Border work in the contact zone: thinking indigenous/non-indigenous collaboration spatially

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Border Work in the Contact Zone: thinking Indigenous/non-Indigenous collaboration spatially

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\textbf{ABSTRACT} This paper explores different ways of conceptualising Indigenous/non-Indigenous research collaboration and partnerships. It begins with a brief outline of the problem of current conceptualisations within the critical paradigm in qualitative research. It proposes the idea of the contact zone (Pratt, 1992) as a useful way to theorise the site, and border work (Haig-Brown \& Archibald, 1996) as a way to understand the emotional and intellectual work of intercultural collaboration. We apply these ideas to the analysis of a series of conversations between team members involved in a research partnership between an Australian Aboriginal corporation and a university. This analysis suggests that the way borders are conceived differently by different team members depends on their particular political investments. A range of border maintenance and border crossings is necessary for the task of achieving effective collaboration. The ‘discomfort’ zone of cultural contact is usefully conceived as an area of productive tension in which differences can generate hybrid outcomes such as team produced books for the organisation’s ecotourism enterprise.

\textbf{Introduction}

On the mid north coast of New South Wales, hidden in paperbark forest behind Corindi Beach, is a small settlement of Gumbaingirr people. Although they live a contemporary lifestyle they continue to fish and gather shellfish and worry about the health of the estuary which once provided them with a subsistence living in ‘no man’s land’ (Murphy \textit{et al.}, 2000). They have a deep history in this place. Associated with the settlement is an Aboriginal organisation, Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation. The purpose of the organisation is to look after the land; to provide local employment, housing, health and welfare services; and to educate their children and the general population about local Aboriginal cultural knowledge (Interview with Perkins, 1999). Nearby, on a plateau of the Great Dividing Range that separates the coastal country from the western plains, on the edge of Gumbaingirr territory, is a small regional university, the University of New England. The academics who work there are mainly transitory although some of us have become strongly attached to
Margaret Somerville & Tony Perkins

this landscape and are well positioned to do ‘place studies’ (Somerville & Beck, 2001). This paper is about a research collaboration between Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation and the University of New England, funded under an industry partnership agreement by the Australian Research Council. The project aimed to research relationship to place using archaeological and oral history methods to produce educational materials for the organisation’s cultural and educational ecotourist enterprise.

Such a partnership agreement is funded on the basis of the strength of the collaborative arrangements and the partner organisation is required to contribute equally in cash and in kind to the research funding. Many important collaborative arrangements were put in place from the beginning such as a formal schedule of meetings with equal representation to exchange ideas about the process of the research; intellectual property and protocol agreements; and plans for capacity building through research training in archaeology and oral history. However, although all of these pre-conditions may have been crucial for the appropriate conduct of the research project, the actual work of achieving collaboration happened elsewhere and differently. How can we examine the work of collaboration and the relationship of that work to the knowledges produced, the outcomes of particular collaborative practices?

The Emancipatory Paradigm and Collaboration

The only way we can fight against that political power is now through, come out with the knowledge, the power knowledge within Aboriginal people and let that go so that it is recorded and that’s why we attached ourselves pretty well now to the [research] side of it to give us that, I s’pose gain the power behind our statements and it’s probably using a stone axe which was the tool years ago well that’s another form of tool that we’re using now to lever away a political power and that’s the only avenue that we have got.

Research collaboration between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is generally conceptualised within the methodological approaches of the emancipatory paradigm (Lather, 1991). Lather suggests these include critical, neo-Marxist, feminist, minoritarian, praxis-oriented, Freirean and participatory methodologies (Lather, 1991, p. 8). The emancipatory paradigm is concerned with the political nature of research and has a predominant focus on social change. Research in this paradigm asks questions about whose interests and in accordance with what values, do we research? Who benefits, and how do they benefit from our research? Kincheloe and McLaren define such research as underpinned by certain basic assumptions:

that all thought is fundamentally mediated by power relations that are socially and historically constituted; that facts can never be isolated from the domain of values or removed from some form of ideological inscription; ... that certain groups in any society are privileged over others ... and that mainstream research practices are generally, although most often
unwittingly, implicit in the reproduction of systems of class, race and gender oppression. (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1994, p. 140)

This fundamental understanding about power relations underpins our research. The literature in the area of research collaboration, however, is largely proscriptive rather than analytical, consisting of recipes for telling the researcher how power should be shared:

... by involving members of the research community as co-researchers throughout the process. They participate in identifying the research problems, designing the research project, gathering and analysing data, and acting on the outcomes of the research. PAR [participatory action research] is a collaborative process aiming to utilise research as a tool for the joint problem-solving and positive social change between researcher and local practitioners. (Nagai, 1999, p. 21)

Such prescriptions tend to give rise to research findings that gloss over the negotiation of collaboration. They fail to account for the power relations that saturate the research site and are the conditions of knowledge production. There is an assumption, for instance, that research partners can identify a common agenda in research. In our experience, as in the transcript quote at the beginning of this section, this is not the case. Each side has their own agendas and the research process is negotiated across this space of difference. In this paper we apply concepts of the contact zone, and border work, to analyse this space of difference in a series of recorded conversations from the Yarrawarra research project.¹

The Contact Zone

The term ‘contact zone’ has been used by Mary Louise Pratt and Paul Carter, to describe aspects of cultural contact in historical contexts. Pratt describes the contact zone as a space in which ‘peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other’ (Pratt, 1992, p. 7). For her these are zones of ‘possibilities and perils’, characterised by unequal power relations ‘as they are lived out across the globe today’ (p. 4). Pratt’s project is to ‘decolonize knowledge’ by bringing into play ‘contestatory expressions from the site of imperial intervention’ (p. 10). She is interested in hybrid historical productions that provide evidence of alternative possibilities to the forces of colonisation.

Paul Carter similarly bases his analysis of the contact zone on elusive historical texts, explorers’ accounts of first contact exchanges with Aboriginal peoples. His interest is not in the texts themselves but in the performances enacted on both sides in an attempt to create a space of communication. Carter’s focus is not on the hybrid productions, but on the space in between, ‘the intervals of difference’ (Carter, 1992, p. 179) as embodying alternative possibilities. The purpose of the contact event is ‘to find a system of communication where the greatest differences can be expressed simultaneously and, instead of cancelling each other out, be instantaneous transferred from one side to the other’ (p. 180).
Another conceptualisation of the zone of cultural contact is the ‘third space’, articulated by Homi Bhabha as ‘the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture’ (Bhabha, 1994, p. 141). The focus for theorists of the third space is on its hybrid possibilities, a space which enables new positions to emerge and eludes ‘the politics of polarity’ (p. 141). Similar notions have been developed by other cultural theorists with a focus on the mobility, fluidity and hybridity of the space of the contact zone. Articulated by Foucault as heterotopias and heterologies (1986), Anzaldua as borderlands (1987), hooks as the margins, and the edge (1990), Giroux as border crossings (1992), and Soja as the third space (2000), these ideas of a hybrid space of cultural contact have rapidly gained ascendance and have been embraced by postcolonial cultural theorists. In the analysis that follows I will argue that the particular conceptualisation of the space of cultural contact depends on the political investments of the theorist and subject matter of the research.

We have identified three contact events that occurred during the course of the Yarrawarra project in which:

- all of the team members worked together;
- the planned or expected course of the research was changed;
- a space for hybrid knowledges was opened up.

The ‘contact zone’ is represented in this paper by one of these contact events, a sequence of recorded conversations about the politics of cultural translation. The purpose of the conversation was to involve all research team members in a joint process of knowledge production in order to prepare papers for the World Archaeology Conference on Indigenous/non-Indigenous research collaboration. The conversations provided an opportunity for all of us to enter into the space of the contact zone and to simultaneously reflect on their meaning as a space of knowledge production. They also provided a basis for the subsequent collaborative production of hybrid texts, five books about the clusters of sites we researched (Beck et al., 2002; Brown et al., 2000; Murphy et al., 2000; Smith et al., 2001; Somerville et al., 1999). These books represent the outcomes of the research for Yarrawarra’s eco-tourist enterprise.

Margaret Somerville designed and facilitated the process of recording the joint conversations and collaborative production of the books. In this capacity she is the writer of this paper which analyses and discusses the ideas that emerged from the recorded conversations about research collaboration. Three team members whose conversations are represented here, Cheryl Brown and Dee Murphy (Yarrawarra) and Wendy Beck (UNE) presented the papers at the World Archaeology Conference. The other three, Tony Perkins (Yarrawarra) and Margaret Somerville and Anita Smith (UNE) also took part in the conversations and their ideas are represented here. The overarching ideas for this paper are drawn from Tony Perkins’s comments, Manager of Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation and a guiding force in the research project. For this reason Tony has been acknowledged as a co-author of this paper and has read and provided feedback on the ideas but expressed his desire not to be involved directly in the writing. This brief description in itself reveals the
complex processes of collaborative production of research outcomes and the often invisible border work of the contact zone.

**Border Work**

Several writers have focused on the nature of the border work required of the contact zone. bell hooks describes the space as one of ‘radical openness ... a margin—a profound edge’ and finds that ‘locating oneself there is difficult yet necessary. It is not a “safe” place. One is always at risk’ (hooks, 1990, p. 149). For Gloria Anzaldúa the ‘borderlands’ are a place of profound emotional pain for herself and others who occupy this space not by choice but by historical location. This work of the borders ‘takes place underground—subconsciously. It is work that the soul performs’ (Anzaldúa, 1987, p. 79). Celia Haig-Brown and Jo-anne Archibald (1996) introduce the notion of border work and later describe listening to each other in the ‘tension of the border’ in order for ‘respectful work to proceed’ (Haig-Brown, 2001, p. 251). Haig-Brown describes the emotional work of the contact zone as ‘engaging in the painful work of contextually and temporally situated coalition work’ (Haig-Brown, 2001, p. 31). The rewards of this engagement are that both participants are transformed in the process.

According to Haig-Brown the transformative nature of border work involves recognising and re-conceptualising the categories (e.g. Indigenous/non-Indigenous) through which the border is maintained. She argues for the necessity of both border maintenance, a focus on difference, and border crossing, a focus on hybridity, as necessary border work in the contact zone. Geraldine Pratt (1999) argues that we should keep ‘the process of border construction in view, as well as tracing the interdependencies of what lies on either side of the border’ (p. 156). She draws attention to the strategic possibilities of border maintenance, as complementing an attention to movement across boundaries and difference and calls for a ‘contextualised theorising’ (p. 156) of border work in the contact zone.

**A Contextualised Theorising: mapping border work in the contact zone of the Yarrawarra project**

*Defining the Contact Zone*

Analysis of the conversations about collaboration in research located the contact zone in three different but interrelated sites: the social context of Aboriginal politics in Australia, the cultural context of Yarrawarra’s ecotourism, and the research project itself. The border work differed in each of these sites but was always a necessary part of engagement in the contact zone. The following analysis locates the broader contact zones and associated border work, as the necessary context for local negotiations in the research itself.

*The Social Context of the Contact Zone in Australia*

Tony firmly locates the research collaboration in the contact zone of the Indigenous
struggle over land. He says that research knowledge can be used to ‘connect them to another country’ and that is ‘a political way of looking at it’, a ‘political issue to take away the rights and identity of Aboriginal people belonging to this country’. He points out that another way of looking at it is that ‘Aboriginal people could use that information to determine their own ownership of the land’—‘we could turn that around with carbon dating and stuff, we’ll show that there’s existence here for so many thousands of years’. He conceives this as being ‘two sides’, a borderland, ‘on the one side there is the political issue … and on the other side Aboriginal people could use the information’. He invites us as researchers to participate in this struggle, ‘Where do you stand on that issue?’

For Carter, the in-between space of the Australian indigenous/non-indigenous contact zone is necessarily grounded in contestation over actual physical space and provides the ongoing possibility of ‘entering into negotiations over land’ (Carter, 1992, p. 171). Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996) similarly establish the ‘struggle on the borders’ of the contact zone between indigenous and non-indigenous Canadians as fundamentally related to contestation over actual physical space:

Struggles for control take place on the borders between First Nations, whose people are indigenous, and Canada, a nation of immigrants and their offsprings, the nonnatives. Control of land, sovereignty, and self government for first Nations is fundamental to all work in this border area. (Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996, p. 250)

Tony moves freely between actual struggles over land and metaphorical struggles in his discussion of the contact zone of the research. The political issue of how to use research knowledge is related to other struggles for Aboriginal rights,

we’ve seen the marches and we’ve seen the struggles, and we’ve seen the protests and the lock ups and the message sometimes gets through, but we decided a long while back to establish another direction, and that through education, that’s our answer to it.

So research knowledge is not only a tool to fight a political battle directly over ownership and belonging to land but a tool to change people’s awareness and attitudes. This movement between the actual and the metaphorical is also noted by Carter and Haig-Brown who argue that First Nations people are border workers in a metaphorical sense because of their marginalisation by Canadian society. They are socially positioned on the border in education, research and the struggle over control of representations, all potential sites of border work in the contact zone (Haig-Brown & Archibald, 1996, p. 250).

Tony’s border work is determined by his political investments as a member of an Australian Indigenous minority, dispossessed of land without a treaty or compensation. Because of this his border work is largely characterised by border maintenance, making evident the precise nature of the Aboriginal border and what is at stake there in terms of research collaboration. This work of border maintenance, making visible the nature of difference, is as critical to the research collaboration as the border crossings and hybrid productions of the in-between space.
Yarrawarra's Cultural Ecotourism as Contact Zone

The immediate purpose of the research project was to research local places using archaeology and oral history methods to produce educational materials for Yarrawarra's ecotourist enterprise. As such it was located in the contact zone of Yarrawarra's work in educational tourism. For Cheryl and Dee, research team members who are directly involved in this work, the borders are defined as Yarrawarra Indigenous workers on the one hand and the non-Indigenous tourist public on the other. They believe that the stereotypes of Aboriginal people that the tourist public bring depend on ‘how much contact they have had with Aboriginal people’ and that the purpose of the research is to address these cultural stereotypes.

Their border work is defined as producing and mediating local cultural representations, another a form of border maintenance based on difference,

I think in some ways you still have to offer them some of the things they expect, but if you can offer them high quality, local data that shows them [tourist visitors] that it’s not all didgeridoos and dot paintings.

Again, this border work is characterised by border maintenance rather than border crossing. The purpose is to make visible the strong local attachments to place and the related cultural practices such as collecting and gathering local foods. This sort of border work supports Pratt’s idea of the strategic possibilities of border maintenance, as complementing attention to border crossings (1999, p. 156).

The Research Project as Contact Zone

The research project, while situated within the broader social and cultural ecotourism contact zones is the most local site of border work. This contact zone was defined by individual researchers in relation to the specific methodologies of archaeology and oral history employed in the research project. Analysis of this border work reveals how disciplinary borders are both maintained and stretched in the work of the contact zone.

Border work in archaeology. Dee, a Yarrawarra researcher, occupies a complex relationship to the question of maintaining and crossing borders in her position as a non-Aboriginal woman employed by an Aboriginal organisation. As a Yarrawarra employee of some years, she identifies strongly with the goals of the organisation and the Aboriginal community whose interests the organisation serves. As a qualified
ethno-botanist and archaeologist she is often in a mediating role and, particularly in the research project, between Aboriginal workers and archaeological research practices.

I’ve been here four and a half years, and I’ve been more tending to learn the Aboriginal way of doing things, and going that way and losing all my, abandoning all my scientific kind of skills and with things like Sites school and things like this it’s more like ‘OK Aboriginal people you can play Archaeology but you gotta play by our rules and you’ve gotta do things this way’… The methodology doesn’t come naturally to people, it doesn’t come naturally to Archaeologists either, but do you think that the methodology can change or does it have to be, it’s still, it’s like what’s happening to Aboriginal people in all spheres of activities these days, it’s, well, you can play but you’ve gotta play by our rules.

Dee’s position enables her to deconstruct and translate the ‘rules’ of archaeological research and make them more transparent for Yarrawarra people. Her border work serves to open up the borders of archaeology and to raise questions about the practice of archaeology in relation to Aboriginal people. Her position as located in the contact zone by her employment allows Dee to cross many boundaries and to relate the work of the research to the broader contact zone in which Aboriginal people at Yarrawarra operate. This work is always precarious however, to the extent that it participates in the ‘temporally situated coalition work’ described by Haig-Brown (2001).

Anita, a UNE archaeological researcher, defines the contact zone as between archaeology and community people who worked with her in archaeological fieldwork. Her practical approach to shared border work focuses on the mundane fieldwork activities of archaeology as a good space for achieving the work of border crossing:

Also with the field stuff again and why it’s a sort of a leveller, not only the field work but particularly the sorting, there is something about a group of people and there’s a lot of time and it’s basically boring work and it’s repetitive work, but you’re all doing the same thing, but somehow, and I think it’s not just in Archaeology, but I think it’s in any kind of similar situation, that doing that repetitive work, over a period of time just allows some other space to develop in which people talk or be or, I mean you have to talk about something, if you’re sitting doing really you know fairly, mundane things.

The space of the contact zone emerges as people get to know each other and make contact. This is related to whether people feel ‘level’, a concept Anita expands on in a later quote,

I think for me field work has always been an incredible leveller, like even if there’s been a kind of hierarchy and I’ve been a student there’s been somebody telling me what to do, you spend three of four days in the field particularly if it’s in remotish areas, in difficult conditions and you get to know people pretty well.
Anita defines the contact zone of archaeology as the contested space between archaeologists and Aboriginal people in heritage management. In the context of this contestation, the border work of archaeological practice is here characterised as the emotional work of people getting to know each other in a fieldwork setting where hierarchical differences are broken down.

**Border work in oral history.** Margaret, a UNE oral historian researcher, names the contact zone as the space between the Aboriginal community as the location of people’s oral stories, and the public domain of the written text:

> I’m still responsible in a sense for mediating their relationship to the public, because the things that I know, and the things that we record, aren’t necessarily what they want to tell the world. We’ve been sitting down, just them and me with a tape recorder, but they don’t necessarily wanna tell the world, and how do you ensure that it is OK that it goes to a broader audience? I s’pose they’re questions that I was thinking about, and I think one of the things with oral history is that it is already a process of publication, and you end up with a written transcript, and a written transcript has totally different currency and involves a loss of control.

The border (crossing) work involved here is in mediating a story told in a personal interaction in a relationship of trust with an Aboriginal person to a written text in the public domain. The contact zone of the research allows exploration of different ways of doing this border crossing:

> I feel like I’m just a mediating person … and one aspect is to actually talk about what that process means. So talk to Tony for instance about what it means to his grandmother to tell him the massacre stories, and what it means to him to tell me the massacre story, and what it means then to hear me speak it to other people, or to be able to perform … a paper in front of a group of Aboriginal people is really different for me than anything I’ve done before…. Besides, I think one of the important things for me to do is to actually test the stuff that I write, for an Aboriginal audience and see how people feel and what they say, because it’s a totally different thing and has totally different meanings.

Border work is here conceived as an ongoing process that changes as the research proceeds and is learned through practise. Part of the work of the border zone for Margaret was to put herself into the ‘discomfort zone’ and test out the public representations with an Aboriginal audience. This was part of the larger border work of seeking feedback and engagement with people at different levels about the work of representation in the project.

**The discomfort zone.** The negotiation of the research process was the site where individual researchers struggled to work across differences to achieve a degree of true collaboration. Like Pratt’s zone of ‘possibilities and perils’ (1992, p. 4), and Carter’s ‘uncertainty that marks this space out, and continually remarks it’ (Carter, 1992, p. 180), the productive tension of the contact zone in the research project.
became known as the ‘discomfort zone’ to the team of researchers. Each researcher spoke in different ways about their experience of the discomfort zone. Wendy, a UNE archaeological researcher, describes the discomfort zone of border work as based on an absence of prior relationship and a lack of cultural knowledge, ‘we don’t always feel comfortable either, I mean working with people that we don’t know, or we might not know very much about Aboriginal people, and how they lived either’.

Wendy suggests that to some extent the formal procedures and protocols of a research agreement can mitigate the difficulties of the contact zone but cannot guarantee protection from vulnerability for an individual researcher. Ultimately it comes down to individual relationships, a ‘two way awkwardness’ of how to talk and work with people. Accepting the discomfort of difference as the fundamental basis of border work is a beginning to achieving the work of collaboration:

I mean we might not know, cause we’ve talked about protocols, well we haven’t always done the right thing and usually it’s cause we know sort of rules about how we’re meant to proceed, but we don’t always get them right, and you know, we’re a bit unsure about how to talk to people, in the right way, those sorts of things, what it’s ok to ask about and what sort of things it’s not ok to ask about, and stuff like that. So it’s not always one way, it’s a kind of two-way awkwardness too I think, about working together too, that you’ve gotta understand.

Wendy enacts this sense of the productive tension of difference by asking the difficult questions in our conversation and making a space where difference and difficulty can be explored,

we’ve talked a lot about the positive side of the project, which is as it should be, but I just wonder whether there are any negative things that might come out of the project. Are there any disadvantages to having a project like this?

This gives Tony the opportunity to respond with a long and important exploration about the relationship between knowledge and power. It is precisely this outcome of the discomfort zone that reveals its productive potential, the possibility to transform meanings (Carter, 1992). The idea of the discomfort zone as an unresolved space is an important one in relation to Carter’s idea of preserving the intervals of difference (1992) rather than focusing too early on hybrid productions of the contact zone.

Border Crossings in the Discomfort Zone

Cheryl’s own transformation in the research project, as well as her border crossing in the discomfort zone illustrates the transformative potential of this space. As well as her professional work in cultural ecotourism, Cheryl, a Yarrawarra researcher, performs much of her border work in mediating the borders between the organisation (including the research) as a public (non-Indigenous) space, and the local community as a private (Indigenous) space. Cheryl is a member of the local Aboriginal community and much of her talk in our recorded conversations is about how comfortable people feel with the research process. In the process of talking
about comfort, she reveals the potential problems and the necessary border crossing work of research in the contact zone. It is the emotional work of collaboration (Haig-Brown, 2001, p. 33):

> Before you probably wouldn’t have found some of the Aboriginal people willing to even tell many people, sort of things they know, but I think in this community it’s a bit different. They are beginning to know the [research] people a bit more, and they do feel more comfortable and they don’t feel, sort of frightened to tell them things, or they don’t feel that they’re intimidated by them, and I’ve heard a lot of people, have talked about it and they’re really happy with the project, and what’s going on, and if they had problems they would ask, they will say well why are they doing it like this.

Cheryl raises several important research issues around her border work with community members and her discussion of these issues deepens as the conversation proceeds. The first and most obvious is the practice of researchers taking the material culture away for analysis, a practice which she is pleased has changed in this project. The second is the challenge of communication between academic researchers and community members who feel vulnerable because of researchers’ use of exclusive academic language. The third is related to the shame of talking about cultural knowledge that she relates to her experiences in another contact zone, that of her schooling:

> I mean that is what is happening like their culture was just disappearing and it felt like nobody didn’t care and then actually getting back into it and seeing that is much better for them and for me too. I know when I went to school, and I mean like with all that if you were black, it was the worst thing and it was just what happened to you, … we were made to be ashamed of it, and I mean I lost all that cultural knowledge when I went to school, because I didn’t know much, and coming and doing this project has helped me to learn heaps of things too, I didn’t know. Listening to the Elders I’ve learnt more with things I never knew of, and with them—they sort of lost, they weren’t allowed to speak lingo and they weren’t allowed to go to certain places, and they weren’t allowed to do certain things, so there was no use teaching the kids that.

In this quote there are complex layers as Cheryl reflects on the loss of cultural knowledge erased in the contact zone of schooling where, ‘if you were black, it was the worst thing’. This loss is paralleled by the Elders’ loss of cultural knowledge. It is critical to note here that Cheryl’s position in the contact zone, like hooks (1990) and Anzaldua (1987), is a ‘profound edge’ where necessary border work is carried out not by choice but by historical location. It is the ‘soul work’ of the contact zone (Anzaldua, 1987, p. 79). Cheryl has turned her historical location in the contact zone to productive border crossing work for herself and her community, validating almost-lost cultural knowledge through recording the stories of her Elders. In the process she realises she is also personally changed.

While each of these quotes reveals the characteristic border work of each team member as if they were separate individuals, this is a limitation of the analysis. All
border work was collectively realised in our interactions with each other and each person was transformed by our changing collective practices.

Discussion

It is evident from this analysis that the contact zone is constructed in different sites for different team members and that the border work they do depends on that construction and the differing political investments of their position. All members of the team engaged in both border maintenance and border crossing throughout the conversation. Individuals are positioned by their relationship to organisational and discursive power structures, roles in the project, disciplinary affiliations, personal histories and so on, to more frequently do one sort of border work rather than the other. We would argue that all of the constructions and different sorts of border work are a necessary part of achieving collaboration in the contact zone.

Mapping the spaces and work of the contact zone is an important part of understanding it. There were three overlapping territories where borders were located within the Yarrawarra project’s contact zone. The project is necessarily located in the contemporary political contact zone characterised by ongoing struggles over actual land, a characteristic noted by Carter (1992) and Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996) in their descriptions of the contact zone. It is also located in the representational or metaphorical contact zone of the organisation’s work in addressing cultural stereotypes through their work in cultural ecotourism, noted by Carter (1992), Pratt (1992) and Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996).

In the contact zone of the research project expressed in the recorded conversations, borders were not fixed but varied according to team members’ experiences and location in relation to the project. For instance the borders could be between archaeological practices and Aboriginal people, Aboriginal oral stories and the public arena of the written text, and the research project and the Aboriginal community. The borders changed during the course of the conversation, and over the time of the project by working with the community and through fieldwork experiences. These shifting and mobile boundaries are resonant of Haig-Brown’s temporary and contextual coalitions (2001), but also of the fluidity of conceptualisations of the third space (Anzaldua, 1987; Bhabha, 1994; Giroux, 1992; hooks, 1990; Soja, 2000). Mapping illuminates what is at stake in the collaboration and in different theoretical formulations of the space of the contact zone.

Analysing individual transcript quotes reveals the essential emotional and intellectual work of what became known as the ‘discomfort zone’ of cultural contact in the project. The notion of the discomfort zone focuses on the productive potential of difference and the necessary work of choosing to put oneself in that space, as noted by Haig-Brown, 2001). The border work of the discomfort zone varied depending on how the borders were currently defined and what was required within that definition. So Tony’s border work involved maintaining and making the Aboriginal side of the political border accessible to the project by the intellectual and emotional work of characterising that border. At times, it was also important to maintain the proper borders of archaeology as a discipline because archaeological research was
required to provide the ‘hard evidence’ that would potentially convince the government. Much of the border work of collaboration, however, involved the boundary crossing work of moving within, between and across boundaries such as was evident in Cheryl’s, Anita’s, Dee’s and Margaret’s conversations. These conversations, and especially Cheryl’s, echoed the sentiments expressed by Anzaldua (1987) and hooks (1990) about the precarious, risky and emotionally difficult nature of this work.

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, the interrelated concepts of border work and contact zone are useful for understanding and making visible the processes of intercultural collaboration in the Yarrawarra project. Contact events are described as particular events that were intentionally designed and facilitated to enable all team members to participate in transformative knowledge production. The contact zone was found to be a place of productive tension based on difference rather than on a hybridity that elides the space of identity polarities. The contact zone, however, is also characterised by mobile and shifting boundaries and constructed by emotional and intellectual border work. This border work often involves the complex border crossings of a hybrid third space of transformation.

The contact zone and border work is a useful way to think about the process of collaborative research because it makes clearer the actual work of collaboration, how and where the energy of the research process can be directed at transformative potential. The formal and prescriptive rituals of joint meetings, and ‘consultation’ were not where the actual collaboration took place. In the discomfort zone of cultural contact, the actual work of collaboration was achieved.

**Note**


**References**


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Notes on Contributors

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Tony Perkins is a Garby Elder of the Gumbaingirr language group and Director of Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, the industry partner for the collaborative research project described in this paper. He was an Associate Investigator on the project.