

Research Article

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Rereading Diaspora: Reverberating Voices and Diasporic Listening in Italo-Australian Digital Storytelling

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Abstract: The contemporary diasporic experience is fragmented and contradictory, and the notion of ‘home’ increasingly blurry. In response to these moving circumstances, many diaspora and multiculturalism studies’ scholars have turned to the everyday, focussing on the local particularities of the diasporic experience. Using the Italo-Australian digital storytelling collection *Racconti: La Voce del Popolo*, this paper argues that, while crucial, the everyday experience of diaspora always needs to be read in relation to broader, dislocated contexts. Indeed, to draw on Grant Farred (2009), the experience of diaspora must be read both in relation to—but always ‘out of’—context. Reading diaspora in this way helps reveal aspects of diasporic life that have the potential to productively disrupt dominant assimilationist discourses of multiculturalism that continue to dominate. This kind of re-reading is pertinent in colonial nations like Australia, whose multiculturalism rhetoric continues to echo normative whiteness.

Keywords: Italian-Australian; diaspora studies; everyday multiculturalism; digital storytelling; diasporic listening.

1 Introduction

Grant Farred (2009) argues that diasporic stories are simultaneously in context and out of context: reflective of new places but always referential of old places — and none of these places are stable. He writes:

To be diasporised is to be articulated to, disarticulated from and rearticulated through, a context that is outside the place from where the subject speaks. The fallibilities and insufficiencies inherent to the diaspora emerge out of context beyond the place of speaking ... That precarious, and precariously disadvantaged, position of the outside (that is problematically related to the ‘inside’), is the only place from which to speak the diaspora (Farred 2009, p. 135).

In this paper, I explore the Australian Centre for the Moving Image’s (ACMI’s) digital storytelling collection on migration, with particular focus on its Italo-Australian collection *Racconti: La voce del popolo* (2003), to consider its role in narrating Australian multiculturalism. Digital storytelling has its roots in California, where Joe Lambert created the Centre for Digital Storytelling (CDS), pioneering the genre as a humanistic form of sharing stories of ‘ordinary people’. The genre moved to Australia in the early 21st century via ACMI and has since proliferated across the globe. The digital story is a 2- to-5-minute film that combines the author’s personal images and videos with a first-person narrative. Digital stories are usually created in a workshop environment, with a level of sharing and interaction among participants. The stories are created with a specific audience in mind, for example, a family, community, or organisation, and usually

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entail some level of distribution via the internet. Given the public/private assemblage of a digital story, as well as the genre's claim to present authentic everyday voices, ACMI's Italo-Australian digital storytelling collection makes a compelling case study for analysing both diasporic experience and the frames through which it is studied.

Guided by Farred, and in reference to *Racconti*, I consider how digital storytelling can inadvertently coalesce the in- and out-of-context aspects of diasporic life into a normative assimilationist framework. I then ask how the place of diaspora that Farred articulates—the place that is neither fully inside nor fully outside—might be more deliberately adopted as a methodological approach for both critical multiculturalism and diaspora studies.

Inciting the in-/out-of-context aspect of diaspora as a methodological approach allows, in the first instance, for a necessary rereading of migrant stories that constitute the growing digital memorial of Australian multiculturalism. It also troubles the persistent tendency to approach diaspora and multiculturalism via prisms that are either macro or micro, official or mundane, public or private—prisms that ultimately overlook the entangled materiality of diasporic life. Finally, the paper turns to two digital stories independently produced by Grace and Katrina Lolicato to explore how the excesses that appear fleetingly in *Racconti* might be amplified in future digital storytelling projects about diasporic life. I propose that amplifying these excesses can more directly unhinge the assimilationist problematic of managerial multiculturalism and begin to redress some of the enduring normative violences it has inadvertently enabled.

2 From Unwelcome 'Wogs' to Honorary Anglos: The Italian Diaspora in Australia and a Turn to the Everyday

The Italo-Australian population represents one of the many Italian diasporas that Donna Gabaccia (2000) mapped in her eminent book *Italy's Many Diasporas*. Italians began migrating to Australia as early as the 1820s, though the rate of Italian migration did not become significant until the 1920s (Rando 2011; Bosworth cited in Jupp 2001). The majority of Italian migrants came during the postwar period, in particular the 1950s, and a series of 'chain migrations' then occurred through to the 1970s, with the Italian population peaking at just under 300,000 (Baldassar & Pyke 2014, p. 130; Jupp 2001). The ways in which Australia received Italian migrants during this time was awkward at best. While Australia urgently sought new migrants at particular moments during this period, especially after the Second World War—when 'populate or perish' was its motto—it maintained a stalwart desire to retain an Anglo-Celtic demographic. Indeed, Australia's first major policy—the *Immigration Restriction Act*—was colloquially referred to as *The White Australia Policy*. Enacted in 1901, this policy involved a series of migration restrictions towards and measures arbitrarily exercised against people of non-Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. The policy was not formally abolished until 1975. Thus, the period in which Italians were mostly arriving in Australia was also the period in which Australia was most overtly enacting a racialised immigration policy. Nonetheless, despite the nation's concerns about the non-white phenotype of Italians—especially those from the South—it was believed that migration was crucial for the economic development of the nation. Australia started to allow more Italians to enter its borders—beginning with Northern Italians, considered to be 'more white' than their Southern counterparts, but slowly those 'less white', e.g. the Calabrians and Sicilians (Baldassar et al. 2012, p. 19).

Although initially seen as a problematic minority, over time, the Italian diaspora has become more accepted in Australia, even considered a 'model minority' (Lo Bianco cited in Jupp 2001). Generally, Italo-Australians have been depicted as hard-working and assimilating themselves into Australian ways of life. The racism experienced by Southern European migrants in the early- to mid-20th century became less frequent from the 1980s, and new migrant groups, such as the Indo-Chinese, Arabs and Sudanese, subsequently became the target of racial vilification in Australia (Lo Bianco cited in Jupp 2001; see also Ang 2001; Batrouney 2002; Jupp 2002; McMaster 2002). In 1996, there was a drop in the official count of Italian

migrants registered in Australia as compared to the 1970s. This decline represents some return migration; but it also alludes to the contemporary complexities of the Italian diaspora that Gabaccia (2000) outlines. For instance, Richard Bosworth (cited in Jupp 2001) illustrates that the decline in figures is also due to the shape-shifting manner in which many second- and third-generation Italian migrants began to understand themselves in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. These migrants viewed themselves as Italian ‘at times’, even ‘often’, but officially defined themselves as Australian as per their passport or birth certificate.

This shape-shifting phenomenon is one of the key reasons that common conceptions of diaspora struggle to stabilise, especially in the 21st century. Recent research has troubled 20th-century theories of diaspora, in particular the widely adopted diaspora typologies outlined by Robin Cohen’s (1997) *Global Diasporas*. Cohen famously characterised global diasporas, into five main types: victim diasporas, labour diasporas, trade diasporas, imperial diasporas, and cultural diasporas. Although he set out to avoid the problematic convention of mapping migration according to dual territories (home/origin and host/destination), the macro scale of his typology ultimately led to binary demarcations in this manner (Mishra 2006, pp. 47–48). Essentially, Cohen’s categorisations separate diasporic groups en masse, tracing each one’s key *singular* movement from one place to another, while also brushing over the cultural multiplicity within each one. Contemporary research on Australian diasporas, including the Italian diaspora, shows that these diasporic communities increasingly defy Cohen’s categories (Ben-Moshe et al. 2012; see also Baldassar 2001, Baldassar & Pesman 2005, Cosmini-Rose 2008). Even the characteristic common to most definitions of diaspora, namely, the underlying desire to return home, is problematic. In the Australian context, many Italians did not travel to Australia with an intention to return, largely because of the belief that the new country offered greater economic opportunity (Jupp 2001), and most continue to have no desire to permanently return (see Ben-Moshe et al. 2012; Cosmini-Rose 2008, p. 43). Additionally, the flow of migration from Italy in the past 5 years has mainly constituted of temporary, skilled- and labour-related migration, with migrants increasingly arriving on work visas (Tani 2014, p. 120; Baldassar & Pyke 2014, p. 129). The Italo-Australian diaspora, similar to others, thus tends to exist in a ‘de-territorialised’ state (Ben-Moshe et al. 2012, p. 18).

The shape of Italian migration to Australia in the 21st century, therefore, reflects the increasingly complex and delinear terrain of global migration more broadly. Indeed, the terrain of global migration is not *shaped*, but rather is perpetually reshaping, operating as one node in a complex network of ‘turbulent’ movement (Papastergiadis 2000). There are affective elements to this turbulent movement: the experience of migration tends to be embodied by migrants, so that even though migrants might not have migrated to Australia with a desire to return, the possibility of doing so always feels partially alive. Further, second- and beyond generations of diasporic communities wear the legacy of ancestral migration, even though they did not migrate themselves, while also adopting the possibility of future migration. Ultimately, this set of material and affective circumstances creates what Ghassan Hage (2014) calls the ‘diasporic condition’, in which migrants experience a disposition of vacillation, moving between multiple, shifting locations.

How, then, to better understand the turbulent patterns of contemporary diasporic life and reconsider the structures (i.e. multiculturalism) in place to support them? In the past, global movements of people were mapped and devised at a macro scale, much like Cohen’s (1997) work on diasporas. Of utmost importance to these macro-structuralist models of migration (Papastergiadis 2000, 2012) or binary migration models (Nail 2015) have been the ways in which global flows affect the nation-state, particularly in terms of economic theories of labour. These models rely on a world-systems theory of a central power and periphery cultures. Recognising the limitations of this work, counter-studies that focus on migration at a localised, individualistic level, less interested in the economic or political systems driving migration and more focussed on cultural motivations and exchanges have been conducted (Papastergiadis and Trimboli 2017, p. 567). In diaspora studies this latter work is evident in the movement that Sudesh Mishra (2006) has somewhat sardonically described ‘the scene of archival specificity’. This approach is demonstrated in studies such as that carried out by Gabaccia (2000), whose aforementioned book drew attention to the localised complexities of Italian diasporic cultures—the plurality of the term Italian *diasporas* in the title immediately signalling this aim.

The recent scholarly grapples with diaspora have occurred alongside, if not in dialogue with, similar tussles about how to re-conceptualise multiculturalism. Since the 1970s, multiculturalism has been the framework adopted by Western liberal governments to recognise and service the needs of different cultural groups, including diaspora communities. Australia was one of the first nations to formerly adopt this framework as policy, the second to do so after Canada. Although initiated with positive intentions, multiculturalism has suffered increasing criticism. As Andrew M. Robinson (2011, p. 29) succinctly notes: ‘the past decade has not been kind to multiculturalism’. The criticisms have in fact always been present, as Will Kymlicka’s (2012) survey of multicultural policies in Western democracies emphasises, but they have become louder in the past 20 years. Multiculturalism has not just been ‘losing ground’ (Robinson 2011, p. 11), but it has frequently been posited as a past societal mode—declared ‘inadequate’, ‘failed’ or simply ‘dead’.¹ These reactions have circulated in the domains of both public rhetoric and scholarly endeavours.

Multiculturalism’s failings have been attributed to many factors. The main critiques are well summarised by Fenix Ndhlovu (2016, p. 293). For some, the identity focus of theoretical multiculturalism has been inadequate to address the complexity of lived cultural difference, while the political aspects (programmes and policies) have failed to service this complexity sufficiently. As Australia and comparable colonial nations enter an era of ‘evolving hyper-diversity’, whereby diversity itself is diversifying (Ang et al. 2002; Noble 2009, p. 47), these inadequacies become increasingly evident. At the same time, issues that multiculturalism promised to solve/tensions it hoped to alleviate continue to recirculate—racism, inter- and intra-community conflicts, institutionalised discrimination, to list a few. The fundamental and commonly overlooked problem is, as Ndhlovu (2016, p. 28) asserts, the ‘hegemonic dominance of Euro-American perspectives’ in multiculturalism, which forego ‘other ways of knowing, reading and interpreting the world’. Australian multiculturalism utilises a framework of Western liberalism recognition based on racial/ethnic difference. In doing so, a particular, bordered ‘multicultural’ space is demarcated, a space positioned outside the white, monocultural centre. In this schema, governmental discourses on multiculturalism pose a norm for the ‘multicultural/ethnic’ person and then compel the body to conform to this norm. Ien Ang and Brett St Louis (2005) point to this predicament when, with regard to Australian multiculturalism, they write:

A key plank of state-led recognition of difference is the policy of multiculturalism, which officially sanctions and enshrines ethnic, linguistic and cultural differences within the encompassing framework of the state. In this administrative-bureaucratic context, difference becomes the cornerstone of diversity: diversity is the managerial view of the field of differences to be harmonized, controlled and made to fit into a coherent (i.e. national) whole by the (nation) state. The cumulative effect of this is the control of an imagined and manageable multicultural community (Ang & St Louis 2005, p. 292).

Ghassan Hage (1998) eloquently details this racialised problematic, or what he terms ‘white managerialism’, in his book *White Nation*.

Efforts to deal with these issues are occurring in various ways. Some scholars are abandoning work on multiculturalism altogether, placing the phenomenon firmly in the past, as Vijay Mishra’s (2012) book *What was Multiculturalism? A critical retrospective* does. Others continue to critically redress multiculturalism through conceptions of cosmopolitanism (Gilroy 2005, 2006; Gunew 2017; Noble 2009; Papastergiadis 2012), super-diversity (Vertovec 2006) and inter-culturalism (Cantle 2012; Zapato-Barrero 2017), among others.

In Australia, a concerted effort to reify the assimilationist undertones and conceptual limitations of managerial multiculturalism is occurring via the burgeoning field of everyday multiculturalism. The field is interested in exploring how practices of everyday life shape and reshape identities, and how this relates to the broader terrain of multiculturalism (Wise & Velayutham 2009, p. 3). Melissa Butcher and Anita Harris (2010) succinctly summarise the field as having a focus on the following:

¹ For examples from Australian media, see Savva (2011), *The 7:30 Report* (2011) and Uhlmann (2011).

(1) Everyday practices of intercultural encounter and exchange (the ‘doing’ of multiculturalism); and (2) sites and spaces where tensions and possibilities around multicultural community and nation building occur (the places where multiculturalism is done) (Butcher & Harris 2010, p. 450).

Practitioners of everyday multiculturalism argue that there is disconnect between official discourse and on-the-ground experience of multicultural life. Their studies attempt to illustrate how multiculturalism is ‘just done’ (Noble 2009, p. 46) by Australians in their day-to-day lives in a way that is removed from political and theoretical ideals. The framework of everyday multiculturalism is useful to some extent, but whether it allows for a considered rethinking of multiculturalism in the way that Ndhlovu (2016) and others (e.g. Gunew 2017, Gilroy 2005, 2006) urge warrants serious consideration. In some ways, everyday multiculturalism creates its own troublesome disconnect, formulating multicultural life as removed from the bio-political discourses that undoubtedly shape it. By turning to narratives of diaspora framed as ‘everyday’ multiculturalism, I question the continued efforts to singularly locate the subjects of Australian multiculturalism, subjects that emerge from increasingly mobile, vacillatory experiences of dis-location.

3 Italo-Australian Digital Storytelling as a Site of Everyday Multiculturalism

During the mid-1990s, Joe Lambert developed a model for new media storytelling, which would enable ordinary people to share their personal stories by harnessing new internet and computer software technologies.^[1] Ordinary people were attracted to his ‘digital storytelling’ model, which blended familiar forms of personal documentation (such as the home video) with new online forms (such as the video blog) in a user-friendly format. Digital storytelling complemented the renewed interest in everyday stories, appealing to the ordinary person’s ‘desire to document life experience, ideas, or feelings through the use of story and digital media’ (CDS 2012, accessed online: 15 April). Digital storytelling attempted to democratise media and public stories, rooting itself in movements pioneered by folk cultures and the activist traditions of the 1960s (Lambert 2009, p. 26). Lambert saw these traditions as ‘inherently sympathetic to human experience ... [seeking] ways to capture their own and other’s sense of the extraordinary in the ordinary comings and goings of life’ (Lambert 2009, pp. 26–27).

The key to digital storytelling is its claim that the genre helps bring ‘authentic voices’ to the surface. Digital stories use a range of media to narrate a *persuasive* story (CDS 2012, accessed online: 15 April). This blend of authenticity and persuasion begins to shed light on why digital storytelling has been taken up so enthusiastically by cultural organisations such as the Melbourne-based ACMI. Charged with a task to engage with its diverse public community, organisations such as ACMI need models of engagement which are relatable and which enable people to connect with difference on a personal level. Many of the digital storytelling projects facilitated by ACMI have been on the topics of migration and cultural difference. Subsequently, some of these stories have been archived on the Culture Victoria website, themed under labels such as ‘A Diverse State’, ‘Immigrants and Emigrants’, ‘Post-War Europe’ and ‘Recent Arrivals’. A type of digital memorial of multiculturalism is therefore forming.

Creating digital stories is usually done in a workshop environment and according to Lambert’s ‘The Seven Steps of Storytelling’. At least one facilitator guides the digital story authors through the steps, beginning with script brainstorming and ending with voice and other audio track layovers. The process tends to take place over a few days, and a level of sharing occurs between participants. The final output is a 3- to 5-minute multimedia film that blends an original story, music, images and—importantly—‘narration in the author’s own voice’ (Weis et al. 2002, p. 157). The stories often incorporate home video, a mixture of personal photographs and stock images, and scanned documents such as passports. These images are arranged to give a montage-like effect, usually timed with music and the voice-over.

Given the specificities of the digital storytelling form and methodology, the genre is most usefully defined by Jean Burgess (2006, p. 7) as ‘the specific modes of production, technological apparatus and

textual characteristics of the community media movement'. Importantly, the genre is not only a form of media, but a specific field of cultural practice:

a dynamic site of relations between textual arrangements and symbolic conventions, technologies for production and conventions for their use; and collaborative social interaction ... that take place in *local and specific contexts*' (Burgess 2006, p. 7, italics added).

But how does the diasporic experience interfere or alter these local and specific contexts where digital storytelling takes place? How does the storyteller and their mode of storytelling adjust if, returning to Farred, diasporic narratives take place both in and out of context? A close analysis of digital stories produced by diasporic communities in Melbourne, Australia, in conjunction with ACMI, lends itself to answering these questions. At the same time, it takes to task recent emphasis on the localised or everyday approaches to diaspora and multiculturalism studies.

Digital storytelling and everyday multiculturalism are, after all, guided by similar aims and principles about the value of shared, diverse experiences. These similarities can be grouped into three main characteristics: 1) the attempt to 'bridge a gap' between the ordinary person and the institution or state; 2) the attempt to tell unheard or marginalised stories and share different perspectives; and 3) the attachment to and use of the notion of a culturally diverse society. These similarities make digital storytelling a useful point of entry into thinking about how notions of multiculturalism and diaspora manifest in Australia and embed themselves as everyday multiculturalism. This work is crucial since, as Burgess (2006, p. 211, original italics) argues, digital storytelling is 'a means of "*becoming real*" to others, on the basis of shared experience and affective resonances'. Whether the presence of a particular audience is imagined or otherwise, the digital story is constructed on its behalf and has material consequences. Exploring the ways in which diasporic subjects 'become real' through the mode of digital storytelling can reveal both limits and possibilities for multicultural Australia.

4 *Racconti: La Voce Del Popolo: Telling the Nation, Finding Space*

Currently, Australia's most prominent collection of digital stories on the topic of migration is that produced by ACMI between 2003 and 2010. Although hundreds of digital stories have been produced as part of the collection, only 32 were found to be readily available online. These texts make a particularly useful case study because of the representation of diasporic groups—many of the stories were produced with diasporic communities in Melbourne, including the Jewish, Italian, Lebanese, and Chinese communities. The Italo-Australian diaspora is represented through the collection *Racconti: La voce del popolo* (2003), which was, in fact, the first major digital storytelling project facilitated through ACMI (Simondson 2012, interview: 16 Nov.). Although a total of nine stories were produced, only three are publicly showcased on ACMI's websites and easily accessible via Culture Victoria's online repository of digital stories.² The remaining six are available online but require some online 'digging' before appearing on the YouTube channel of The Italian Federation of Migrant Workers and their Families (Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Emigrati e Famiglie, abbreviated as FILEF).

In my analysis of *Racconti*, I am interested in finding how Australian multiculturalism is displayed through various performative actions, and, further, how these displays embed themselves as everyday multiculturalism. In this way, the analysis has parallels to Stella Bruzzi's (2006) analysis of documentaries as 'performative acts', recently adopted by Belinda Smaill (2010). Smaill (2010, p. 19) argues that as screen technologies become more advanced, documentary moves further away from the original 'conventions of observational and expository form' and becomes increasingly performative. For the purposes of this paper, I focus on the spoken narration with some reference to the accompanying audio-visual components. I

² Namely, 1) Giovanni Sgro's, *Australia: per forze e per amore*; 2) Nella Siciliano's *Next Generation*; and 3) Maria de Maria's *Journey Home*.

take cues from Marco Santello's (2017) linguistics study of the Italian diaspora in the Australian state of Tasmania. Santello's study offers insights into how Italo-Australian narratives such as those found in *Racconti* might be considered types of space-makers in multicultural Australia. Santello argues that new kinds of 'centres' emerge when people interact linguistically; centres that are constructed in accordance with centres elsewhere and in relation to specific interactions in localised spaces. Diasporic groups such as the Italo-Australian diaspora have worked hard to create space in Australia, attempting to move from the 'Italian' or 'ethnic' space positioned on the edges of Australian society into a more centralised position (Lo Bianco cited in Jupp 2001; Santello 2017, p. 212). As Santello writes:

the telling—the ways in which choices are narrated and constructed—generates meaning in the here and now of the interaction ... migrants position themselves inside, outside at the edge of, or in the middle of spaces. They use a range of codes and points of entry when telling their stories to find places of dwelling (Santello 2017, p. 209).

The act of telling in *Racconti* can be read as a way to create spaces of both personal and public dwelling. The stories are intimate accounts, but they are created and shared in public. Further, they attempt to articulate the dis-located experience of diasporic migration within a located context (Australia). As such, they add to what Michael Shapiro (2000) views as national telling. Drawing on this idea, Jacqueline Lo (2014, p. 61) argues that multiculturalism telling work adds to the nation-state's attempts to autobiographically narrate itself as cohesive and homogeneous—to smooth over the fractures that multicultural 'non- or pre-citizens' create. This smoothing inclination is evidenced in the 32 digital stories about migration available online: after watching several, a particular rhythm begins to surface; after watching them all, a typology emerges. The typical migrant digital story involves four key elements: 1) three distinct narrative sections: moment of change, liminal space, and conclusion; 2) a linear movement from past to present/bad feeling to good feeling/hardship to success; 3) the condensation of convoluted experiences into a palatable trajectory—so much so that traumatic or anxious moments are, to borrow from Sara Ahmed (2010), 'disappeared'; and 4) the use of aesthetics that outline *the body*, drawing the viewer to the 'humanity' behind the migrant's face, ironically reinstating the contours of the universal as 'non-ethnic' (white).

For the most part, the stories in *Racconti* reflect this typology. The four characteristics of the typology are clearly seen in *Emilio's Story*, which begins with Emilio's decision to leave Italy and shifts to the difficulties experienced upon arrival in Australia. These difficulties centre on work in particular—his inability to find work in the first instance, despite the promises, and then the laborious and often dangerous nature of the work he eventually acquires:

[I] [w]ent to work on a weir, had to work in water and mud on hillside on cliffs. We just had to bounce it around our body. I built the roads for the country roads board, under the hot sun. The bitumen was very sticky and smelly. I also worked for the railways for five years.

Emilio then describes the terrible emotional liminality experienced when returning to Italy to see his wife and children, only to discover that he is unfamiliar to them. This double strangeness is quickly surpassed when the family comes to Australia, via the seamless joining of sentences, as below:

In 1961, I returned to Italy. The purpose of the trip was to arrange things for the whole family to move back with me in Australia. For nine unending years I had longed to be back to be joined with my children and my wife. It was impossible to describe my feelings when I found out I was to them like a stranger. The long separation had caused much harm. My children did not know me. They were so changed. Those were the worst days of my life, worse than my experience in the Australian bush. It took a long time to convince my wife to come with me to Australia, but eventually in 1963, the whole family came. We settled down as a happy family [...] Despite the early trouble, I like Australia, people are fair dinkum, I become formally an Australian citizen in 1962, I had finally realised my dream to make this my home for myself and my family.

Certain affects also circulate in *Racconti* in order to create intimacy between the ethnic author and the implied Anglo-Celtic viewer. Perhaps the subtlest of these is the perpetual longing for and the pursuit of the Australian 'good life'—a phantasmagorical aspiration linked to the origins of migration and continuously

reinforced by the white imaginary. The nine Italian digital stories featured in *Racconti* particularly emphasise this final pursuit of the Australian good life, with all narrators frequently referencing vertical mobility in the workforce, property ownership, and education. In *Lands Apart*, Cathy Mazzeo (2018) details the kinds of labour her parents did when they arrived in Australia, closing with the following statement:

My parents taught me about family values and commitment. My father always aimed high for his family. I don't think I would be in the position I am now without my parents' dedication and hard work. Thank you, Mum and Dad, for having the courage to move your family to a new country, and for your strength and the sacrifices you made to give us a better life.

Similarly, in Giancarlo Faustini's *The Provincial Connection*, the contrast between past struggle and present success is accentuated through the abrupt shift from his melancholic departure from Naples to the receipt of his salary in Melbourne. It is worth noting the sequential positioning of his long-awaited 'pay packet' and 'native [white] Australians':

We arrived in Melbourne just before Christmas, the port was full of people waiting for their loved ones. My heart was still crying out for Italy. I had chosen Australia as my new country. It was a daunting thought. In February 1965, I began working as a house painter in Melbourne. I vividly remember my first pay packet. My work gave me the opportunity to mix with native Australians.

The three-part narrative of these digital stories can be seen to correlate broadly with the three key points of Australia's multicultural success rhetoric, as well as the way in which the authors are positioned as multicultural subjects. They each discuss the difficult decision to migrate to Australia and the hardships faced once they do. They are shown to work painstakingly, often in poor conditions, but eventually find success and happiness. What emerges is a subjective positioning that mirrors the normative multicultural narrative: the Italo-Australians featured in *Racconti* take the opportunity to migrate to Australia, life is challenging and confusing initially; however, by working hard and adopting Australian values, they are eventually rewarded. There is perhaps no better visual symbolism of this trajectory than that seen in *Emilio's Story*, which begins in a similar fashion to others, with black-and-white family portraits, the camera scanning over the face and zooming into the eyes. When Emilio describes his wife's reluctance to move to Australia, an image of her standing in front of a house is shown. The image is in black and white. When Emilio says, 'but eventually in 1963', the saturation of the image begins to change: the image is slowly becoming coloured. By the time Emilio says the words 'we settled down as a happy family', the image is in full colour. The accompanying music shifts from traditional folk music to something more uplifting in beat and tone.

State-sanctioned rituals or authorised codes of national belonging are also frequently emphasised in *Racconti*, for instance, Australian citizenship dates or ceremonies. Giancarlo goes further than this by asserting the place of Italian migrants in Australian history and colonisation, in particular, their role in acting as allies to Anglo-Celtic miners in the Australian gold fields. He narrates as follows:

I became a proud Australian citizen in 1980 and have never regretted my decision to move to Ballarat, the centre of the Australian gold rush of the 1850s. It is a city full of history. One of the more prominent arrivals was the Italian Raffaello Carboni. Carboni participated in the rebellion against the government. He wrote a book that is now a classic. Carboni has his own place in Australian history, alongside pioneers and prime ministers. In 1996, I become president of the Ballarat Italian Association. In 1998, I was also invited to join the Eureka Stockade Memorial Association and become the treasurer. My involvement with these associations makes me acutely aware of my heritage, the positive contribution of Italians to Australia and my role in representing both cultures. That role is one that my family and I take great pride in fulfilling.

This narration is visually supplemented by images of historical sketches of the Ballarat colony, colonial maps, and the Eureka Stockade flag. Faustini's emphasis on the involvement of Italians in Australia's 19th-century gold rushes gives rise to an odd conjunction. The racism of Anglo-Celtic gold miners towards non-Anglo-Celtic miners—Chinese especially—is well documented; so too, the way the racist angst that accumulated in these labour settings influenced the *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901. As stated, this legislation was one of the earliest used to keep non-white migrants, including Italians, from migrating

to Australia. In *The Provincial Connection*, Giancarlo is attempting to rewrite Italians into the dominant history of Australia, but his eagerness to do so via codes of the white colonial imperative creates troubling tensions. These tensions reflect in Farred's (2009, p. 132) argument that 'To be diasporic is to think "minorisation" while acquiring fluency in the major language that can never be either fully owned—inhabited—or dismissed'. In the typical migrant digital story, diasporic subjects in Australia become fluent in dominant languages—not only in a linguistic sense, but in a symbolic one. Here, Giancarlo's narrative works to occupy the 'same psychic space' (Berlant 2011, p. 95) afforded to the dominant culture.

5 Diasporic Listening

Typically, the digital stories in *Racconti* promise to offer happiness and social inclusion by acting as a sign that can be given to others, which Ahmed (2004, p. 196) describes as the 'right kind of feeling', providing 'the right kind of subject'. Most of the stories perform the attainment of 'inclusiveness within Australia', which is presented as a performative accomplishment in their respective conclusions. The stories draw on pre-existing notions of Australian multiculturalism in ways that move beyond the digital story and further augment normative notions of multicultural Australia. The stories are presented within a framework of multicultural harmony and celebration of diversity; a framework that defines multicultural life in Australia as happy and enriching. Giovanni Sgro's digital story *Australia: Per Forze e per Amore* allows us to consider what is produced when the multicultural promise of harmony and reward is broken, when a digital story *does not* give us the 'right kind of feeling'. As both Ahmed (2004, 2010a, 2010b) and Ann Cvetkovich (2003) demonstrate, bad feeling works in productive, powerful ways. Indeed, it seems as if it is precisely when the promise of multicultural happiness is unfulfilled (for either the author or the viewer) that the possibility for a robust reading of diaspora and multiculturalism arises in these digital stories. In Giovanni's story, the multicultural promise remains somewhat empty, and the rupture between his old home (Calabria) and his new home (Australia) is unresolved. Unlike most of the digital stories in this collection, which move from an initial trauma to a resolution, the difficulty of Australian life punctuates the entirety of Giovanni's narrative—first in the migrant camp and, later, in his involvement in violent protests for migrant rights. His conclusion does not end with Australia but with Calabria: 'I have been happy here, I have enjoyed my life [...] but I cannot forget where I was born. In the daytime I work in Australia, but at night I am in Seminara, Calabria'. For Giovanni Sgro, the pursuit of the Australian good life has created an obvious subjective tension: he is pushed close to the imaginary good life by the dominant culture, but never allowed to traverse into and inhabit this imaginary fully. His story illustrates how Italian diasporic subjects, especially of the postwar period, were asked to occupy the Australian national space but could only do so precariously and on the periphery. *Australia: per amore e per forze* reminds viewers that the subject of diaspora, the 'I' that forms the subject of these digital stories, is tenuous and always historically located: 'The diasporic subject lives [...] always with the prospect of being made in/hospitable' (Farred 2009, p. 143). This prospect begins to reveal the fictions by which normative discourses such as successful multiculturalism are propped up, discourses that dismiss an embedded history of racism that begins with colonial invasion.

The multicultural subjects in *Racconti* are already associated with a political, cultural, and affective history, and the way viewers begin to connect to these subjects is to some extent tied to that history. As such, it is impossible and perhaps even counterproductive to try and read these texts from a purely everyday or localised perspective, without proper consideration of the ways in which they talk both within and to broader normative structures. These structures have long histories, histories that are constantly accumulating. Digital storytelling is certainly a useful tool for bringing ordinary voices into the public domain, but, like all forms of representation, the mode of the genre and the context within which it is conducted undoubtedly constrains the terms of the speaking and, ultimately, the speaker. A rereading of diasporic narratives is therefore required, one that involves what Tanja Dreher (2012, pp. 162–63) might term 'difficult listening' and what I am going to extend here to the term 'diasporic listening'. Difficult

listening in this instance means approaching *Racconti* as an economy of complex subjects, objects and energies; diasporic listening extends this by dis-locating these ‘everyday’ narratives, rereading them in and out of contexts. Such an approach is inspired by Sventlana Boym’s (1998) work on diasporic intimacy, which she eloquently describes below:

Diasporic intimacy does not promise a comforting recovery of identity through shared nostalgia for the lost home and homeland. In fact, it’s the opposite. It might be seen as the mutual enchantment of two immigrants from different parts of the world or as the sense of the fragile coziness of a foreign home. *Just as one learns to live with alienation and reconciles oneself to the uncanniness of the world around and to the strangeness of the human touch, there comes a surprise, a pang of intimate recognition, a hope that sneaks in through the back door, punctuating the habitual estrangement of everyday life abroad* (Boym 1998, p. 501, italics added).

When we remain attuned to the ‘pangs’ that ‘sneak in through the back door’, we get a better sense of diasporic life, while simultaneously disrupting the assimilationist imperative of normative discourses of Australian multiculturalism. Shapiro (2000) summarises as follows:

Creating unity out of constitutive division, the state attempts to write itself in a way that ends the split. Indeed, once we locate the state in a theatrical frame, imaginatively performing its distinctiveness rather than simply existing passively within a naturalized, geopolitical space, the split temporal dimensions of its existence become more apparent (Shapiro 2000, p. 80).

To return, then, to *Racconti* and consider how the outside sneaks inside, and vice versa, ‘disperse[ing] the homogeneous visual time of the horizontal society’, reveal[ing] Australia ‘as a set of disjunctive temporal performances’ (Shapiro 2000, p. 80). Santello’s (2017, p. 211) study acts as a guide again here, due to the way it examines the intersection of speech and spaces of dwelling, searching for new spaces of speech ‘where one can find areas that are sidelined in most cartographies of diasporas’. Santello’s scouring of linguistic data is used for a different aim, but the method is useful for tracing unsuspecting fragments in *Racconti*. These fragments allude to new passages of space that are not necessarily Australian, Italian, or even Italo-Australian. In Nella Siciliano’s *Next Generation*, Nella briefly touches on her sense of ongoing isolation from childhood to adulthood, though she quickly moves on to happiness when she talks about convincing her husband to allow their daughter to attend university. The mood shifts rapidly from disappointment to triumph, and it feels as though something has occurred that is neither fully realised nor properly attended to. What is this *something*, I wonder? Similarly, in *Journey Home*, Maria de Maria moves her narrative from a place of despair at having to leave Italy, to eventual happiness in her new home. She closes her story by saying: ‘perhaps there were opportunities here that they [my parents] wouldn’t have known had they stayed’. The word ‘perhaps’ stands out oddly; ‘perhaps’ suggests an element of uncertainty in the successful narrative she has so far been telling; a sense that this might not be true. The ‘perhaps’ lingers as a momentary space-holder for an alternative dwelling, offering the potential for an alternative reading of Maria’s multicultural story.

These linguistic excesses or space-holders are also present in one of the most obvious and important components of the digital story: the voice-over. Most of the stories in *Racconti* are spoken in English, with varying degrees of an Italian accent, and speaking is, of course, a highly performative act. The verbal statements made by the authors interpellate them within the terms of language, which enables ‘a certain existence of the body’ (Butler 1997, p. 5), and illustrate a particular exercise of power relations that connect the author with the addressed audience. Both Judith Butler (1997) and Belinda Smaill (2010) use Shoshana Felman’s (2002) notion of the body as ‘an excess’ of what is said in order to think about how the performance of illocutionary acts implicates the body. In this case, stating something like ‘I was born in Italy’ situates the authors within a frame of reference for ‘Italianness’ in Australia, but it also performs what Butler describes as a redoubling: ‘there is what is said, and then there is a kind of saying that the bodily “instrument” of the utterance performs’ (Butler 1997, p. 11). She explains:

The illocutionary speech act performs its deed at the moment of the utterance, and yet to the extent that the moment is ritualized, it is never merely a single moment. The ‘moment’ in ritual is a condensed historicity: it exceeds itself in past and future directions, an effect of prior and future invocations that constitute and escape the instance of utterance (Butler 1997, p. 3).

In other words, what is said can only make sense in terms of the frames of the excess that support it. The viewer meets the digital story with a particular and pre-existing understanding of what it means to be a multicultural Australian. The narrated performance is then directed in certain ways, establishing ‘the presence of the performing subject by directing our attention to that subject’ (Small 2010, p. 138). This presence is bound up with certain fantasies of the self and the Other and, ultimately, affects the ways in which the subjects involved are articulated. The use of accented English intimates the narrators’ *otherness* to the implied viewers. Often, the authors stumble over words, or their accents make it difficult to interpret the spoken narration. This ‘stammering English’, as Gunew (2003) describes it, creates a shortfall in the Australian performance. Ultimately, the narrations are delivered in a comprehensible manner, and sometimes even colloquial words are used, such as Emilio’s (somewhat awkward) use of ‘fair dinkum’. This combination of comprehensiveness and stammering creates a performative glitch between the whiteness associated with English speaking and the unhomey — or ‘not-quite right’ (not-quite white) — sound of the author’s English. The performativity of whiteness is passed on by speaking English, but the accent means it is not passed on in the expected manner—it is producing something else, something other than, or in excess to, whiteness (Gunew 2003). This disturbance is exacerbated in stories like Nella’s, which are spoken entirely in Italian with English subtitles. Nella’s story illustrates that she is a happy Australian woman; however, the subtitles point to the fact that she does not speak fluent English, or at least, she does not speak it confidently. In short: it suggests she has not properly assimilated into Australia. After all, these two adjectives—Australian and non-English-speaking—are not considered synonymous by the nation’s public imagination.³

These disruptions or space-holders are not always linguistic—the visual and audio languages are also crucial to the digital story form and its narrative accomplishment. When Emilio tells us, ‘we settled down as a happy family’, he does so with an image of his family at their Melbourne home. When re-watching *Emilio’s Story*, I hit pause on this image. A group of women sit together on the front lawn in a loose circle. In the background’s far-right corner, a man stands under the house’s veranda. Unlike the women, who are lit up by sunshine, the man is standing in the shadows, looking jarringly removed from the rest of the scene. I consider again the words Emilio uttered moments ago: ‘The long separation had caused much harm’. Looking again at this image, I become unconvinced that this harm was seamlessly repaired, as Emilio’s spoken narration suggests. There is disconnect between photo and narration, a disconnect that seems to be ‘that precarious, and precariously disadvantaged, position of the outside (that is problematically related to the ‘inside’) ... the only place from which to speak the diaspora’ (Farred 2009, p. 135).

6 Diasporic Reverberations: Increasing the Volume

What would happen to our understandings of diaspora and multiculturalism if we amplified the narrative slippages or space-makers that subtly appear in *Racconti*? Two digital stories created in 2014 by sisters Katrina and Grace Lolicato begin to elicit some answers. Katrina and Grace co-run an oral history archive in Melbourne and, in 2014, curated the exhibition *Italo-Australian: Defining Diaspora/Understanding Culture*. The exhibition included a short promotional digital story of the same title, as well as their own personal digital story, *Her, Grace*, narrated by their father. The promotional digital story diverges from the conventional form of the genre, with a range of voices heard. Various statements about experiences of ‘Italianness’ are edited together, often providing opposing beliefs or sentiments. This haphazardness is exacerbated in *Her, Grace*, which begins fairly typically as a migration success story. The accompanying

³ See Noble (2005, p. 118).

moving photographs zoom past, interjected by small shots of the father sitting at a dining table, narrating. At times, the voices of Katrina and Grace are heard off-screen, asking their father questions, or responding to his, highlighting the moving and fragmented way that diasporic subjects construct their narratives. The Lolicato father talks about growing up ‘ethnic’ in regional Australia, describing food, school life, and other cultural rituals, with mostly good humour. These various, mundane moments of difference are juxtaposed against footage of the father meeting the Queen of England as a high school boy, and as he reflects his awe about this official encounter with Anglo royalty, I get a sense of the entangled place that is ‘Italo-Australian’. As the digital story moves along, his sister Grace is mentioned more frequently. It is difficult to get a sense of what the main thread or point of this story is; however, I realise it has something to do with Grace. Indeed, the narration is collaged in such a way that the father at times speaks about Grace in the past tense, even before he has said why she is in fact in the past. This greatly disturbs the temporal rhythm so frequent in digital stories, and most ‘telling’ works. The film ends with fast-moving images, overlaid with the following statement:

We all were convinced that she was going to come home and come home a healthier girl. She died on the operating table. And yeah, that was it [restrained crying]. But anyway [restrained crying]... Not long after that we were all packed up and come to Melbourne. That was it.

7 Conclusion

In *Her, Grace*, Katrina and Grace Lolicato have crafted the narrative to ensure that when their father says, ‘that was it’, the viewers know that it was *not* ‘it’ at all. There was more to this story, there *is* more to this story, maybe less depending on when it is told, who asks the questions, and how it is edited together. However, by integrating snippets of recollections and interjecting comments and questions, voiced across generations, the story ‘cuts and pastes’ in ‘bits and pieces’ (Dellios 2018) the complexity of diasporic life as it navigates everyday joys and traumas within a macro political framework that does not always accommodate its difference. By giving room for these past and present echoes to move, the Lolicato sisters are able to destabilise the assimilationist legacy that ACMI’s digital storytelling memorial about migration inadvertently consolidates. The authors pick up on the ‘somethings’, the ‘perhaps-es’ that arose in *Racconti*, ultimately prying open the parameters of the place of the diaspora that Farred describes and that I began this paper with. Diasporic telling emerges from particular contexts—but this telling always ricochets off other contexts. This ricochet has the potential to create—in Sneja Gunew’s analogy (2017)—a powerfully disruptive ‘acoustic hum’.

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