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# Introduction. Creative Collaborations, Dialogues, and Reconfigurations: Rethinking Artistic, Cultural, and Sociopolitical Values and Practices with Indigenous people in Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia-Kanaky, and Papua New Guinea

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# **Introduction. Creative Collaborations, Dialogues, and Reconfigurations: Rethinking Artistic, Cultural, and Sociopolitical Values and Practices with Indigenous people in Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia-Kanaky, and Papua New Guinea**

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# Introduction. Creative Collaborations, Dialogues, and Reconfigurations: Rethinking Artistic, Cultural, and Sociopolitical Values and Practices with Indigenous people in Australia, French Polynesia, New Caledonia-Kanaky, and Papua New Guinea

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- 1 Visual anthropology and the anthropology of the visual generate a strong interest in various domains such as academia, museums, cultural institutions, and festivals. As crucial means to study “what is not visual in human society” (MacDougall 2004), they offer an invitation akin to that of Indigenous studies to move beyond disciplinary boundaries as well as “to reveal and accept the complexity of knowledge intersections” (Nakata 2004: 13). Through the analysis of how different visual, textual, and performative materials are constructed and circulate, this issue aims to reflect and prolong the dialogues established by its contributors across the disciplines, beyond academia, and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. It includes contributions from scholars – some of whom are also filmmakers, artists, poets, educators, and curators – who are Indigenous or have worked with Indigenous people for at least a decade (in some cases several decades), and who have produced visual materials as a result of these collaborations. This issue interrogates and provides examples of how to incorporate new decolonising, emancipating or empowering knowledge and approaches into academic, visual, and cultural productions. It also

examines the challenge tackled by most authors to engage new audiences and create bridges between societies while respecting Indigenous protocols and codes of ethics. The contributions were developed as part of the Research Project “TransOceanik: Interactive Research, Mapping, and Creative Agency in the Pacific, the Indian Ocean and the Atlantic”, an international collaboration (*Laboratoire International Associé*, 2012-2015) between the French National Scientific Research Centre (CNRS-LAS) and James Cook University/The Cairns Institute.<sup>1</sup>

## Weaving words and images

- 2 This collection of essays and video contributions both focuses and relies on interactions between texts and images.<sup>2</sup> *AnthroVision* – as an online journal aiming to “include audiovisual material and to promote innovative ways of writing within an academic framework” – is therefore an ideal publication avenue for this volume, which also addresses the strategies, choices, and constraints that shape research that is conducted with these two media (texts and visuals). The articles do not only unveil the “epistemological backstage” (Olivier De Sardan 1992: 185) of visual documents; they question the dialogic relationship between images and texts. Magali McDuffie, Rosita Henry and Daniela Vávrová, as well as Flora Aurima-Devatine and Estelle Castro-Koshy, for example, chose a two-tool writing process. In their articles, the film questions, completes, and gives more depth to the written text; it does not “double” it. In all the contributions, the film and/or the photographs and the text are mutually enriching. This is also the case in Barbara Glowczewski’s book, *Totemic Becomings. Cosmopolitics of the Dreaming/Devires Totêmicos. Cosmopolítica do Sonho*, which is reviewed by Gerko Egert: Egert stresses that the bilingual book “composed as a rich assemblage of images and text [...] charts the complex cartographies of Warlpiri Dreaming cosmologies” – a mapping that Glowczewski also explicates and gives examples of in her video contribution to this issue.

Conference at Collège de France. « I don’t like pink ». Quand le cancer attaque les femmes Warlpiri (Australie centrale)



[https://www.odsas.net/scan\\_sets.php?set\\_id=1756&doc=188523&step=0](https://www.odsas.net/scan_sets.php?set_id=1756&doc=188523&step=0)  
Barbara Glowczewski

**Well Women Workshop. Warnayaka Arts Centre, Lajamanu**

[https://www.odsas.net/scan\\_sets.php?set\\_id=1756](https://www.odsas.net/scan_sets.php?set_id=1756)

Barbara Glowczewski

- 3 The four-hand writing process in the essays by Henry and Vávrová, and by Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy, also enhances their rich assemblage of videos and textual analysis. In the innovative essay by Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy, the intertwined voices of the researchers become distinct at times, thus lending a dynamic to the text which invites the reader to engage more intimately with its topics. Pluriform writing sometimes allows the scholar(s) or the artist(s) to convey the emotion he/she has experienced or what he/she cannot say with words, to carry the voices of the people with whom he/she works, or to better give justice to the efficacy of certain images.
- 4 The examination of the significance and contextualisation of visual productions is central to this collection of articles and videos, which addresses the need to (re)historicise visual productions as well as to engage with the expertise brought and meanings ascribed by the artists/filmmakers to their creative processes. Stéphanie Graff's essay sheds light on visual attempts to make invisible colonial history and Kanak claims to sovereignty in New Caledonia-Kanaky. While her essay brings to the fore – through her textual analysis – what is not represented on the *place du Mwâ Kââ* in Nouméa, the photographs she provides communicate the violence that was used by the city when the *cases* (customary houses) were demolished by bulldozers during the *Affaire des cases*.<sup>3</sup> The deconstruction and reconfiguration of narratives surrounding historical images and discourses is performed in Martin Préaud's contribution, entitled "Barnabott the Clown's great colonial bingo", which was first delivered at the College de France in December 2015. Through humour, irony, as well the superposition of gestures, photographs, and texts (including historical documents, statistics, and quotes from newspapers), this political farce denounces what Préaud cogently calls in his accompanying essay the contemporary manifestations – in public discourses and policies – of "the political imaginary underpinning settler colonialism". Géraldine Le Roux's article focuses on Australian ghostnet art and introduces new perspectives on the circulation of marine debris, stepping away from the sole negative impact of marine pollution. Her detailed, sophisticated analysis of ghostnet techniques, philosophy, and of the "intimate connections" that the artists have with their environment and weave into their artworks is informed by the multi-sites and multi-sited approach she has developed as an anthropologist and an art curator, as well as from the time she spent "cutting, stitching and coiling nets with the artists".

- 5 This volume helps understand the limits of what can be said or filmed and furthermore of what cannot be shown, either in a filmic or in a written form. Henry and Vávrová underline the need to carefully ponder over these issues in their essay on an “extraordinary wedding” and on bride price transactions in the Western Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The authors note that Henry filmed the events with a light-weight digital camera as her intention was initially to give a recording of the wedding to the family. The anthropological significance of the events and potentiality of the footage were revealed to her during the filming. This *après-coup* is classic in anthropology and raises the question as to what the camera adds to the research. The camera can be impressive to the interviewees as an object and because of the potential circulation it can give to a particular recording. Henry and Vávrová also recall how often “actors or participants [...] narratively direct the filming”. Conscious that this “shared, dialogic process [...] often halts once filming stops and the editing process begins”, they chose to involve the people whose lives are portrayed in the film in “participatory editing” and explore the modalities and effectiveness of this process in their article. McDuffie’s article emphasises that the scholarly work she has undertaken on her filmmaker’s work has led her to reflect upon the filming process as a “process with countless ramifications” resulting from her participatory approach. The two aforementioned essays offer a particularly judicious and illuminating engagement with the literature on ethnographic filmmaking. Working with a camera (Glowczewski; Henry and Vávrová; McDuffie), elaborating multimedia research tools (Glowczewski), establishing an artistic dialogue (Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy; Le Roux; Préaud), mounting exhibitions (Le Roux) can trigger – for interviewees and researchers – new discourses, attitudes, and work relations.

## Production, circulation, and (re)interpretation of films and visual arts in and on Oceania

- 6 This issue looks at the production and reception of films and visual arts in and on Oceania. The importance of ethical, cultural, and economic concerns during creative processes and for the circulation of the works are highlighted by contributors to this volume. McDuffie’s enlightening essay analyses “strategies of resistance (cultural actions, economic, and self-determination initiatives)” developed by Nyikina women – from the West Kimberley region of Western Australia – through the medium of film. Her decade-long collaboration with the women informs her essay, which stresses the paramount role film has played over the years for the “inter-generational and inter-personal transmission of knowledge”, in the process of community building, and to create “a network of local and global relationships and connections”. Moreover, as a way to prevent any risk of commodifying Nyikina culture, the women and McDuffie have established that “monetary gain from [their] films is never a goal, nor an indicator of popularity or success: priorities are not set within the traditional academic, research or distribution outputs”. Le Roux analyses both the “translocal identity” of the ghostnet art movement and its local particularities in the Torres Strait Islands and Cape York. Her article shows how artworks commissioned for an international art exhibition were made by the artists to strategically increase the international recognition of their Indigenous knowledge, cultures, and societies. Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy discuss three video interviews with Indigenous Tahitian writers,

Flora Aurima-Devatine, Nathalie Heirani Salmon Hudry, and Chantal Spitz, as well as Aurima-Devatine's performance of her poem, "Te pata'uta'u a te vahine tutuha'a" ("The rhythmic song of women beating barks to make tapa cloth"). Castro-Koshy, in collaboration with filmmaker, Dominique Masson, produced these videos to give further visibility to Indigenous Pacific authors. The essay by Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy demonstrates that these videos offer new ways to understand the writers' work and Tahitian society. The interviews and the scholars' analysis inform and expand the field of Oceanian literary and cultural studies, as the concept of "interorality" they develop in this essay – to better interpret Aurima-Devatine's work as well as the annual multi-arts and multilingual Tahitian event Pina'ina'i – illustrates.<sup>4</sup> With this concept, Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy show how diverse oral and textual sources are creatively woven into the works of contemporary Tahitian writers and performers. Henry and Vávrová crucially interrogate how to author a narrative that can appeal to a broad audience "without diminishing the integrity of the lifeworld of the characters". Their essay also draws attention to the editing choices made in order to avoid "rekindl[ing] tensions that would otherwise lie dormant".

- 7 In contexts where new technologies and social media are increasingly used, research with and into makers of stories and "collectors of stories"<sup>5</sup> often needs to simultaneously look at what is produced and at who gains access to information and knowledge. This issue explores how different levels of knowledge are negotiated by artists, filmmakers, and scholars according to the local, national, and international destination of their work. Who disseminates and controls, or cannot control, the circulation of films and visual arts? What are the roles of different media platforms – including those providing free online access – and cityscapes for cultural productions that are not mainstream or would benefit from greater visibility? These questions are addressed in this volume, which also provides insights into the choices made by storytellers to create awareness on specific political, historical, ecological, and societal issues in the Pacific. It tackles the crucial question of researchers' levels of involvement with the people about whom cultural productions are made, as well as that of "who" becomes involved in the knowledge-making-process.

## Artistic and narrative interventions in Oceania

- 8 This contribution to the research conducted on Oceania places great emphasis on the flourishing creativity of artists and cultural makers. It also reveals "another side" of the story. The volume shows how some historical events, especially in contexts where history was written through the lens of the colonial power, can only be understood through the unfolding of a narrative. Préaud's powerful performance made available here in video creatively analyses the violence of settler colonialism in Australia understood in the terms of late historian, Patrick Wolfe – to whom Préaud pays tribute – as "a structure and not an event" (2006: 388). Préaud's essay highlights the context in which the performance was elaborated and the rationale behind some of his theatrical choices: as an artistic response to the announcement by the Western Australia Premier in 2014 of the closure of Aboriginal communities in his state,<sup>6</sup> the farce aims to make visible the blood shed upon which the wealth of Australia as a country was built, while also emphasising the "continuing, persevering, and tireless" presence and resistance of Indigenous people in Australia and the world. Graff analyses how different versions of

history are represented in the public space in the capital city of New Caledonia-Kanaky. Her thought-provoking essay argues that what she calls a “politics of common destiny” acts as historic and cultural rewriting in New Caledonia-Kanaky through the “displacement and replacement of facts, narratives, and symbols”. She focuses in particular on public visual productions and actions that construct Caledonian citizenship without addressing the issues of anti-colonialism, decolonisation, and independence. By analysing what sense of identity and political project for the territory appear through the *Mwâ Kââ* square and the *Affaire des cases*, her essay raises critical questions for other countries in Oceania: what would a Caledonian (or national/Pacific) identity that does not recognise the sovereignty of Kanak (or Indigenous) people be? Can visual evocations of the past in the public sphere be read as signs of the way the future will be built? As Graff and Préaud draw the readers’ and viewers’ attention to the brutal and continuing impact of settler colonialism on Indigenous people over decades, they also underscore the persistence of Indigenous protests movements – regarding sovereignty, basic human rights, or the protection of culture – since the 1970s.

- 9 This issue brings attention to cultural heritage that has been recorded or reinterpreted and to the need for Indigenous people to build “memories for the future” (Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy). The artworks studied by Le Roux, the films by Goenpul Jagara and Bundjulung filmmaker, Romaine Moreton, analysed by Castro-Koshy in her conference presentation as well as the films directed and produced by McDuffie have already gained national and international recognition. Castro-Koshy’s eloquent demonstration brings to the fore that Moreton’s films represent a “two-way vertical transmission” of knowledge – from elders to the youth and from the youth to older people: while *The Oysterman* evokes the heritage that the grandfather has passed on to his grandson, in *The Farm*, “the mother reconnects with her memories, history, and ability to engage with the old people through her senses thanks to her daughter”.

Conference at Collège de France. Poésie visuelle, lieux-histoires, et philosophie aborigène dans les films de Romaine Moreton *The Farm* and *The Oysterman*

- 10 This media file cannot be displayed. Please refer to the online document <http://journals.openedition.org/anthrovision/2191>

<https://vimeo.com/173430658>

- 11 In the corpus constituted by Castro-Koshy, love as well as the transmission of values come forth as transversal themes. Expressed through the woman figure and/or filial relationships, these themes are explored by Moreton and the three Tahitian writers to emphasise the importance and influence of their ancestors, family, and heritage on their lives and artistic productions.
- 12 Castro-Koshy also highlights that Moreton’s films – and their emphasis on tenderness – emerge as “breaths of visual and emotional poetry” – even more so in film festivals where relationships are often depicted through violence. By analysing the choices made by Moreton to evoke colonial conflicts without re-enacting their violence, allow the land to “do much of the storytelling”, as well as show “how people’s ancestral links with places can be read [...] through engagement and an inscription of the senses” (Langton 2002: 254), Castro-Koshy also suggests that Moreton’s films are a deployment



of “visual sovereignty” (Raheja 2010). The potential role that the arts can play in shifting representations, and, consequently, people’s attitudes, comes forth in several essays. Le Roux shows how ghostnet artists have drawn national and international attention to the destructive impact of marine pollution while transforming discarded nets into acclaimed artworks and even humoristic fashion material. Her essay highlights the multifaceted success of this new art movement through which Indigenous people tell their stories, “different stories”, and challenge different communities – of spectators – to engage constructively and aesthetically with marine pollution. Le Roux also demonstrates how Ghostnet artists have encouraged many people to move away from “disempowering attitudes that are often seen around environmental issues”. Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy underline in their essay how Nathalie Heirani Salmon-Hudry’s narrative, through her autobiographical book, *Je suis née morte* (I was born dead), and her video interviews, aims to “show difference in a different way” and to raise awareness about the issues faced by people with a disability. The parallel between these issues and those encountered by Indigenous people – such as their marginalisation in the education system or in visual productions – is subtly drawn in this volume, which also concentrates on the many ways by which Indigenous people both respond to destabilising representations of themselves or their communities and enrich the Oceanian repertoire of artistic expressions. Helen Idle’s review of the exhibition “Vivid Memories” – produced by the Musée d’Aquitaine and co-curated by Arnaud Morvan, a member of the TransOceanik project – also reveals “an artworld that blends innovation with continuity while adapting technologies to express the variety of worldviews of artists from many Aboriginal nations”.

- 13 For individuals and communities who fight for the survival of their people, culture or epistemological heritage, or whose histories have been silenced, establishing a body of work that is available for local, national, and international communities is nothing less than rewriting history. The voices, thoughts, philosophies, struggles, and creativity of Indigenous Oceanian people are therefore of paramount importance to this volume. For Tahitian writers, Aurima-Devatine, Salmon Hudry, and Spitz, “*les mots soignent les maux*”: words hold the power to heal – whether they have been inflicted by colonial history, trauma, stereotypes, ignorance or even academic essays (Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy).
- 14 The political urgency that resonates in this issue echoes the urgent response that Aboriginal, Kanak, and many Oceanian people or communities are asking when facing structural problems that are mostly the result of colonisation. The films, art works, and research that are central to this volume confront different discourses and practices surrounding images or representations. The stories that are shown and told work as “counter-discourse” (McDuffie) or “counterpoint to a history that is often narrated as shattered or ruptured” (Castro-Koshy). From this perspective, and echoing Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s idea, Magali McDuffie explores “the use of film both as an empowering act of resistance to neo-colonial oppression, and a decolonizing methodology”. This volume invites the research community and readers/viewers to pay attention to the complexity of narratives, and to the multiple voices that inform them, sometimes without leaving visible traces.

## Establishing enduring collaborations

- 15 One of the major contributions of this issue is to present collaboration as a way of working, a methodology, an “ethics-methodology” (Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy). It also highlights some examples of protocols and processes that were established to foster long-lasting collaborations. Just like films can be a way of doing ethnography, collaboration and consultation are also ways of conducting research, “emphasizing the agency” (Le Roux) of the people we work with, and, in some cases, of “producing new cultural material” (Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy). McDuffie’s enriching collaboration with Nyikina women led her to undertake doctoral studies. The richness of her cinematographic productions testifies to the relationship of trust that she has established with the Nyikina women. She highlights that the film *Three Sisters: Women of High Degree* (2015) “is not a film one could make in one short trip – it is a film that emerged after seven years of conversations”. Thanks to a long-term collaboration, Castro-Koshy’s contribution on Romaine Moreton’s films includes segments from the two short films, including excerpts from *The Oysterman*, a short film that has been screened in festivals but has not yet been commercialised. Similarly, the essay co-written by Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy results from and prolongs a collaboration of ten years – that also led to the production of the first audiovisual production on Flora Aurima-Devatine which the essay discusses. A firm believer in the incommensurable value of Tahitian cultural heritage, Aurima-Devatine went as early as 1968 to record and talk to the old people in Tahiti. For many years, she composed the traditional poems for the Heiva sung by Papara. Le Roux’s essay is the result of several years of engagement with Ghostnet artists; the two artworks she selected for an exhibition she curated in Paris in 2012 were the first ghostnet works shown overseas. Graff has conducted research in New Caledonia-Kanaky since 2005 and is the only anthropologist working on an everyday basis in the Caledonian political spheres. Henry met Maggie, the mother of the bride whose wedding Henry filmed, in the 1970s, and kept in contact over the years. Préaud has conducted research in Aboriginal Australia since 2002.
- 16 Barbara Glowczewski has used new technologies innovatively to further her collaboration with Aboriginal people. In her oral presentation – made available for this issue on an open access video – she presents a synthesis of her use of different media in collaboration with Warlpiri people from Lajamanu in Central Australia, and traces Warlpiri women’s understandings of health issues and healing over several decades. Glowczewski provides the anthropological context for several films, and in particular for two films she shot thirty-five years apart: a 1979 16mm footage of women only rituals, and a 2014 video clip on a breast cancer prevention workshop filmed at the Warnayaka arts centre. Her demonstration highlights some critical challenges raised by different cultural perceptions of – or lack of familiarity with – inside knowledge and ritual secrecy. It subtly addresses the need for official policies to take into account the knowledge, beliefs, and everyday realities of the people for whom these policies are designed. Glowczewski’s various audiovisual material can be accessed on ODSAS, the Online Digital Source and Annotation System – developed by Laurent Dousset and – dedicated to archives collected by researchers working in Oceania.<sup>7</sup> Glowczewski originally developed her archives so as to return her audio-visual data to the Warlpiri people from Lajamanu and make it available for their own use.<sup>8</sup> Hundreds of hours of

singing and storytelling in Warlpiri, thousands of photographs, pages of fieldwork notebooks, and hours of films are made available with various commentaries and linked through hyperlinks on ODSAS: the access to some files is restricted to respect Warlpiri cultural protocols but can be authorised through the odsas system.<sup>9</sup> Collaborative annotation of her material by Warlpiri people has also been developed since 2011 during workshops she has organised in Lajamanu. Glowczewski's extensive fieldwork with Warlpiri people is contextualized in the book reviewed in this issue.

- 17 Most contributions in this issue underline the challenges posed and rewards gained in these two-way processes or “inter-action” (McDuffie), when the crafts and *savoir-faire* (know how) of the researcher/filmmaker/artist/curator and that of the participant community person/artist enter into dialogue. The public version of *An Extraordinary Wedding* is the result of numerous conversations between Henry, Vávrová, and the bride's family, who all contributed to shaping the message and values conveyed by the film. Henry negotiated with the families during the writing process and she went back on the field to better integrate them in the process. Despite her death, Maggie Leahy played a major role in the writing process; her voice guided the anthropologist's work. These essays deal in depth with “authorial strategies” (Henry and Vávrová) and the sort of attention that ethically-concerned researchers and artists aim to attract. Trust and integrity are also recurrently highlighted as being fundamental to establishing enduring and rewarding collaboration. This volume argues that consultation practices are not antithetical to creative processes. It supports the view that recognising the agency of people about whom knowledge is circulated can only provide more insightful understanding of situations, societies, and historical events that are complex. With six essays, three video contributions, one exhibition review, and one book review, this issue stands as a collective assemblage of creativity and singularities – very much in the image of the TransOceanik network.
- 18 Estelle Castro-Koshy and Géraldine Le Roux, guest editors.

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## NOTES

1. This project was coordinated by Barbara Glowczewski (CNRS), Rosita Henry (JCU), and Ton Otto (JCU, 2012-2013). For other publications that resulted from the project, see *etropic issues: Behind the scenes: Transversality of Invisible Lines and Knowledges* 15(2) (2015); *Value, Transvaluation and Globalization* 13(2) (2014); *TransOceanik: Academic Research and Public Domains* 12(1) (2013). See also Glowczewski, Barbara, Rosita Henry and Ton Otto. 2013. Relations and Products: Dilemmas of Reciprocity in Fieldwork. *TAJA* 14(2): 113-125.
2. The three video contributions were recorded during the conference “Theatre of operations. Staging of Action, Coordination of Movement and Transformation of the World”, the last conference organised by the LIA TransOceanik (Collège de France, December 2015). Two presentations given at the conference are made available here as an attempt to exploit different research media and expand the scope of this issue on visual creativity and narrative research.
3. The forceful demolition of the cases is also recalled in a song by Kanak performance poet, Paul Wamo, called “Le Kaillou” (<https://soundcloud.com/paul-wamo/sets>) and in “12 11 12”, a short story named after the date of the event and published in *Nouvelles de Nouvelle-Calédonie*. Pp. 113-122. Paris: Éditions Magellan et Cie.
4. An article that Aurima-Devatine and Castro-Koshy wrote on Pina’ina’i with 17 other – mostly Indigenous – contributors from French Polynesia will be published in the forthcoming 2016 issue of *Journal de la Société des Océanistes (JSO)* on cultural performances in Oceania.
5. We are here taking up eloquent words used by Rosita Henry during the TransOceanik Colloquium, “Difference and Domination: The Power of Narrative in Ritual, Performance and Image”, The Cairns Institute, Cairns, 24-25 July 2014.
6. For his other responses to the announcement, see [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-preaud/australian-aboriginal-communities-should-not-be-closed\\_b\\_7161392.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/martin-preaud/australian-aboriginal-communities-should-not-be-closed_b_7161392.html) and [http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/martin-preaud/aborigenes-australie-femeture-communautes\\_b\\_11350692.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.fr/martin-preaud/aborigenes-australie-femeture-communautes_b_11350692.html).
7. ODSAS was developed by Dousset to respect scientific, cultural, and ethical protocols which take into account the copyright of both the authors-producers of the archives and the traditional owners of the Indigenous knowledge.
8. See the filmed conference by Glowczewski, “Ethics of anthropological archives: academic heritage and Indigenous priorities”, Canberra, AIATSIS (12 August 2013): <http://vimeo.com/73112943>.
9. Viewers are able to request a password directly on [www.odsas.net](http://www.odsas.net): the platform automatically sends an email to the author/producer of the archive for authorisation.

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