were convinced that most researchers remain bound by



conventions of scholarly writing—especially the enduringly dominant form, the journal article—because a critical mass of alternative exemplars does not yet exist.¹ As a way of facilitating the creation of such exemplars and, in the process modelling an alternative path to publication, we approached the *TAJA* editorial board with a proposal to create a special issue in which the core research articles would be hosted outside of the conventional Wiley infrastructure. Astonishingly (in retrospect) they agreed, and we set about inviting others to join us in the work of reimagining and, as appropriate, upending the traditional format of the journal article.

The authors who took up our invitation did not necessarily have a multimodal or intermedial practice from which to build. We chose them based on their existing interest in non-conventional scholarly forms. This made the challenges and opportunities quite different for each author or author group. Many had never thought *with* other media forms. Some had been doing so for years. To facilitate their experiments, we provided technical and creative support for the design and coding of their contributions. ‘All wild ideas welcome’, we would declare in the first of many Zoom meetings we would have with authors. By providing creative and technical skills above and beyond the usual editorial process, we made it possible for our contributors to consider for themselves what it becomes possible to think and convey to others when epistemic hierarchies between forms of media are not pre-imposed; when media elements can be made to move and interact in the service of social analysis, not the other way around.

Anthropology has long been shaped by its reckonings with the epistemic violence of systems and institutions that exclude, demean, and diminish other ways of knowing (cf. Spivak 1988; Moreton-Robinson 2004; Kearney 2021). Ethnographers make these knowable for others. Furthermore, in showing what such violence looks and feels like, they demonstrate to others, beyond the discipline, how such reckonings might be made. At the same time, anthropologists cultivate practices of attuning to alternative ways of knowing, valuing, and relating to the world by attending to the material, the sensuous, the performative, the political, the ethical, and the poetic as world-making practices in places undergoing constant, messy, and often-brutal transformation.

These two intertwined anthropological agendas inform the ‘regenerative praxis’ that we have sought to nurture in curating and co-designing ‘Epistemic attunements’. We adopt this phrase inspired by the many First Nations contributors to this issue who explicitly theorise their research as practices of enlivenment and regeneration, including the renewal of sovereign rights and responsibilities.² As these authors draw variously from their own traditions to approach research as a regenerative praxis, they manage to both acknowledge *and* sidestep the defining logics of colonialism. Something else becomes possible. The First Nations contributors to this special issue neither simply critique colonialism, nor do they seek to explain Indigenous knowledge and sovereign knowledge practices in isolation from broader social dynamics and obligations. Working with each of them we have come to recognise that what unites their approach is that they performatively seek to renew ancestral ontologies, epistemologies, and axiologies through formal innovation in response to contemporary conditions (see REACH, this issue; cf. Miyarrka Media 2019). We would argue that the same regenerative imperative holds beyond Indigenous knowledge practices: formal innovation offers anthropology new grounds for the cultivation of critical traction and political nuance.³

Of course, many kinds of creative and experimental practices have made important and enduring contributions to the on-going reshaping of anthropology. (For exemplary of creative anthropological research and/or commentaries on the significance of such approaches see, Rouch 1955, 1967; Gardner 1986; Marcus and Clifford 1986; Michaels 1993; MacDougall 1998, 2005; Glowczewski 2001; Ginsburg *et al.* 2002; Taussig 2004, 2023; Narayan 2007, 2012; Hallam

and Ingold 2007; Bourgois and Schonberg 2009; Schneider and Wright 2010, 2013; Castaing-Taylor and Paravel 2012; Young 2012; Hinkson 2014; Cox, Irving and Wright 2016; Deger 2016; Tsai *et al.* 2016; Pink *et al.* 2016; Haviland 2016; Raza and Guillén 2017; Pandian and McLean 2017; Bakke and Peterson 2017; Geismar 2018; Pandian 2019; Ingold 2020, 2021; Ballesterro and Winthereik 2021; Bessire 2021; Otto *et al.* 2021; Sopranzetti *et al.* 2021; Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón, 2021; Westmoreland 2022; Dovey 2024.)⁴

These days, multimodal methods, outputs, and debates are on the rise. Yet even so, in our experience, researchers—junior and senior alike—face mounting pressures to produce journal articles rather than any other forms of scholarly output (including books). In Australia and elsewhere, this push is exacerbated by the ravenous demands of an increasingly metrics-driven system of quality assessment and the hierarchies of value that this reproduces. Assessments based on journal rankings and citational metrics quite literally diminish the ways that other research outputs ‘count’ within the system. We are deeply concerned that such structural forces profoundly constrain anthropology’s potential to renew its practices, theoretical forms, and modes of engagement in response to the challenges of our times.

Hence this special double issue of *TAJA*. Clicking through these pages you will encounter eleven peer-reviewed and custom-designed digital articles, each wildly different from the next. These include a webcomic, a remixed performance lecture, an animated anticolonial bibliography, and a sounding out of a theory of sonorous ethics, to name just a few. All of these articles deliberately break academic conventions. Or stretch them in new ways. Formal innovation is driven by conceptual concerns, as each selectively creates and expands zones of critical expression, perception, apprehension, and hesitation.

Intermedial practices, conceived in kindred spirit with Mieke Bal and Steven Feld, animate this collection. In this, design plays a foundational and conceptual role. Through the iterative process of co-design and composition with our authors, we have learned to recognise the resonant gaps and convergences that working with and across media forms bring to life. We have seen how, as intermedial practices open new zones of intensified meaning, affect, and sensation, it becomes possible to engage key anthropological concerns such as time, futurity, ritual, power, kinship, friendship, ethics, aesthetics, more-than-human relations, the Anthropocene and environmental crisis, media, colonialism, and more. In exciting ways these inter-zones enable an expanded and inclusive analytic repertoire for research with collaborators, interlocutors, and co-authors of many kinds, including more-than-human entities and forces such as Country.

To attune to this collection is to attend anew to the expressive invitations and insistences of more-than-human worlds facing uncertain futures. It is to be invited to come to knowledge with previously overlooked, disregarded, or otherwise muted agents and entities. The digital articles have no home in the conventional pages of *TAJA*. They must be viewed ‘live’ on our website. As interactive invitations to attunement, they cannot be printed or exported as PDFs precisely because they have been made to move, interact, fade, gesture, juxtapose, and variously chime together.

MAKING ‘EPISTEMIC ATTUNEMENTS’

Informed by our discipline’s traditions of thinking about form, poesis, trans-formation, and communication, through lenses attentive to power as historical force, we have dived deep into the challenge of designing ways into shared worlds of research-as-attunement. Anthropology has, of course, explored and evoked—in ontological, epistemological, metaphysical, and moral



terms—worlds shaped by forces both human and non-human. Generations of cultural anthropologies of art and aesthetics—including symbolic anthropology, ethnomusicology, performance studies of religion and ritual, poetics, and material culture—have addressed themselves to the emergence, production, reproduction, and transformation of form. They have taught us to appreciate form-making as a defining expressive modality through which earthly and supranatural beings make sense of, and with, the world in their own terms. (See for example Anna Tsing's special contribution 'Attunement: Form in motion', this issue, FORM)

Notably, our intellectual genealogy as thinker-makers concerned with form, threads through anthropologies of poetics (Feld 1982) and their Jakobsonian attention to language-based communications understood as dynamically structured world-responsive expressive gesturing. Equally, our dynamic figuring and re-figuring of 'design' as an unfolding creative practice, traces anthropology's pendulum arc of cultural and social analysis in new ways by treating design as a mode of thinking. Holding close the insights of Michael Taussig (1993), Jennifer Deger (2006) and other colleagues who have explored the mimetic powers of image-making, the making of text, visual, or audio media is first and foremost understood as technologically mediated creation, equally historical and spirited. Our approach is inspired also by Alfred Gell's (1998) pivotal reorientation of anthropology towards the social significance of aesthetics in his writing on art, enchantment, and technology. Our emphasis significantly differs, however, from Gell's as we tend to the socially attuned creative labour of an 'artful anthropology' (Miyarrka Media 2019, 2021) concerned with a techno-aesthetic cultivation of practices of making knowledge that open expanded, overlapping, and shared epistemic horizons for anthropology and its interlocutors. As we enabled our authors to variously channel, imagine, and even play shamanically with a kind of 'magic' that makes new scales, perspectives, ideas, senses, and relationships possible (Taussig 2011), our aim is for the resulting insights, satisfactions, and significances of such knowledge practices to reach beyond the discipline, and, indeed, the academy (cf. Boko *et al.* on the 'magic' of this approach, this issue, REACH).

In step with Feld (this issue, REACH) and Mieke Bal (2022), we describe the conjoined work of curation, coding, design, and exegesis that the Curatorium Collective models as an intermedial practice.^{5,6} Intermedial practices attune to the kinds of knowledges that emerge through juxtaposition, combination, rhythm, and remix. Intermedial artists and performers attend to the generative inter-zones created by moving between different media and genres: the echoes, frictions, correspondences, and conjunctions (Higgins 2002). In turn, Steven Feld's special contribution 'Hearing Heat' (this issue, REACH) dazzlingly demonstrates what a lifetime of attuning to acoustemological questions and practices can set in motion.

What makes our approach in 'Epistemic attunements' distinct is the ways we use these zones as sites of critical-creative reflection and analytic amplification by designing and composing for the computer screen. Victoria Baskin Coffey, Caleb Kingston, and Jennifer Deger led the iterative process of finding form for each article and in close communication with each author or author group. Over many months, they came up with a custom design for each article with code created through the Content Management System (CMS) Webflow. Some authors brought with them an idea, not yet articulated. Some came with a written piece accompanied by galleries of photographs, videos, and sounds not yet interwoven into their argument. Others came with pieces almost fully realised, entrusting us to take their initial workings and translate them into the interactivity that the screen affords. Meanwhile, Lisa Stefanoff and Sebastian J. Lowe took careful stewardship of the articles' written textual content, in all their various forms.

Early in the co-design process we began referring to our readers as 'attuners' so marking them explicitly as active participants in the making of meaning.⁷ Thinking of our audience as attuners



helped us, in turn, to recognise our responsibilities as editors and authors to be as generous as possible to them as they navigate a self-proclaimed experiment. ‘Epistemic attunement’ as a way of engaging rewards a willingness to attune to a different style, speed, and rhythm of interaction every time they click one of the articles. Our approach is not immersive in the way that digital projects are often conceived and described. Instead, our focus has been on cultivating an inter-medial art of ‘unfolding’ an argument, to encourage attunement. We do not attempt to place attuners inside the screen, or in another world. Rather, we aim to activate an internal animating dynamic that makes arguments come alive in the attuner’s body and through the relationships activated across images, texts, and sounds. In Sebastian J. Lowe’s words, ‘the grounds for theory emerge in the shared moments, rather than simply reached for externally from afar’ (this issue, REACH). Or as Miyarrka Media put it, ‘[k]nowledge emerges as two sensing bodies come into alignment, if only momentarily’ (Gurrumuruwuy *et al.*, this issue, FORM).

Our investments in performativity, innovation, emergence, collaborative, and multi-authored work align in many ways with the foci of other anthropologists working under the rubric of multimodality. Mark Westmoreland (2022), for instance, makes the case for the ways that multi-modal approaches contribute to the energising ‘reshaping’ of anthropology (Westmoreland 2022; see also Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019). For us though, the strength of framing both thinking and making in the practice-language of intermediality, as distinct from multimodality, is that it allows a distinctive shift of emphasis from a focus on technologically enabled *multi*-plicity of modes, or what we understand Bal to mean by ‘accumulation’ (in her epigraph to this essay). Intermediality, by comparison, allows us to specifically think, and feel, with the generative *inter*-zones in which an ethics of accountability to our source materials and interlocutors become inseparable from aesthetics; and where these inter-zones are where meaning making is amplified.

Working together across the entire collection, we learned to appreciate the screen as a site for igniting semantic processes that unfold temporally as well as spatially. We embraced digital composition as a chance to create an experiential analytic encounter that builds and thickens as attuners interact with it and the argument or analysis unfolds. This required paying close attention to speed, rhythm, pace, and interaction as critical dimensions of the analytic force that each article sought to activate. To these ends, we carefully considered details that our attuners would likely (and hopefully) never notice, such as the speed of a fading text, or the becoming-sticky of texts or images that imperceptibly claim their own moment on the screen before an attuner scrolls onwards. Through these processes Victoria Baskin Coffey began to design for the screen as a stage rather than a frame. This, in turn, led us to ask: What does it mean to stage an argument? Each time the answer was different.⁸

GIVING FORM: PRAGMATICS AND POLITICS

The digital articles in ‘Epistemic attunements’ have been peer-reviewed and published—paired with an exegesis, or author’s reflection—across two platforms: the purpose-built website designed and maintained by Curatorium Editorial Collective and the conventional Wiley publishing platform from which you are currently reading TJAJA. Despite our preservation of ‘the journal article’ as a key anthropological text-form here, our aim has never been to re-legitimate the article as a scholarly form over and above other genres of non-traditional research outputs, such as films, exhibitions, artworks, curated events, creative writing, and graphic novels. Rather, we



agree with Julian Knowles (2023) that a disruption of the binary of traditional vs non-traditional research outputs is long overdue.

As editors we made the decision to hold onto the term 'article' in this context because our ambition is to expand and reclaim the genre, not to wish it away.⁹ Pragmatically this also helps the contributions to gain recognition as fully fledged works of original research. Finding a way for this work to quite literally count and circulate within existing structures was an important dimension of our undertaking, especially given the number of junior scholars who took up the invitation to participate.

The point of these intermedial compositions is not to reach decisively 'beyond text'. We do not reject academic voices and rhetoric as a matter of principle. Instead, each article had to find an intermedial form that amplified its core critical concerns, thereby making an original contribution to the literature on its own terms. Form and content had to be brought into relationship with the aim of generating new insights and original arguments deemed relevant by experts in the field. To put it crudely, the twinned publications had to be recognised as original research, even if they emerged nothing like a set of conventional articles.

The exegesis, or author's commentary, plays a particular role here, borrowed from the creative arts. The exegeses in this collection are reflections written by the authors to expand upon their sense of the epistemic stakes in their efforts, in whatever way they deem appropriate. So, here too, the form of the work varies. Beyond that, the exegesis provides an anchoring text within the conventional pages of *TAJA*, allowing for conventional metrics to accrue. For this reason, the twinned pieces have a single title and DOI. But equally, it is our hope that publishing on our own independent website will enable this material to be found and accessed by wider and more diverse audiences than might generally dive into an issue of *TAJA*. With this aim in mind, Boko *et al.* on behalf of the Alice Springs-based family collective Nguny tjuku Mamaku Tjukurpa Kanyini Wanka, composed their article with multiple modes of address so that it could speak directly to both Anangu family *and* all other 'visitors' to the article.

As Keith Murphy (2021, 116) argues, there is an inherent power to acts of giving form. Approaching the question of power through form within this collection attunes us to political forces operating at a different register to a prescriptive identity-driven politics of inclusion. It matters to the curation of this collection not only who gets a look in, or who is invited to add their bit, or who steps aside to allow others to speak, but what each expressive agent, human or non-human, might actively contribute to the shaping of knowledge. In this, power is performative. And collaborative. Politics finds different formal expression.¹⁰

In other words, we want to stress that strength of this collection lies beyond simply its inclusion of multiple voices and points of view—birds', frogs', bones', beaches', lost loved ones', and ancestors'. Through the co-design process across multiple materials, those voices and modes of address have been amplified and orchestrated in ways that seek to enable them to make a claim on knowledge and authority *in their own terms*. Rather than using media to illustrate or identify cultural difference, the work here is to make a performative claim for this knowledge within the pages of *TAJA* as contributions towards the broadening and deepening of transdisciplinary outlooks (Williams and Kulka, this issue, FORM; Gurumuruwuy *et al.*, this issue, FORM; and Lowe, this issue, REACH), facilitating a broader understanding of the practices, agents, and infrastructures through which more-than-human futures are being actively crafted (Irwin *et al.*, this issue, FORM) if not radically remade (CómicsClub, this issue, FORM; see also Tsing *et al.* 2021).

With the inclusion of sound and images—and with intermedial practices being the means by which research is composed—authorship can become thick, complex, and collaborative in



ways that, as Jilda Andrews argues (this issue, REACH), challenge conventional presumptions of sole authorship, even when it is only a single human tapping away at the keyboard. As different knowledge authorities with their different modes of expression are brought together within individual articles, and across the collection, 'Epistemic attunements' holds space for the generative friction of suggestive resonance *and* dissonance across and between voices, in this way refusing a mediated assimilation into a singular display of mastery (cf. Tsing *et al.* 2021).

CómicClub's contribution, for instance, builds on their experience in graphic ethnography to make a web comic that takes up the multiverse possibilities of the form to deliver alternative storylines that highlight the kinds of decisions forced upon Caroline Schuster's interlocutors as they navigate life shaped by 'collective debt under conditions of 'global weirding' and extreme weather' (Bernardou *et al.*, this issue, FORM). As Schuster argues, the comic form provides a 'narrative frame and set of visual idioms [that] draw the empirical and analytical dimensions of the project together, with unique possibilities for anthropology of finance' (Bernardou *et al.*, this issue, FORM). Anthony Irwin, Ken George, and Kirin Narayan settled on a layered approach to composition 'in recognition of how the article builds upon itself, just as the repeated tracings of pencil lead on the face of the god amass into a lustrous image of a divine being' (Irwin *et al.*, this issue, FORM)

Many small decisions have been made in keeping with the editorial commitment to an attuning to form that expresses a quiet merging of aesthetics, ethics, and politics. For instance, in each article, authors have made their own decision regarding whether to italicise foreign or Indigenous words, according to the internal logics of piece. Lowe, for instance, chose not to italicise, in step with Māori theorists who seek to avoid a performative othering at the level of language. Williams and Kulka address the epistemic complexity of translation with the decision to present translations in grey tone, thereby pushing English back, fractionally yet decisively, from the determining register of knowledge.

Stolte's bibliographic remix also serves as a good example. The gestural poetics of the design foregrounds her conceptual commitments to Kitkiñike, a Nez Perce term that means 'in the direction of'. Rather than performing a straightforwardly algorithmic task of ordering and reordering, the design invites the attuner to navigate a series of concepts and questions, eschewing the kinds of mastery that the digital entices us to believe we have by offering different categories of organisation and the possibility of imposing them.

Across the collection, as contributors cultivate the epistemic grounds from which an expanded common sense might emerge without erasing the cultural and historical particularity of the sensorium of the world they engage, they do so with particular stakes in view. For instance, Williams and Kulka's article on 'intimate sensing' in Far North Queensland works to redirect and rescale the senses to challenge to techno-scientific approaches to the study of climate change (this issue, FORM). Fisher takes both fire and images of fire in Darwin and Sydney as interlocutors with which to interrogate fire beyond 'catastrophe' or 'culture' in his pursuit of 'a politics of apprehension' (Fisher, this issue, FORM).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the creative breadth and multimodal dimensionality of First Nations knowledge practices, it is the Indigenous-led contributions that most radically and inventively activate a politics of giving form. Stolte's anticolonial concerns find form through a design that playfully invites attuners to a click-and-scroll exploration of a First Nations research bibliography performatively retheorised as a cultural landscape. Miyarrka Media treat written text as a form of concrete poetry as they gesture to the iterative accruals made visible in tidal wrack lines, in a nod to the article's insistence on the located authority and knowledge of *rañi* (beach) and *gapu* (sea) themselves (Gurumuruwuy *et al.*, this issue, FORM). Fiona



Wirrer-George Oochunyang describes her own performative politics ‘giving Voice to Voice’. In her *Arnya* Lecture, Voice is made manifest through an intermedial orchestration of multiple generations of family including Country in dialogue with scholars and the anthropologist Donald Thompson; she explicitly stakes her claim for a performative mode of Indigenous knowledge and intercultural critique crafted for, and within, the academy (this issue, REACH). In other articles too, Country claims an expressive voice and formative, even colour-loaded, presence (Boko *et al.*; Gurumuruwuy *et al.*; Fisher; Williams and Kulka; Stolte). As Andrews points out in her exegesis, being able to activate Country as an authoritative participant in the creation of knowledge in ways that are palpable to non-Indigenous members of the design team is a game-changer, and not only for her own research practice. She notes that this radically challenges assumptions of the classic figure of the single author in ways that anthropology can now begin to grapple with. Wirrer-George Oochunyang further suggests that power in these performative intermedial contexts are the generative sites for new configurations of power and knowledge to assertively claim their places in epistemological landscapes. As she emphatically states, with clapsticks in hand at the end of her lecture to Australian anthropologists at their 2018 annual conference, videoed and reworked for this collection, ‘I am not writing and asking for change. You see, the Voice, and the essence of my work, is change’.

THE SHAPE OF LIMITATIONS

Three years of wrangling this collection into shape has taught us a lot. Unsurprisingly, there have been frustrations and thwarted dreams along the way. These have been instructive. Instead of wrapping up this introduction with a sigh of exhausted triumph, it makes sense to acknowledge the limitations and obstacles that have also substantially shaped this project, not least because these also delimit the potential of ‘Epistemic attunements’ to offer a viable model for others who might be inspired to try something like this for themselves.

First, bringing ‘Epistemic attunements’ to publication has entailed substantially more hands-on editorial roles than is usual in the curation of a journal’s special issue. Our process of bespoke conceptual compositional design and coding made a mockery of timelines and deadlines. But as a new editorial process began to reveal itself, we were compelled by the emergent creative works that the back-and-forth of iterative design with contributors (and their materials and concepts) made possible. For some authors, this design process began to make new thinking and new arguments available. Those who had been more accustomed to working in a text-based publishing environment, rewrote and reconsidered their articles after having explored the possibilities of colour, alignment, contrast, space, and movement together. The ongoing back-and-forth, the ‘showing and telling’, over Zoom meetings inspired many of the contributors to open their arguments to new kinds of descriptive possibilities—precisely because of the capacities for the emergent form itself to express some of the relational analysis and poetic force of their intellectual work. Encouraged by the revelatory dynamics of this process, we committed to giving each article the gestation and labour that it demanded. This was one more dimension of the ethics and aesthetics of care that the authors and editors collectively brought to the project, as we tended like jazz gardeners to the sites, ideas, materials, entities, and interlocutors through which each article took shape and grew.

It is no exaggeration to say that the production of each of these articles required hundreds of hours of mostly unpaid labour by our editorial collective, with no extra logistical support available from TAJA. By necessity, but also admittedly by design, our team took on the responsibilities



of coding, of co-designing both graphics and user experience, of copy editing, and proof-reading everything on our website. Without institutional funding, this has required an incredible level of commitment from a team without secure employment. Certainly, for us it would be impossible to consider doing this again, no matter how much we have loved the process and outcomes. In short, ours is not a viable model for others to follow. It has simply taken too much unpaid time and work. The diverse skill sets required, the invisible labour, and the yet-to-be widely recognised intellectual rigour of anthropologically-attuned design thinking that has brought this site to life (see FORM) is more than any journal is likely to be able to devote to such projects, at least under current structures and publishing regimes.

Second, several authors have remarked that they found it difficult, if not impossible at some level, to shake-off the text-based analytic drive that they have been trained to pursue. They found it difficult to know how to get around the expected obligations to formally cite the literature (cf. Gurumuruwuy *et al.*, this issue, FORM). Even when embracing the possibility of dropping footnotes and theoretical language, some felt uneasy about the capacity of their colleagues to apprehend their intermedial argument, as distinct from a conventional article in which everything that matters is expected to be quite literally spelled out. For us as editors, it was salutatory to realise the enduring power of the traditional article as a profoundly inculcated and disciplining form of scholarly expression.

Third, the articles we have crafted were never intended to be fully immersive experiences of a digital utopia. The sensorial fields within which we have worked are delimited by the sights, sounds, and touch (of the mouse or trackpad) that can be accessed via a computer. Technical constraints became creative constraints. Working with specific functionality of the Webflow CMS has meant that these sensory dimensions become even further disconnected when attuners are forced to interact to make things work, for example, pressing a triangular play icon to hear a bird sing (van Dooren *et al.*, this issue, FORM) or to hear a story emerging out of an intentionally darkened screen (Boko *et al.*, this issue, REACH).

Despite our strong desire to sidestep the algorithmic as a determining analytic mode, computing software has had the last say in determining the efficacy of our efforts. It was simply beyond the scope of the project to create the articles to be experienced at the scale of a phone screen. Sadly, we accept that this could prevent some authors from being able to share and view in their regular vernacular digital settings and may curtail access for readers accustomed to accessing palm-sized content. The fact that attuners will encounter the digital articles with various operating systems and screen sizes means that there may be some clunky user-experiences. If that is you, we are sorry and advise you to check the operating system guidelines and perhaps try on another device.

Indeed, as it turns out, the interactivity between different media on the page—the key element of the design in so many of the pieces—is the least stable aspect of the design when the work starts moving across different operating systems. It is, of course, when things don't work as designed that we are reminded in no uncertain terms that for all the attention and conceptual care brought to its making, this is a project at once enabled and constrained by hard and soft technologies. Although we are not naïve to technological determinism of this kind, it breaks our hearts to accept the vulnerability of our work on a rapidly transforming digital horizon. There are, it sometimes seems, many excellent reasons not to introduce this degree of technological mediation into the work of building concepts. There are now already, of course, an entirely other set of generative AI possibilities for brave anthropologists to play with.

Technology matters here not only as an anthropological tool. As Orit Halpern elaborates in *Beautiful Data*, '[O]ur forms of attention, observation, and truth are situated, contingent, and



contested and that the ways we are trained, and train ourselves, to observe, document, record, and analyse the world are deeply historical in character' (2014, 1). Even as we work to cultivate spaces of digital attunement that offer an alternative to the restless and relentless click-and-scroll habits and habitus into which we have been schooled by the likes of Meta and X, we take seriously Takaragawa *et al.*'s (2019) warning against uncritical suppositions that multimodal, or in our case intermedial, approaches to knowledge production somehow inherently solve ethical dilemmas. We find ourselves in agreement with them that these technological configurations are more than likely to introduce issues of concern that may not necessarily be anticipated at the time of publication. Similarly, we welcome Shankar *et al.*'s identification of the dangers of an uncritical or fetishised use of digital media by multimodal scholars. We concur that there will always be value and purpose to 'extratextual engagement' (2021, 422) and a need for a critical ambivalence in relation to what these technologies and experimental forms make possible. Yet, we would argue that the sheer mechanics of our project push us beyond ambivalence, especially considering the claims we have made for the regenerative value of this work.

What does it mean for an ethics and aesthetics of care when carefully tended digital connections stutter, freeze, break, or crash? What does it mean to craft digital configurations destined, inevitably, for technological obsolescence? Are the moments of distraction and disappointment that some attuners will inevitably experience because of technology glitching sufficient reason to declare our undertaking a failure?

These questions are not abstract. Our answer must be 'we hope not'. Working in the ways we have also entails a necessary embrace of possible failure. The value and purpose of our work becomes jarringly questionable when text and image don't align in the ways intended, and the poetics built into the design and code do not come into view. And yet, as we weigh up the value of what we have been able to deliver on behalf of our contributors and the worlds to which, in turn, they are responsible, our commitment to processes of regeneration offers a different place from which to conclude than simply with a resigned nod to inherent vulnerability. A regenerative approach to this collection, as Andrews powerfully encourages in her article in respect to her own ongoing museological curatorial work, recognises the intrinsic value of the work of clearing old growth and sowing seeds, even though those seeds are by no means guaranteed to sprout.

In this sense, 'Epistemic attunements' offers a formal provocation 'in the direction of' (Stolte, this issue, REACH) a regenerative anthropology (see REACH). We have modelled different ways to try this. And these are certainly not the only ones. Our editorial collective took on this enormously time consuming, though often joyful and surprise-filled, approach to scholarly curation and compositional co-design because we believe that anthropology, perhaps more than any other discipline, is both theoretically and methodologically positioned to cultivate expanded zones of critical-creativity in meaningful and socially engaged ways. As many colleagues across many disciplines now insist, these times demand more than research-as-usual. As the futures that some of us once took for granted fracture and burn, we need new coalitions of researchers and makers. And new publics. We need new kinds of knowledges and new processes of becoming knowledgeable together (Tsing *et al.*, 2024). If we are to move beyond a sense of anthropology as a discipline in perpetual crisis (Thomas 2019; Jobson 2020) we need to actively pursue a recalibration of our senses; and to bring a renewed analytic attention to the arts of making sense across increasingly complex sites and scales of existential threat.

The shape of the world is never still. It is up to anthropology to respond accordingly. Even if there will never be another issue of TAJA of this kind, 'Epistemic attunements' shows that it can be—or at least should be—possible to think with and across media in ways that re-calibrate and thicken our capacity to respond to situated concerns and socially dynamic worlds. Despite a



habitus of flickering information inundation that is changing not only what we know, but how we come to knowledge, who we become in that process, and who profits as a result, our authors and their interlocutors insist there remain many ways to tend to the work of knowing differently. And many reasons for doing so.

This is why we spent the last three years building a website to host a double issue of *TAJA*. We dedicate this collection to the next constellations of wild ideas, yet to find their forms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are immensely grateful to the contributors and commentators who not only brought incredible projects to the collection, but a willingness to stick with us through sometimes lumpy processes and protracted timelines. Great thanks to the peer reviewers who enthusiastically took on the task of evaluating these differing forms, offering insightful questions and comments without ever questioning the terms or validity of the experiment. Credit is also due to Lisa Wynn, whose initial suggestions as Australian Anthropological Society's President that *TAJA* might more actively engage multimodal and other creative work eventually led us here. We likewise gratefully acknowledge *TAJA* editors Andrew McWilliam, Jaap Timmer, Anna-Karina Hermkens, and editorial managers Thomas Wright and Jerrold Cuperus, who have supported the project across these years, thinking through different challenges with us as they arose. Jerrold and Jaap got us over what seemed like a never-to-be-reached finishing line with humour, grace and sheer determination. Gabriel Dattatreyan and Melinda Hinkson have been incredibly sharp and generous commentators, we are so grateful for their insights. Likewise, but differently, Lily George and Zeynep Gürsel have been critical friends of this project over many years. Their exceptionally nuanced anthropological commitments inflect this special issue in ways that no amount of footnotes could ever convey. Thanks also to the many other dear friends and colleagues for gifts of walking, talking, thinking, and wondering together, on screen and in-person, including especially Ton Otto, Jovan Maud, Jane Sloan, Chris Wright, Christian Suhr, Haidy Geismar, Anna Tsing, Jenny Chio, Hannah Robinson, Nellie Peoples, Michaela Spencer, Steven Feld, Mick Taussig, and Jilda Andrews. Open access publishing facilitated by Charles Darwin University, as part of the Wiley - Charles Darwin University agreement via the Council of Australian University Librarians.

Jennifer warmly acknowledges conversations in January 2024 with the group convened in Berlin for by the Stadtlabor for Multimodal Anthropology at Humboldt-Universität, especially Andrew Gilbert for his close comments on this essay. Jane Sloan has been an incredible friend and editor over the many drafts through which this essay and other contributions to this collection found form. Alicia Wheatley and Robin Rodd shared for fabulous and formative discussions about regenerative praxis that find different kinds of expression here. Charles Darwin University's Ruth Wallace and the Northern Institute's Kim Humphery have enabled this project in so many ways by supporting scholarly collaborations and socially attuned experiments that do not necessarily conform to standardising metrics of value. Thank you. Finally, thanks to Paul Gurrumurwuy Wunungmurra, Co-Director of the CDU Centre for Creative Futures, for everything really. And, of course, to Evan Wyatt for all the rest.

Victoria Baskin Coffey offers these acknowledgements: A lot of what I've done here comes from a place of rage. Rage that has tried to find form and shape and reach in the tendrils of words and colour and breath and feeling. It's not often that we confess or locate our motivations in rage but it's so often the place from which we curate and create. Inspired are we by the rage that something is not the way it could be. That the world is not as open and inclusive as it should be. The system has gotten too tight, the questions too exclusive. We create with a yearning for all the change that seems so obviously hidden in plain sight. Over time, if we will it through critical self-reflection, rage finds its place

in the softest of gestures: in turning towards, in listening, and in opening. Rage finds itself humbled by community and collaboration and transformed by curiosity and kindness. It was my Dad who taught me to shake my fist at the world while loving it at the same time. This project, and my part in it, is my ode to that. My gratitude to Aarhus University, James Cook University, Indian Institute of Technology Madras, and The Centre of Creative Futures at Charles Darwin University for their institutional support. My sincere thanks to my family and friends, collaborators and co-conspirators for all the other worlds we're making inside of this one, in rage and with love.

Caleb Kingston offers these acknowledgements: Firstly, I would love to thank Viktor and Jennifer for giving me the opportunity (and much grace) to work on this project, for having confidence in how my work would contribute, and for the fond memories of our collaboration together. I would love to thank the authors for contributing their life work, and for letting me have the freedom of exploration in how it transcribes to the digital realm. I thank my family, friends, and loved ones, who've put up with my unbeknownst desire to be a hermit. And lastly my utmost thanks and gratitude to my partner Robi for their constant support, and who's homemade pizza is divine.

Sebastian J. Lowe offers these acknowledgements: Driving along with Dr Lily George on our way to a wānanga near Whangārei, Lily asked me, 'what kind of researcher do you want to become?' Her question emerged from discussion we were having about the overdue need for anthropology in Aotearoa New Zealand to begin to have tough conversations about the discipline, its history, and its future relevance in these islands in the South Pacific. Words, such as those from Lily, have carried me along like beacons of soft guiding light. I think about others, who have not only said things that matter to me, but who have, in all sorts of generous ways, put their words artfully into playful yet sincere action. Together with generous support from several institutions, namely Aarhus University, James Cook University, and The University of Waikato, I sincerely thank all those who have shared with me, guided me, supported me, and provided me with sustenance in all sorts of ways and by all sorts of means to keep my pathway lit. I especially acknowledge my dear family, close friends, colleagues, and supervisors, and Te Awa Tupua, all of whom continue to play a part in the journey that I have never felt I have ever had to walk alone. The Curatorium Collective has been such a journey. I hope it illuminates others on their own paths of becoming.

Lisa Stefanoff gratefully acknowledges UNSW Art & Design and Charles Darwin University Faculty of Arts and Society Centre for Creative Futures, and her colleagues in both places, especially Jennifer Deger, for honorary positions that kept her in the game and provided infrastructural and academic support after her ARC DECRA 'Moving Stories' project (DE140101607) funding ended during the pandemic. In Mparntwe, Tangentyere Artists, Rosalyn Brenda Boko and the Ngunytjuku Mamaku Tjukurpa Kanyini Wanka group are always grounding, determining, and positive forces for ideas and work that matter. Lisa now owes her patient starburst kids, Anouk and Luca, heaps of unfettered weekend time.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

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ENDNOTES

- ¹Although in recent years it has become possible to include video and audio clips within the pages of *TAJA* and other Wiley publications, stubborn epistemic hierarchies remain. Images, for instance, are automatically labelled and numbered as 'figures', and are thus positioned as illustrative, or otherwise secondary to the written text. Likewise, the template presumes that every image requires a caption. Equally frustrating for those of us working and thinking in multiple media are the limitations of file size and duration imposed on audio-visual media.
- ²For a differently orientated discussion on regenerative praxis from an anthropological perspective see Wheatley (2024).
- ³We should acknowledge an important and fast-growing interdisciplinary literature on regenerative practices and design. These discussions are beyond the scope of this essay. Instead, we specifically adopt the language of regeneration in response to the critical creative impetus of the First Nations contributors to this issue: Jilda Andrews, Gretchen Stolte, Fiona Wirrer George Oochunyung, Paul Gurumuruwuy, Enid Gurumuluwuy, Meredith Balanydjarrk, Warren Balpati, Jaramali Kulka, Margaret (Margie) Nampitjinpa Boko, and Rosalyn Anu Brenda Boko.
- ⁴For other influential examples and elaborations of critical-creative approaches that have influenced anthropologists in our collective see Berger and Mohr (1982), Minh-Ha (1982), Roe (1983), Hooks (1995), Carter (2004), McPherson (2018) and Chun (2019).
- ⁵See also Lars Elleström's (2021a, 2021b) important two volumes.
- ⁶We did not impose this terminology on our authors, and in fact have found it interesting and helpful to see how others conceptualise their efforts.
- ⁷Many thanks to Ken George for coining this term in conversation with us.
- ⁸Our investments in performativity, innovation, emergence, collaborative, and multi-authored work explored in this issue align in many ways with other anthropologists working under the rubric of multimodal. Mark Westmoreland, for instance, makes the case for the ways that multimodal approaches contribute to the 'reshaping' of anthropology (Westmoreland 2022; see also Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019; and Astacio *et al.* 2021). For us, however, the strength of thinking and making in the practice-language of intermediality, as distinct from multimodality, is that it allows us to shift emphasis from a technologically enabled multiplicity of modes, or what we understand Bal to mean by 'accumulation' in her epigraph to this essay, to focus on the generative inter-zones that open when composing with and across media.
- ⁹We gratefully acknowledge these kindred spirits in the work of rethinking academic forms, including McHardy (2017), Wylie *et al.* (2017), Downey and Zuiderent-Jerak (2021), Loveless (2019), Jungnickel (2020) and TopEndSTS (2020).
- ¹⁰For example, sharp eyed readers might notice an inconsistency in the textual treatment of Indigenous words across the collection. Our editorial decision was to leave the choice to italicise, or not, to each author or authorial group, rather than imposing a homogenising style. This mattered greatly to many of our authors. For some the refusal to italicise and, in the process not 'other' non-English words, makes an important anticolonial point. Yet, for others, such as Miyarrka Media, the interplay between languages emphasised by a formal shift into italics for Yolŋu words offers another iteration of the performative relationality of sameness and difference at the heart of the effort. Similarly, we left the decision whether to capitalise Country, or not, to each author.

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How to cite this article: Deger, J., Coffey, V.B., Kingston, C., Lowe, S.J. & Stefanoff, L. (2024) Epistemic attunements: Experiments in intermedial anthropology. *The Australian Journal of Anthropology*, 35, 3–19. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1111/taja.12492>