

Researching Contemporary Cosmologies: Indigenous Research Methods

INDIGENOUS HEALTH RESEARCH AND THE NON-INDIGENOUS RESEARCHER: A PROPOSED FRAMEWORK FOR THE AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

Cindy Smithers Graeme

ABSTRACT

INTRODUCTION

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Primary Research

Reflexive Reflection Co-created with *Kehte-ayak* (Old Ones) as an Indigenous Qualitative Methodological Data Contemplation Tool

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Article

An Application of Two-Eyed Seeing: Indigenous Research Methods With Participatory Action Research

Cindy Peltier¹

Abstract

In this time of reconciliation, Indigenous researchers-in-relation are sharing research paradigms and approaches that align with Indigenous worldviews. This article shares an interpretation of the Mi'kmaw concept of Two-Eyed Seeing as the synthesis of Indigenous methodology and participatory action research situated within an Indigenous paradigm of relevant, reciprocal, respectful, and responsible research. This research is a collaborative effort between a Mi'kmaw and a non-Indigenous researcher to explore the concept of Two-Eyed Seeing and its implications for conducting research.

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Engaging with Indigenous Research Methodologies: The Centrality of Country, Positionality and Community Need

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methodology first nations collaboration

Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: Towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice

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Lynore K Geia is a proud woman of Bwgcolman, born and raised on Palm Island, Queensland

ABSTRACT: There is increasing recognition of Indigenous perspectives from various parts of the world in relation to storytelling, research and its effects on practice. The recent emergence of storytelling or yarning as a research method in Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island studies and other Indigenous peoples of the world is gaining momentum. Narratives, stories, storytelling and yarning are emerging methods in research and has wide ranging potential to shape conventional research discourse making research more meaningful and accessible for researchers. In this paper we argue for the importance of Indigenous research methods and Indigenous method(ology), within collaborative respectful partnerships with non-Indigenous researchers. It is imperative to take these challenging steps towards better outcomes for Indigenous people

are derived from presentations delivered at a research methodologies held at the University of Canberra's Collaborative Indigenous Research by interdisciplinary approaches to engage on of Indigenous/First Nations studies. en-

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Overview

- Ontologies and Epistemologies.
- Personhood.
- Indigenous knowledge and worldviews.
- Decolonising Methodologies.
- Yarning, data and incorporating indigenous methodologies.
- Going beyond...

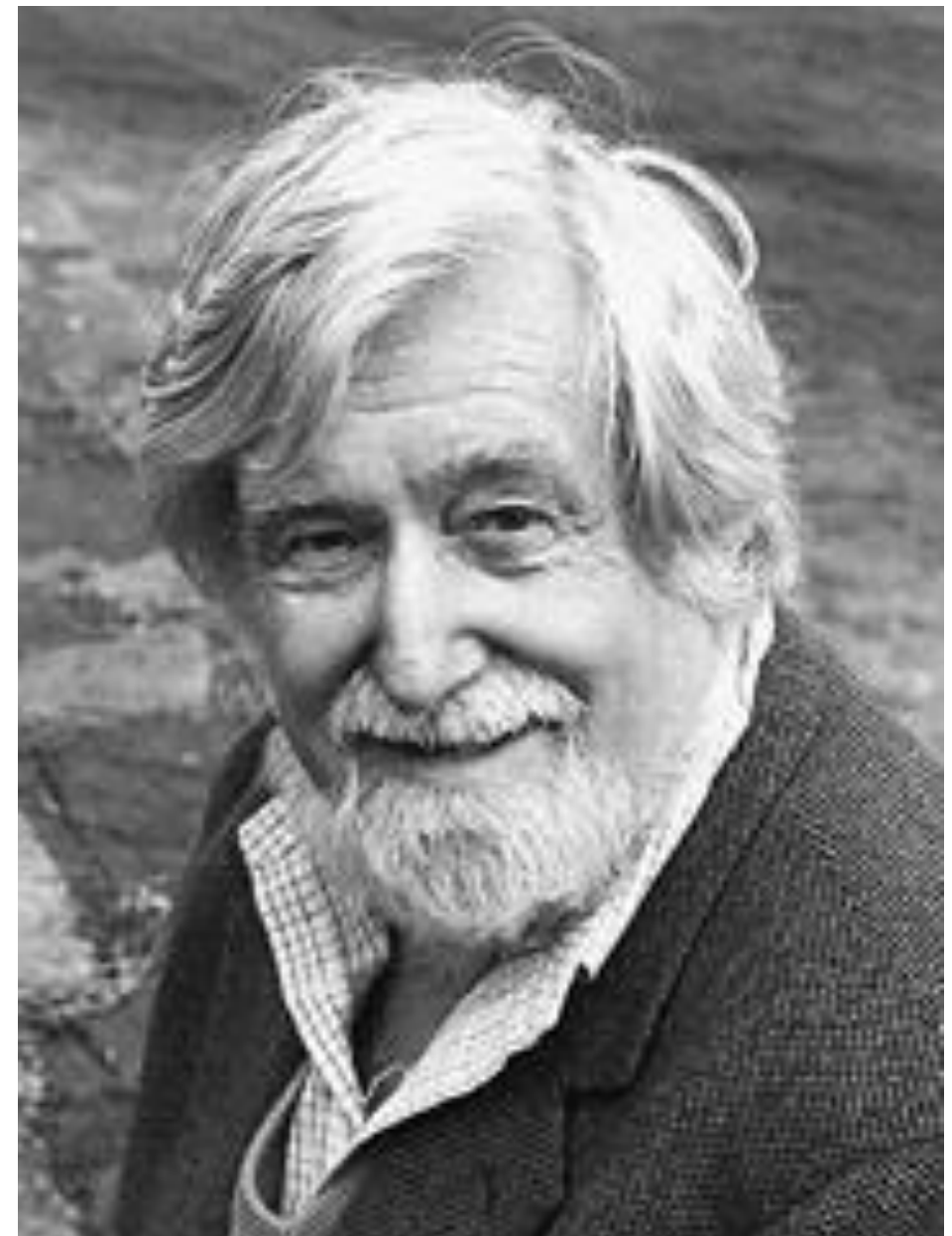
Ontologies and Epistemologies

- Qualitative research derives from a Western, Euro-American, epistemological system.
- “[...] these Eurocentric biomedical research practices have left a legacy of mistrust within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. Research in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities is a ‘dirty word’ and is understood as something done to them and not with them, without reciprocity” (Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013, p. 13).
- It is based on underlying ontological assumptions about the nature of the world:
- “[...] English inevitably places settler worldviews at the centre of every concept, obscuring true understanding. For example, explaining Aboriginal notions of time is an exercise in futility as you can only describe it as ‘non-linear’ in English, which immediately slams a big line right across your synapses. You don’t register the the ‘non’ - only the ‘linear’: that is the way yo process that word, the shape it takes in your mind. Worst of all it is only describing the concept by saying what it is not, rather than what it is. We don’t have a word for non-linear in our languages because nobody would consider travelling, thinking or talking in a straight line in the first place. The winding path is just how a path is, and there it needs no name” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 21).
- What happens when we begin research from entirely different ontological assumptions, and with different epistemological tools?



Personhood

- The ‘Western’ Individual:
- "[...] a bounded, unique, more or less integrated motivational and cognitive universe, a dynamic center of awareness, emotion, judgment and action organized into a distinctive whole and set contrastively against other such wholes and against its social and natural background" (Geertz, 1974, p. 31).
- In Charles Taylor's terms, the Western self is "buffered" (2007, pp. 37-41), separated from the outside world and from others.



Personhood

- By contrast, the **dividual self** is often considered to be made up of several constituent parts, or to be porous with permeable boundaries through which other selves or entities might come and go (Markus & Kitayama, 1991).
- In anthropology attention was drawn to the dividual self through the work of anthropologist Marilyn Strathern on Melanesian personhood.
- “The dividual is considered to be divisible, comprising a complex of separable - interrelated but essentially independent - dimensions or aspects. The individual is thus monadic, while the dividual is fractal; the individual is atomistic, while the dividual is always socially embedded; the individual is an autonomous social actor, the author of his or her own actions, while the dividual is a heteronomous actor performing a culturally written script; the individual is a free-agent, while the dividual is determined by cultural structures; the individual is egocentric, while the dividual is sociocentric” (Smith, 2012, p. 53).



“Non-Western” Self

- “What it means to be a person...in the Japanese sense cannot be understood without reference to the individual’s social ties: the particular, usually tight and limited human nexus to which he or she belongs, from which one derives identity, and to which one is totally committed” (de Craemer, 1983, p. 26).
- “Malays on the island of Langkawi become complete persons, that is, kin, through living and consuming together in houses. Identity and substance are mutable and fluid. These perceptions suggest a processual view of kinship and personhood...” (Carsten, 1995, p. 223)
- The concept of ‘Noman can be glossed variously as mind, intention, will, agency, social conscience, desire, or personality. It clearly covers a wide range of meanings. These meanings have to be seen processually, in terms of the life-cycle and of social interaction" (Strathern & Stewart, 1998, p. 175).
- Do ‘Western’ psychological/sociological research methods even make sense in the context of a processual, socially embedded understanding of personhood?

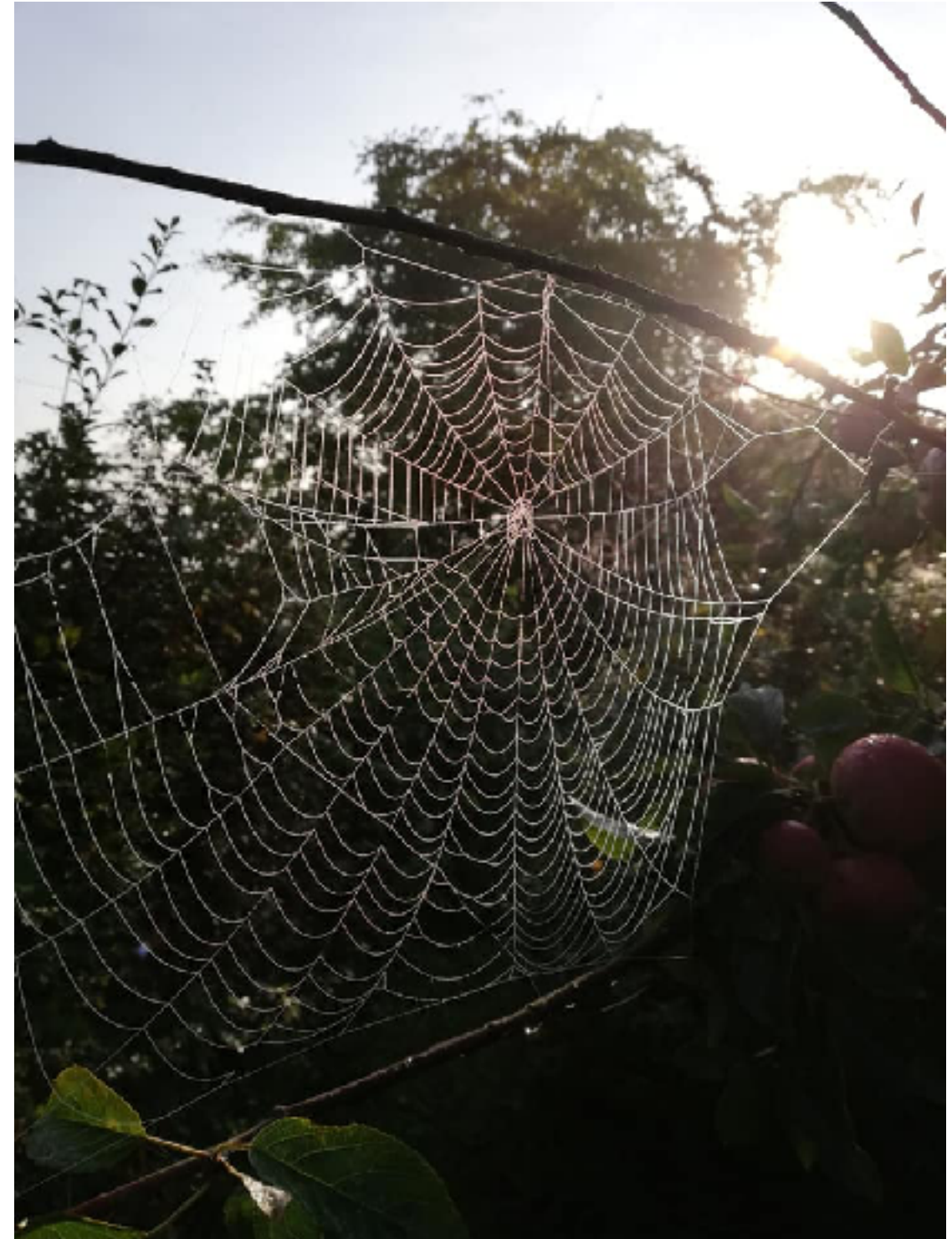
Indigenous Knowledge

- There is also the issue of what kinds of knowledge are valued.
- Western scientific knowledge is often valued for its objectivity, reproducibility, etc.
- Science is understood as a dispassionate search for objective knowledge, implying a degree of separation between the ‘researcher’ and the ‘researched.’
- “Ultimately Indigenous knowledge and world views are characterized by their relational aspects; they cannot be separated from the people, the land, spirituality, and the universe [...] It is this relational understanding of the world that underpins Indigenous research paradigms” (Smithers-Graeme, 2013, p. 515).



Indigenous Worldviews

- Indigenous worldviews tend to collapse the binary distinctions that Western societies are built on - e.g. spirituality is not something separate from other domains of life, but is fundamentally braided.
- “The arguments of different indigenous peoples based on spiritual relationships to the universe, to the landscape, to stones, rocks, insects, and other things, seen and unseen, have been difficult arguments for Western systems of knowledge to deal with or accept...” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 78).
- “These arguments give a partial indication of the different world views and alternative ways of coming to know, and of being, which still endure within the indigenous world...” (p. 78).
- “It is one of the few parts of ourselves which the West cannot decipher, cannot understand and cannot control...yet” (p. 78).



Key Themes: Animacy

- Robin Wall Kimmerer talks about the Anishinaabe word Puhpowee - “the force which causes mushrooms to push up from the earth over night” (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 49).
- ‘Western science has no such term, no words to hold this mystery. You’d think that biologists, of all people, would have words for life...’
- ‘...in scientific language our terminology is used to define the boundaries of our knowing. What lies beyond our grasp remains unnamed...’
- ‘The makers of this word understood a world of being, full of unseen energies that animate everything...’ (Kimmerer, 2013, p. 49).



Key Themes: Reciprocity

- ‘The idea of reciprocity with land is fundamental to many indigenous belief systems. Indeed, such beliefs serve as the foundation for what have been described as “cultures of gratitude” ...’
- ‘In such cultures, people have a responsibility not only to be grateful for the gifts provided by Mother Earth, they are also responsible for playing a positive and active role in the well-being of the land. They are called not to be passive consumers, but to sustain the land that sustains them’ (Kimmerer, 2011, p. 257).



Key Themes: Ceremony

- “Ceremonies are a form of reciprocity that renews bonds between land and people and focuses intention, attention, and action on behalf of the natural world, which is inclusive of the spiritual world...” (Kimmerer, 2018, p. 31).
- Ritual interaction with the living world in order to establish relationships.



Decolonising Methodologies

- The Durkheimian approach to sociology adopts a positivist approach - with an emphasis on objectivity.
- “From an indigenous perspective Western research is more than just research that is located in a positivist tradition. It is research which brings to bear, on any study of indigenous peoples, a cultural orientation, a set of values, a different conceptualisation of such things as time, space and subjectivity, different and competing theories of knowledge, highly specialised forms of language, and structures of power” (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 44).



Yarning Stories

- “[...] it will be stories, images and yarns that will make the English work in this book, with meaning being made in the meandering paths between the words, not the isolated words themselves” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 21).
- “Yarning is more than just a story or conversation in Aboriginal culture - it is a structured cultural activity that is recognised even in research circles as a valid and rigorous methodology for knowledge production, inquiry and transmission. It is a ritual that incorporates elements such as story, humour, gesture and mimicry for consensus-building, meaning-making and innovation. It references places and relationships and is highly contextualised in the local worldviews of those yarning” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 131).
- “It has protocols of active listening, mutual respect and building on what others have said rather than openly contradicting them or debating their ideas. There is no firm protocol or only one person speaking at a time, although the mutual respect protocol ensures that interjects are in support of what a speaker is saying [...] There is a lot of overlapping speech that makes yarning vibrant and dynamic and deeply stimulating. It is non-linear, branching off into diverse themes and topics but often returning to revisit ideas in ways that find connection and correlation between divers sets of data that would otherwise not be found in more analytic modes of dialogue” (Yunkaporta, 2019, p. 131).



Recording Data

- Sand Talk:
- “[...] I have built every chapter on oral culture exchanges: a series of yarns with diverse people [...] I carved the logic sequences and ideas arising from these yarns into traditional objects before I translated them into print [...] I simply hold those objects and translate into print parts of the knowledge I see there [...] Each chapter will include some ‘sand talk,’ invoking an Aboriginal custom of drawing images on the ground to convey knowledge” (Yunkaporta, 2019, pp. 15-17).
- “This is my method, and I call it *umpan* because that is our word for cutting, carving and making - it is also the word now used for writing. My method for writing incorporates images and story attached to place and relationships, expressed first through cultural and social activity” (ibid.)



Tips for Incorporation

- “Prepare well ahead of time. Getting to know the participants ahead of time will result in deeper yarning and richer insights into the research question(s) [...]”
- Befriend or engage in dialogue with an Indigenous colleague, or client, develop a respectful attitude in your interaction and you will in almost all cases receive a reciprocal respectful attitude from your Indigenous colleague or client;
- Tell your story, share some of your personal and professional story, it need not be a long story. In fact most Indigenous people in Australia prefer to share small yarns of introduction, and enquiry of their personal wellbeing and the country (that is their tribal, language and family affiliation) they belong to on first encounter with a stranger;
- Listen to their story; the process of interaction and sharing stories will begin to breakdown communication and social barriers between researchers and the Indigenous person. Be attentive, notice body language, tone of voice, the use of silence, and avoid the overzealous attempts of connecting with an Indigenous colleague or client or you run the risk of stifling any success in two way communication” (Geia, Hayes & Usher, 2013, p. 16).



Beyond...

Nature Mysticism

- “There is no doubt that as a boy I was becoming what might be described as a nature mystic. Somehow, I felt the presence of something which was beyond and yet in a way part of all the things that thrilled me – the wildflowers, and indeed the insects too. I will now record something...[that] I have never told anyone before, but now that I am in my 88th year I think I can admit it. Just occasionally when I was sure that no one could see me, I became so overcome with the glory of the natural scene, that for a moment or two I fell on my knees in prayer – not prayer asking for anything, but thanking God, who felt very real to me, for the glories of his Kingdom and for allowing me to feel them. It was always by the running waterside that I did this, perhaps in front of a great foam of meadowsweet or purple loosestrife...” (Alister Hardy, as cited in Hay, 2013).



Nature Mysticism

- “...I did not mean a belief in a deity with an anthropomorphic image, but did at least mean a belief in an “extra-sensory” contact with a Power which *is greater than, and in part lies beyond the individual self...*
- Towards this, whatever it may be, we have a feeling, no doubt for good biological, or psychological, reasons...of a *personal* relationship, and we can it God” (Hardy, 1966, p. 9)



Extrovertive Mystical Experience

- As I watched, suddenly the whole countryside changed and everything in it, without exception, simply glowed with numinous light – it seemed no longer to be lit by the sun but by its own internal radiance. Sunlight was not reflected from it, but I myself and everything else seemed to have become light – which now inter-penetrated and shone through our previously dense physical forms...The whole scene shone with an extraordinary golden glow, which included the sky and the atmosphere itself.

(RERC Reference: 10003, Male, no details).

- “As we conversed the situation became unreal. The plants and shrubs and the three pine trees in a copse...became unreal. And yet they were more real than I had ever seen them in the 3 1/2 years I had lived there. Instead of merging into a general familiar pattern, each item of plant, shrub and tree, stood out singularly, vivid, vibrant...The whole area became something on its own, apart from the rest. The whole area became something I had never seen before. I became filled with a feeling of elation and well-being such as I have never before or since experienced...I felt that I had seen Nature as it really is.”

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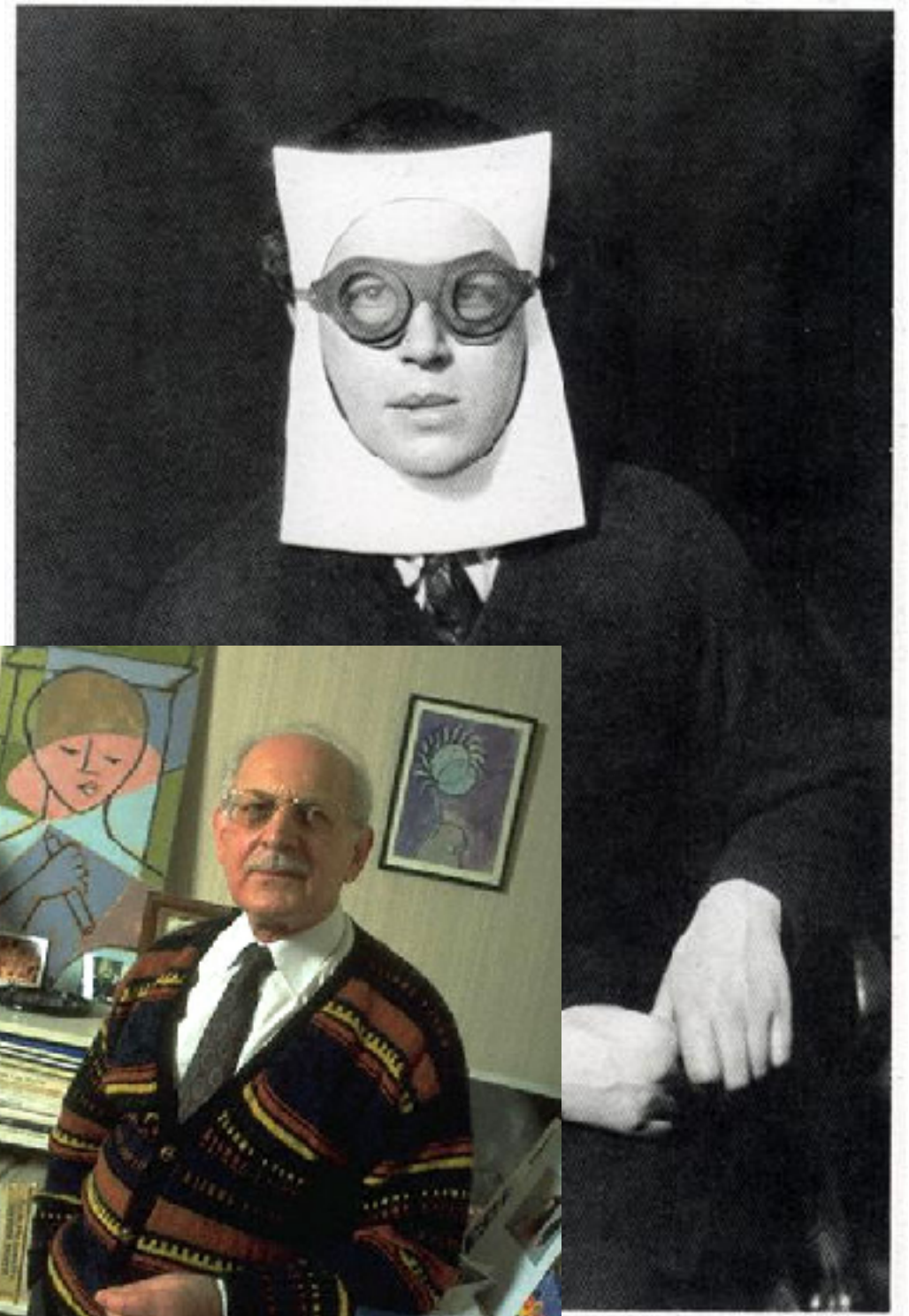
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Surreal

- “Psychic automatism in its pure state, by which one proposes to express [...] the actual functioning of thought. Dictated by thought, in the absence of any control exercised by reason, exempt from any aesthetic or moral concern” (Breton, 1990, p. 26).
- “[...] to reconcile reality with the illogical processes which arise in ecstatic states or in dreams, with the aim of creating a super-reality. Surrealism cannot accurately be described as fantasy, but as a superior reality, in which all the contradictions which afflict humanity are resolved as in a dream” (Alexandrian, 1970, p. 48).
- Breton communicated with Freud, as well as psychical researchers such as Charles Richet (Alexandrian, 1970, p. 47).
- A truly surreal experience would be one in which the ‘boundaries’ between inner/outer, subjective/objective, dream/reality, blur.



Surrealist Research

- Bureau of Surrealist Research, established in Paris in 1924.
- “The promoters of the surrealist movement, in their desire to appeal to the unconscious and to set surrealism along the path of greatest freedom, have already begun to organize a Bureau to unite all those who are interested in expression where thought is freed from any intellectual preoccupations...” (Durozoi, 2002).
- “[...] the public at large was invited to bring along accounts of dreams or of coincidences, ideas on fashion or politics, or inventions, so as to contribute to the ‘formation of genuine surrealist archives’” (Alexandrian, 1970, p. 49).



Surrealist Research Methods

- ‘Paranoiac-critical method’ - Salvador Dali.
- ‘spontaneous method of irrational knowledge based on the imperative critical association of phenomena [...],’
- Dali’s definition of painting: ‘photography (by hand and in colour) of concrete irrationality and of the imaginary world in general’ (in Alexandrian, 1970, pp. 102-103).
- Resonances with participant observation approaches - other ways to experience first-hand the surreal.



Conclusions

- There are different knowledge systems - ways of gathering information about the world (epistemologies), and different ways of putting that knowledge together (ontologies).
- Indigenous research methods begin from different ontological foundations, and so the kinds of questions and the kinds of knowledge sought might be quite different to that sought out in 'Western' science.
- The self is not necessarily separate or distinct from others, or from nature, nature is understood to be animate, reciprocity is central and ceremony provides a mode of engagement.
- Oral traditions have developed different strategies for collecting, storing and transmitting knowledge and information.
- Yarning and talking circles are one of the ways of sharing knowledge that can be very useful in qualitative research.
- Decolonising methodologies is a process of revealing, and facing up to, the ontological assumptions that dictate social research, allowing indigenous voices to speak.

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