The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge: Classification, Categorisation & Poetics

Aden Rolfe

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The work presented in this thesis is, to the best of my knowledge and belief, original except as acknowledged in the text. I hereby declare that I have not submitted this material, either in full or in part, for a degree at this or any other institution.
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Introductory Statement

... one accepts those incompatible things which, only because they coexist, are called the world.

Jorge Luis Borges, “There are more things”, The Book of Sand, 36

Poetry is not a monospecies event.

Aaron Moe, Zoopoetics, 24

“The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge” is a poetry and poetics project that explores the relationship between animals and systems of classification. It consists of two parts, a suite of 14 pairs of poems, “The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge”, and an essay, “Of What the Kangaroo”.

The poems and the overall project take their title from Jorge Luis Borges’ 1942 essay, “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language”. The essay is a critique of Wilkins’ attempt in the seventeenth century to develop a universal language where each word would also reveal its own definition. The rigid categories, differences and species that underpin Wilkins’ proposed language remind Borges of “a certain Chinese encyclopedia” in whose distant pages

it is written that animals are divided into (a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel's-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies. (Selected, 231)

The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge is (as far as we know) a false reference, an example of what translator and essayist Eliot Weinberger calls Borges’ “faux erudition” (qtd. in Rolfe “Interviews”). Borges deploys it to playfully advance his argument—there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and speculative (Selected, 231)—but also to achieve what his genuine references cannot. That is, the Heavenly Emporium embodies the absurdity that can be found within all taxonomies and systems of classification.

This is the spirit with which Michel Foucault conscripts the Heavenly Emporium as the seed for his influential archaeology of the human sciences, The Order of Things. “In the wonderment of this taxonomy,” he writes, “the exotic charm of another system of thought, is the limitation of our own, the stark impossibility of thinking that (xv)”.

In accepting my own limitations, my specific inability to think that, this project offers the opportunity to think with that. Using Borges’ catalogue as a structural and conceptual conceit, I’ve developed 14 pairs of poems for the emporium’s 14 categories. Each pair posits an Australian animal to be classified within its corresponding category, testing the bounds of the particular classification and the designation Australian. These anomalous creatures include the camel (an introduced species now found nowhere else in the wild (Thompson 2)), the pig (introduced, domesticated, farmed, feral), the

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1 Eliot Weinberger’s translation is the source of the quotes and the nomenclature employed in this project, in particular the title. Earlier English translations of Borges’ essay, such as Ruth L.C. Simms’ “The Analytical Language of John Wilkins” (Other Inquisitions, 101-105), render the encyclopaedia as celestial rather than heavenly.

2 And which Georges Perec alternatively calls his “ambiguous erudition” (196).

3 Five of these pairs were commenced prior to undertaking the Master of Research at Western Sydney University: (a), (f), (h), (k) and (m). Versions of these poems were published in Cordite Poetry Review in 2015 and 2016 (Rolfe “Heavenly Emporium”). The versions submitted here have been revised in the context of the complete series and the overall project.
thylacine (likely extinct) and the panther (likely cryptozoological). The method of classification ranges from description (with termites for “(n) those that from a distance resemble flies”), to metaphor (Thylacine cynocephalus for “(g) stray dogs”), and to metonymy (camel for “(k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s-hair brush”). Sometimes the animal is the centre of attention, sometimes it makes only a fleeting appearance.

Each pair consists of a poem based on anaphora or refrain and a poem that follows a movement more narrative in style. The former uses repetition of verbs, prepositions and phrases to speculate on what it means to be classified in that specific category. The latter creates a stronger sense of character and place, typically a site of encounter with the featured animal. The you of the poems is a shifting signifier: often it’s the addressee, sometimes it’s the speaker of the narrative poems, sometimes the animal itself. Other pronouns (she, he, they and it) appear with varying frequency. The first person (singular or plural) never emerges. The resulting pairs engage critically with the possibility of objective classification through a consideration of perception, description and categorisation. These too are objects, the sequence also a catalogue.

The essay “Of What the Kangaroo” likewise explores ways of rethinking our categorical understanding of Australian animals. Applying the discipline of poetics and my perspective as a poet, I unpack the encounter between Joseph Banks and the kangaroo in 1770 as an exemplary episode of category formation in the early modern period. To do this I trace the textual development of the concept kangaroo in the Endeavour journals of Banks and James Cook, from the animal’s first appearance, as an anomaly (“nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him” (Banks 85)), to its return to order in the Linnaean hierarchy (“easily known from all other animals by the singular property of running or rather hopping” (117)). The difficulty with which the Europeans write about the kangaroo shows the inadequacy of their taxonomies for explaining it as an object of knowledge. Their eventual apprehension of the animal through the concept of kangaroo is arbitrary and not a little absurd, and yet the concept has a direct and ongoing influence on our contemporary Western understanding of the animal.

Using different methodologies, the thesis and the poems undertake research on similar questions and ideas around categorisation and classification. For the poems, my approach is practice-led research, employing critical reading as a compositional strategy, and incorporating theoretical content through quotation, paraphrase and open-ended propositions. The theorists I’ve consulted include Borges, Foucault and Wilkins, as well as Umberto Eco, Marco Polo, Patrizia Violi, Carol Kaesuk Yoon and Bernard Smith. Words and ideas from these writers sometimes appear as quotations, but this should not be used as a guide: quotation marks have been used first and foremost for their poetic potential.

The same theorists and texts underpin the essay, together with the poetics of Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, Viktor Shklovsky, Lyn Hejinian, Ruth Millikan and Michael Farrell. With these writers and thinkers I demonstrate the value of considering the encounter between the kangaroo and the European explorers as a textual event and the construction of the category kangaroo as an act of poiesis: a making in, with and for language.

The Heavenly Emporium is similarly a textual construct. It is a paradox, at once imaginary (as far as we can tell), but becoming real the moment Borges writes about it. His reference instantiates the encyclopaedia as an object of language, one able to proliferate and thrive in the texts and textual works of Foucault, Georges Perec, George Lakoff, Geoff Dyer, Eleanor Rosch and David Byrne.

My project differs from the majority of these works in its use of the Heavenly Emporium not as a reference or starting point but as its central framework. For this, the medium of poetry has provided me with a way to think with, rather than simply about, Borges’ catalogue. Specifically, it has facilitated the exploration of the poetic potential of classification in a way that prose could not have done. By writing into Borges’ Heavenly Emporium, my “Heavenly Emporium” investigates the specific categorical logic of each of his classifications—on their own and in the context of the larger sequence.

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4 cynocephalus is Greek for dog-headed (OED).
5 All notes on the poems are included at the end of the suite, with full references in the Works Cited list at the end of the document.
Only by such a method have I been able to move past “the wonderment of this taxonomy” (Foucault xv) and appreciate its simultaneous criticism of and exhortation to classification. Because the arbitrary and speculative nature of classification should not “dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear that they are provisional” (Borges Selected, 231).

My project extends Borges’ thinking to demonstrate that even the most absurd classifications can be rationalised under the right conditions. For me, poetry creates those conditions, while for someone like Perec, it is bureaucratic language that brings them about. In his experimental essay “Think/Classify”, he asserts that an “almost equally mind-boggling enumeration” might be extracted from government documents:

(a) animals on which bets are laid, (b) animals the hunting of which is banned between 1 April and 15 September, (c) stranded whales, (d) animals whose entry within the national frontiers is subject to quarantine, (e) animals held in joint ownership, (f) stuffed animals, (g) etcetera (this etc. is not at all surprising in itself; it’s only where it comes in the list that makes it seem odd), (h) animals liable to transmit leprosy, (i) guide-dogs for the blind, (j) animals in receipt of significant legacies, (k) animals able to be transported in the cabin, (l) stray dogs without collars, (m) donkeys, (n) mares assumed to be with foal. (196-197)

Perec takes the fictional encyclopaedia’s structure to imagine an alternative taxonomy, a parallel text; I write into the original classifications and divisions, creating a potential text in the gaps of a conceptual one. The resulting poems maintain a sustained dialogue with the Heavenly Emporium, teasing out the possibilities and limits of each category rather than glossing over the whole. They reveal the textual logic of Borges’ invented “system of thought” (Foucault xv), a logic not dissimilar to that of Banks in his categorisation of the kangaroo.

The two components of this project thus approach classification from opposite directions. The essay “Of What the Kangaroo” is concerned with finding the appropriate category for a specific animal; the poems of “The Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge” suggest appropriate animals for specific categories. In both cases, the animals are constituted as textual objects, not as animals in themselves. In both we see the arbitrariness, provisionality and absurdity of classification as a model for the production of knowledge. In both we glimpse the possibility of other taxonomies, other systems of thought, other heavenly emporia.
(a) those that belong to the emperor

1.

There are those you expect him to own and those of which he is not yet aware

those he tolerates on account of his daughter and those in which she takes no interest

those that announce their presence, waiting on the steps and those that cannot be perceived by the senses

those that are found within the palace walls and those that exist only in the reflections of others

those that divide into like parts and those that don’t

those catalogued and counted and those he hasn’t yet thought to dream up

red ones

those designed by committee, with the body of an otter, the spurs of a rooster, the bill of a duck—these are the ones in whom, he thinks, perhaps even he cannot believe.
2.

You say you name things according to their nature but flat-foot doesn’t half describe it. Water-mole is better, but you wonder if you don’t need new ways of seeing, especially when the crockery tells more about the room than it does the cuisine, when the stables disclose the eastern gate but don’t lead anyone to water.

You scrawl your name on a scrap of paper drop it in the stream.

Later, unwrapfing folds of silk among and amongst the reeds again and against the clouds thudding, you think: the parts correlate, but where’s the integrity? Better to see properties as qualities as felt reality, wet ankles. You could spend all day describing the colour of the doorframe or just say duck-egg—either they get it or they don’t.

So turn the page, feel the stiffened fur. You think: this beast now belongs to (b) embalmed ones. You think: only motives can be ulterior.

You think: tomorrow the provinces.
(b) embalmed ones

1.

Here a scalpel makes an opening, a splint frames a gesture. Here bodies arrange into patterns that reveal a natural order and a law. Here you think ‘poetry is a thing preserved’, an agreement between form and possibility. Here all information coheres as knowledge. Here an articulation of limbs, then terms, each assuming the shape of a grammar. Here a closed system, in perfect correspondence with the world. Here a structure more satisfying. Here be monsters, named, numbered and filed away.

2.

Spring, before dawn, too early for questions like

‘does the jar exist when no one’s looking at it?’

Consider instead what upside down means to a bat—

drained of its knowledge
skin peeled like a glove.

Only in stillness can you pin it in the corners of understanding. Wing parted to sell you a watch it ushers you to a place where fallen trees stand back up. Look long enough and you’ll see yourself reflected there in the glass, among the rows and shelves amid the vases and vitrines. There where it’s always

spring, before dawn.
(c) those that are trained

1.

You turn the teapot three times
steam rising in stanzas

the same night falling here
as on the capital.

Do names call into being
the things they signify, or are they
always in the wings, waiting
for the right cue? Three wet stones
and a ripe eggplant. One hand
over your eyes. All questions
want for answers
at least to the untrained ear
but listen from without

the tower
designed
to let down
your hair

the finger

for tracing a collarbone.
Bodies know each other
by intention, the ibis in flight
a picture of grace
until it stoops to pluck syntax
from a bin and scatter it the park
over. More than you has it learnt
the pleasures of a double life.
More than you it knows

(pouring another cup)

to throw out the leaves before
they start talking.
2.

To be neither circling nor completely still.  
To ask what conditions give rise to understanding.  
To sit in the dark a long while.

To escape the quotidian with the quotidian.  
To pose a question that can’t be answered  
with a no.  
To think white is a sacred colour.  

To understand fear as a circumstance.  
To want to run from your body.  
To think on what choices leave silent.

To take it by the handle, knowing the possibility  
of such a thing at this height.  
To think on other kinds of china.  
To think possibilities are circumstantial.

To think white is waiting to be stained.  
To blacken the lips, the way ink infuses paper.  
To see many paths.

To be neither circling nor circumstantial.  
To the steeping mountains, and on  
through the plains.  
To leave all this behind with much else.
(d) suckling pigs

1.

What is a tree
if not a seed’s way of making
another seed

a forest’s way of hiding
in plain sight? Within its folds
you might learn something useful
like ‘a boar betrays itself by rustling’
or ‘a log is never simply a log’.
On its flank a fungus grows
without need of a name

at least
not any you can speak out loud. In the
absence of words, is it perception
that brings things into being? Then again
the trees get by just fine without you
branch after branch reaching out
to take you by the throat

cut the thread.

If every one had a bite taken
from it, would the essence of the apple
change? You could call off the hunt, bring
on the harvest, but you’ll never make
a silk purse from salad greens. Nor
will you swindle a sweeter prospect.
You must simply accept that one day
you’ll wake to find yourself looking up
from a platter on which your head
has been served—

as it is with moments
so with empires. For now though
you lie there, thinking

the length of the night
is a problem only for those
who can’t sleep.
2.

As a tree is already a metaphor.
As you carve your initials into the trunk.
As though you ever had a choice.

As a delicacy paired with fennel and cabbage.
As you sniff out truffles in the soil.
As a shortcut is a side of ham.

As green wood burns reluctantly.
As a wound, trying to close.
As a promise supposes intention.

As a hole is known by what it doesn’t have.
As a tree takes priority over your idea of it.
As it is in itself
    and continues to be.
mermaids

1.

To exist in two worlds
above and below. To assign
specific doubts to each.

The sailor holds a different rope
to the stagehand, even if both
might restrain you, might
draw from an ankle

a bruise
like dusk, like the wine-dark.

Even so, a speaking part
means you understand at least
some of the rules of language

breathing groups
of eight syllables

two studies of fish in motion:
one plumbing the depths, one
coming up for air.

Barrels define their limits
on the rocks as oars feather
and round, as though blue
were not a colour. As a body
without guilt.

The dugong clears
her throat as they lash you
to the mast, not with ties
or binds but a sentence.
As there
upon the face of the changeful sea
black eyes bloom
settle on a verdict
and sink.
2.

Supposing a / body / of water / changes / course
between tides.

Supposing it / stops / to form / a lake
between mountains
neither / green / nor grey.

Supposing it / wells up
between cracks
in the / boards.

Supposing your / silence
between lines
implies / consent.

Supposing it / finds itself / pressed
between pages
of the / program.

Supposing a nature / not double / but split.

Supposing the / gap
between pleasure
and remorse / is where / meaning / resides.

Supposing the / chorus / declines / to offer / its advice.

Supposing a / thought / escapes in / the opening
between waves
and breaths / and in / that moment / it sounds / more sweetly
the siren / song.
(f) fabulous ones

1.

Once you read the word ‘pebble’
you’re already thinking ‘water’
thinking ‘skin’
thinking ‘one
is not enough’.
Collecting something frees it
from the need to be useful

gilded boats and signet rings
sugar dandies and scented locks
but if only, you think
if only and instead
the words had come from him. If
he’d written

‘a thesaurus is better
than a dictionary’

then you might take ‘pebble’
not to mean ‘moon’ but ‘coin’, not
‘a circle without blemish’ but ‘darker
when wet’.
Cast over the harbour
the paper swells
a body all surface
and a single black swan
awaits your reply.
2.

Not out of hunger, so much as sympathy
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not shimmering, but with satin plumes
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not in silence, but without speech
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not with teeth, but the whole neck
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not for fear of thorns, but retribution
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not an object of fancy, but artful still
plucking leaves of watercress.

Not finished, simply unfolding
plucking leaves of watercress.
Mist, mountain, cabin—
everything standing in for
something else. You know what
you leave behind is clearer
than what you move toward
the subtitle describing nought
but a striped pelt, the scrape
of a chair leg.

And yet
here you are, Crouched beside
a stream, trying not to think:
‘a tiger is never just a tiger’.
Where the quiet is measured in yawns
and the scrub speaks in aphorisms.
Like, ‘if you walk, a path
will appear’ or
‘even myths come down to drink’.

Form a precise thought, turn it over
in your mouth. The taste of iron, the clouds
on the rise, the pleasure in straying
and letting the sentence
trail off.

Which is how it finds you on its
curl through the hills—
a lone yowl
like the Latin for pouch, like
a question
marking a space
for itself.

And yet.
2.

Say blood is tidal.  
Say it surfaces like a grey emotion.  
Say it slows to a clot, loping through the landscape.  
Say you take it in and feed it.  
Say you give it a name.  
Say a house is neither its walls nor its doors.  
Say it can’t exist apart from these.  
Say you change the locks, clean the bristles.  
Say each word conceals a proposition.  
Say: ‘some decisions count more than others’.  
Say: ‘each dwells in its why’.  
Say it passes into the dirt, waiting for the flood moon.  
Say a body washes up during the night.  
Say you hold your tongue and let all this play out  
from a distance.
(h) those that are included in this classification

1.

There are those alike in spite of appearance
and those neither alike nor unalike

those you place in the same box
as the wind picks out
a shape on the wall
sight so weary it can’t hold anything else.
The panther always already a leopard
always happy to field questions
from the crowd. Might as well call him what
you want, lure the conversation back to intentions.

To contain the world (they say) draw a line around it.

It’s about prospect and aspect
see, the resonance at the back of the mind.
After all, Der panther is also sometimes a jaguar
sometimes a cougar.
Sometimes even a mountain lion.
2.

To speak.

*You followed language into the bush.*

To say it in three words.

*Pursued its scent.*

To listen.

No one thought ‘the landscape is a system’ or ‘a geometry of soil and sky’ or ‘what the rock doesn’t say about itself’.

*You felt its claw marks on the trunk.*

No one said ‘your idea of the undergrowth precedes your apprehension’ or ‘you don’t belong here’ or ‘it can climb, can’t it’.

*The leaves folded back on themselves.*

No one thought ‘the rule for a circle holds for all circles’ or ‘the clearing lets in more light as it expands’ or ‘its perimeter affords being stalked’.

To call up an image.

To consider it from all angles.

No one said ‘depict the canopy as a diagram’ or ‘understand it from the inside’ or ‘interpretation is always partial’.

To perceive.

*You don’t know which words were chosen.*

To recognise.

*Which of them buried here.*

To elaborate.

*You make a mild intervention.*
No one said ‘the ground is a plane of expression’.
To pause and reflect.
No one thought ‘you need a category
for both the things that are, that they are
and those that are not, that they are not’.

Now names lie concealed in each bough and branch
here and here
and here.
To articulate.
No one thought ‘names are a vital part
of what they define’ or ‘to name
is to have dominion over things’.

You forgot how to look past
surfaces.
No one said ‘you can’t think of a line
without tracing it in your mind’ or ‘a description
is a movement’ or ‘see where it leads’.
To be contained by a word.

Lost your bearings.
To stand outside it.
No one thought ‘a path exemplifies the forest’
or ‘nothing is unto itself’.

You retrace your steps.
No one said ‘all categories are provisional’
or ‘any two objects placed in a space form
a connection’.
No one said ‘the banks emerge only
as the bridge crosses the stream’.
To count the vertebrae.
No one thought ‘all stones have weight’ or
‘they learn about the pines from the pine’.
To be in attendance.

No one said ‘hold your finger to the neck of the woods’ or ‘take its pulse’ or ‘feel the tightened silence through the shoulders’.

To speak.

   You followed language into the bush.

To come into being.

   Took satisfaction from small insights.

To reconcile yourself.

   Knowing that a more comprehensive understanding was impossible.

No one reflected ‘an image plunges into the heart and is gone’ or ‘the grove in your mind is laid waste’.

To revise.

   Whoever said you can only walk halfway into a forest has never been lost.
(i) those that tremble as if they were mad

1.

Don’t approach them directly.  
Don’t gaze so much as glimpse.  
Don’t try too hard to establish a setting, but don’t rely  
too heavily on moons, trees, clouds and the like.  
Don’t join all the dots.  
Don’t tread the same ground twice.  
Don’t use certain pronouns.  
Don’t mention more than one animal.  
Don’t be careless with line alignment.  
Don’t be clever or bury obscure references.  
Don’t cultivate puns or clichés without confounding them.  
Don’t be obtuse.  
Don’t be covetous.  
Don’t leave the thesis in.  
Don’t establish a rule you’re not willing to break.

2.

Unable to settle your object, which goeth  
so unquietly and staggering, all day  
yellow, all day drinking water, bottles  
and half-formed words jangling  
in your head. You take a turn about  
the garden, each tremor a symptom  
as well as a warning. The cassowary  
looking on in disdain—  

‘What else might be ruffled  
but feathers?’ You sense the fern  
by its form, the fountain by its function.  
They come to terms of a different order  
knowing this won’t be the last time  
you come through that door  
but that the longer you don’t speak  
the more importance it will assume.
(j) innumerable ones

1.

Some you know by sense, others by intuition. Some you understand only in the context of a bask or a brood or a congress or a float.

Some are listed alphabetically, some in order of appearance.

Some dress the same or have similar mannerisms or can be distinguished only by the colour of their eyes.

Some copy each other.

Some get lost in the crowd.

Some copy themselves. Not satisfied with the river depths they extend their bellies and multiply their line. They copy the copies and disperse across the territory.

Some are plural.

Some churn the water and leave a glistening wake or a trail in the mud.

Some are in the throes of hunger.

Some open the doors to their mouths which are ringed about with fearsome teeth. Or their breath sets coals ablaze and flames dart from their throats. Or they throw out flashes of light.

Some say language is a context, beyond which you become a different person.

Some say context is ‘a weaving together’ or ‘ready to unravel’.

Some are done with contexts.

Some would drown you, with intent, but some are not all, not yet.
2.

By the time you predicate greyness
he’s already up to his knees
wading through labels that no longer
mark where a subject ends

and another begins.
He doesn’t know how many of you
dwell here, doesn’t want to count
the dim shapes nosing the shallows

the fingers
breaking the surface. From the river brown
and low-going, trees wait for the right verb
to set things in motion. Certainly, a log
is an open category, but if naming
is done with affection, don’t you think
you deserve better than pebble-worm?

A weak pulse gentles a bank
more silt than soil, words quivering
like leaves, like vows. Interrupting
a thought, you cross

the threshold.

Not without violence
the water boils
then stills.
(k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s-hair brush

1.

Names change
but the concept
stays the same, tracking you
across the valley. Night rides in
on a gust

star-scatter
like so much porcelain.

Refrain
comes from \textit{frenum}, a bridle
but is an alibi a deleted scene
or a red thread? Shut your mouth
and eyes, ruminate on its form.
Like painting
    desert blossom
you go by bone structure
not appearance.

    Dust in the pigment
dust in the bristles.
If you draw a line in a single
flourish, it takes but a small jolt
to spoil it. One hump can pass
as a horse, two is fooling no one.

You look to the brush—
the concept slides.
2.

One stands perfectly still, inclines gently her head.  
Two argue about the weather.  
One keeps mostly to himself.

One has never seen the ocean.  
One is revealed only by delicate strokes.  
Two pretend to be otherwise.

One thinks, a pose is a fusion of form and subject.  
Another says half a rock is also a rock.  
One knows you could yield your life to this place and still not understand it.

One believes actions can be governed at a distance.  
Two discover a kingdom in a fleck of salt.  
One finds it easier to pass through the eye of a needle.

One insists he isn’t lost.  
Two make plans and put them in motion.  
One spits on the ground completes the pattern.
1.

Having wanted it this way.
Having thought it through.
Having to ask what a stone is like on the inside.
Having sunk to the bottom of the pond.
Having been claimed bodily.
Having gone out in the stove.
Having another look inside the emporium.
Having the words ‘and other things’ read back to you.
Having found an umbrella and a sewing machine
on the operating table.
Having other things like vases, kettles and footnotes.
Having brooms and candles and broken slippers.
Having asides and half-open drawers.
Having jars and teeth and pliers and pumpkins.
Having the sense you’ve been here before.
Having nothing over, nothing without, nothing to speak of
except all these other things.

2.

Midnight. A cloak of rain, footfalls
on gravel. Any excuse to stay inside

let someone else grope about in the mud
with swollen fingers. The reeds murmur
in assent, ask if it isn’t time to put
the book away. No more riddles
in doorways, no more shelling peas
in the cellar. The frog’s wooden clock
marks the hour

    vocal signs the only ones
    you can read in the dark.

Turning your ear to the sound
you sit a moment, water ticking
in the spout, flowing over tiles. Each new
thought shifting with the weight of those
come before. That’s when, between the door
creaking to a close
and the tongue finding the catch, you think
you hear it again, the call from its throat:

    etcetera.
(m) those that have just broken the flower vase

1.

For some, the relation between the body and objects is unclear even when buds are underfoot.

For others, it's the symbolism of the vase they fail to grasp.

For both, the gap in understanding is a way to avoid censure.

For some, the vase marks the point where the room ends and nature begins.

For others, the petals imply a garden.

For all, a change of scene has dramatic value.

For some, the flowers use the vase to express themselves.

For others, the shards describe a question.

For others still, only the fear of thorns stops them chewing stems.

For some, the water links the past to the present.

For others, a sign of debts unpaid.

For none does it admit the possibility of second thoughts.
2.

Picture her lying there, writing:

‘one is the start of the pattern
two is where it reveals itself’.

Shoulder clefts and an ill-timed blush.
A season of pauses. Nearby a gentleman
(plums in his mouth) thinks:

‘not all answers
are excuses’.

You draw yourself up by the pond, still
in darkness or almost. The burrow discloses
an ambling mound, snuffling over
the threshold, thinking on what should’ve
happened yesterday, thinking ‘if not
why not?’ Only the curtain sees both
sides, but (being versed in discretion)
gives little away. Picture the parlour, then
with she and he and a creaturely presence
where all it takes is a careless glance
a sudden clutch of hearts, and a vessel
older than empires
meets its demise. The wombat jogs off

and no one is thinking ‘an iris is also
a flower’ or ‘regret is only a prelude’.
Light rain at daybreak. She writes:

‘three is
when it gets interesting’.
(n) those that at a distance resemble flies

1.

Nothing is great
as such
only by
comparison.

Nothing is similar
to anything
only by convention.
2.

If they look more like ants than flies.
If they saw you from across the square, making notes.
If the air then grew warm with want, with anticipation.
If that's how it started.

    You said you name things according to intention.
    You said ‘an organising principle emerges’.
    You said ‘they move as a single body’.

If a white ant is a biter-off, a comma, a finger traced across the page.
If one follows you home and asks to come in.
If your hesitation gives the wrong impression.
If there's no place to spit in a rich man's house but his face.

    You said you saw his cupness and his tableness.
    You said they're in the woodwork now.
    You said: ‘no thoughts give them away’.

If they split into separate factions and issued a set of demands.
If they found the doors nailed shut.
If meaning depends on the truth conditions of the proposition.
If dignity depends on patience.

    You said only teeth and fists clench.
    You said only heads and tongues loll.
    You said ‘every month has its ides’.

If you worked to get a view over the wall.
If the smoke hung like a swarm.
If you could see no further than you might throw a rock.
If there's only one method for managing a crowd.

    You said conscription is a writing with.
    You said the text knows things the author doesn’t.
    You said: ‘no gesture without import’.

If you consider it first under the profile of redness, then as a liquid.
If the river you step into is not the one in which you stand.
If regret presumes things could’ve been different.
If everything is water.

    You said thought is iterative and anguish is necessarily wet.
    You said you couldn't find the words, that the borders were porous.
    You said: ‘the whole alters the parts’.

If progress is measured in mouthfuls.
If a hypothetical is predicated on a possibility.
If they ate away the foundations and unmade the category from within.
If at least they no longer belong to the emperor.
Notes on the “Heavenly Emporium”

What is a quote? A quote (cognate with quota) is a cut, a section, a slice of someone else’s orange. You suck the slice, toss the rind, skate away.

Anne Carson, “Foam (Essay with Rhapsody):
On the Sublime in Longinus and Antonioni”, Decreation, 45

Many of the above poems emerge from a dialogue with others. They incorporate the ideas and benevolent knowledge of preceding encyclopaedists, the identities of which are revealed here, with full references in Works Cited at the end of the document. More often than not the engagement with these sources is poetic, rather than academic, and invariably partial, so page numbers have been excluded.

(a) those that belong to the emperor
flat-foot – literal translation of the Latin platypus

(b) embalmed ones
poetry is a thing preserved – quoted from Paul Valéry’s essay “Literature”, Selected Writings of Paul Valéry

(c) those that are trained
Do names call into being/the things they signify, or are they/always in the wings, waiting/for the right cue? – paraphrase of William of Ockham’s theory of intuitive cognition, quoted in Joanna Kavenna’s A Field Guide to Reality
To escape the quotidian with the quotidian – paraphrase of Buson, translated by Robert Hass, The Essential Haiku

(d) suckling pigs
If every one had a bite taken/from it, would the essence of the apple/change? – paraphrase of D.H. Lawrence, Twilight in Italy

(e) mermaids
wine-dark, changeful sea – borrowed from Homer’s epics, the Iliad and the Odyssey

(f) fabulous ones
a circle without blemish – quoted from Tu Fu, “Full Moon”, translated by Kenneth Rexroth, One Hundred Poems from the Chinese
darker when wet – paraphrase of William Carlos Williams, “A Novelette”, Imaginations
(g) stray dogs

pouch – literal translation of the Latin thylacine

Say blood is tidal – modified quote from Judith Wright’s “Gum-trees Stripping”, *Collected Poems: 1942–1985*

each dwells in its why – following Aristotle’s use of the term why in the “Physics” (“men do not think they know a thing till they have grasped the ‘why’ of it”), translated by R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gaye

(h) those that are included in this classification

sight so weary it can’t hold anything else
feel the/tightened silence through the shoulders
an image plunges into the heart/and is gone – modified quotes from Rainer Maria Rilke’s “Der Panther”, translated by Robert Bly

the rule for a circle holds/for all circles – quoted from Umberto Eco’s *Kant and the Platypus*, translated by Alastair McEwen

the things that are, that they are/and those that are not, that they are not – paraphrase of Protagoras, quoted in Anne Carson’s *Economy of the Unlost*

the banks emerge only/as the bridge crosses the stream – quoted from Martin Heidegger’s “Building Dwelling Thinking”, *Poetry, Language, Thought*, translated by Albert Hofstadter

learn about the pines from the pine – quoted from Bashō, “Learn from the Pine”, translated by Robert Hass, *The Essential Haiku*

Took satisfaction from small insights … Knowing that a more comprehensive/understanding was impossible – paraphrase of Philip Fisher’s theory of local intelligibility, *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences*

the grove in your mind is laid waste – quoted from Henry David Thoreau, “Walking”, *The Atlantic*

(i) those that tremble as if they were mad

The form of 1. is based on a work by the Jin Dynasty poet-critic Yuan Haowen, quoted in Eliot Weinberger’s “A Few Don’ts for Chinese Poets”, *Works on Paper."

Unable to settle your object, which goeth/so unquietly and staggering – modified quote of Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, translated by John Florio

(j) innumerable ones

Not satisfied with the river depths/they extend their bellies and multiply their line – modified quote from Eliot Weinberger’s essay “Han Yu’s Address to the Crocodiles”, *Works on Paper*

churn the water
leave a glistening wake or a trail in the mud
doors to their mouths which are ringed about/with fearsome teeth
breath sets coals ablaze and flames/dart from their throats
throw out flashes of light – modified fragments from Job 41, the *Bible*, New International Version

pebble-worm – literal translation of the Latin crocodilie
(k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s-hair brush

Like painting/desert blossom/you go by bone structure/not appearance – paraphrase of Chiang Te-li, quoted in Anne Carson’s Economy of the Unlost

One believes actions can be governed/at a distance – paraphrase of Umberto Eco’s The Island of the Day Before, translated by William Weaver

(l) etcetera

and [the] other ones – literal translation of the Latin etcetera

(n) those that at a distance resemble flies

The form of 2. is indebted to Anne Carson’s “Seated Figure with Red Angle (1988) by Betty Goodwin”, Decreation, from which it borrows the anaphoric “If”.

Nothing is great/as such/only by/comparison – paraphrase of Aristotle’s Categories, translated by Harold P. Cook

biter-off – etymological meaning of ant

If there’s no place to spit in a rich man’s house but his face – modified quote from Diogenes of Sinope, translated by Guy Davenport, Herakleitos & Diogenes

You said you saw his cupness and tableness – modified quote from Diogenes of Sinope

If the river you step into is not the one in which you stand – modified quote from Herakleitos, translated by Guy Davenport, Herakleitos & Diogenes

If everything is water – paraphrase of Thales, as paraphrased in Aristotle’s “Metaphysics”, translated by W.D. Ross
Of What the Kangaroo

Not Terra Australis: Introduction

We gain knowledge, commonly speaking, of things that already exist, for in very few cases or none can our knowledge have come into being along with its own proper object.

Aristotle, The Categories, VII, 7b

The impossibility of penetrating the divine scheme of the universe cannot, however, dissuade us from planning human schemes, even though it is clear that they are provisional.

Jorge Luis Borges, “John Wilkins' Analytical Language”, Selected Non-Fictions, 231

On March 31, 1770, off the coast of the place he knows as New Zealand, the captain of His Majesty’s Bark Endeavour, Lieutenant James Cook, writes in his journal:

It was therefore resolved to return by way of the East Indies by the following rout:
upon leaving this coast to steer to the westward untill we fall in with the East Coast of New Holland and than to follow the deriction of that Coast to the northward or what other direction it may take untill we arrive at its northern extremity…. (273)

Note here that Cook makes no claim of discovering New Holland. As far as he’s concerned, the continent already exists as an object of knowledge. It is not available to him for discovery—not because of its occupation and prior discovery by Aboriginal peoples, but because of its more recent discovery by European peoples, “the honour of which belongs to the Dutch Navigators” (387). It is only available to Cook for exploration, its east coast having never been “seen or viseted by any European before us” (387). He thus rationalises his homeward course as a practical detour, “such a rout as might conduce most to the advantage of the service I am upon” (272).

That service, at this point in the voyage, is getting home in one piece. Having tracked a course south of Cape Horn and west across the Pacific, Cook has achieved the expedition’s primary, stated objective—observing the transit of Venus from Tahiti—but his secondary, covert aim—locating Terra Australis Incognita—now seems thoroughly beyond his reach:

To return by the way of Cape Horn was what I most wish’d because by this rout we should have been able to prove the existence or non existence of a Southern Continent… (272)

If Terra Australis exists, he says, it must be to the east, somewhere between New Zealand and the Americas. It’s an opinion shared by the ship’s natural historian, Joseph Banks. “That a Southern Continent realy exists, I firmly beleive”, Banks writes on March 30 (38), citing “Ice in large bodies” seen off Cape Horn (supposedly formed by fresh water) and “signs of land, sea weed, and a seal” in the southerly latitudes of the Pacific, “which, tho both of them are often seen at large distances from Land, yet they are not met with in open oceans” (39). Like Cook, Banks would prefer to return home by an eastern route, back across the Pacific.

The ship, however, is in too poor a condition, its stocks too low, for such a journey. Cook decides, in consultation with Banks and the other officers of the Endeavour, to return to England via Batavia (modern-day Jakarta). Having failed to discover Terra Australis, and with no hope of discovering it on his proposed route, Cook resigns himself to exploring the east coast of New Holland. The two places are not, in his mind, one and the same.

The belief in Terra Australis, the Great Southern Land, dates back to Aristotle, who first floats the idea in 350BC in his “Meteorology”, on the theory that it provides symmetry and balance to the northern
hemisphere. He posits the antipodean continent as a counterweight to Europe, “since there must be a region bearing the same relation to the southern pole as the place we live in bears to our pole” (Complete, bk. II.5, 588). Over the centuries, the myth gathers about itself the promise of gold and riches and fantastic creatures, becoming intertwined with the legends of other fabled lands such as Locac1 and Beach². A shifting geographic concept, it moves to Tierra del Fuego with explorer Ferdinand Magellan (1520), south of Batavia with cartographer Gerard Mercator (1569) and to the New Hebrides with navigator Pedro Fernández de Quiros (1606).

But while Terra Australis is, by definition, unknown (incognita), by the time of Cook’s expedition New Holland has been known to Europe for more than two centuries. Beginning in 1606, the Dutch, Spanish, Portuguese and English explore large swathes of the western and northern coastlines, along with the place they call Van Diemen’s Land. They leave behind a variety of names, none of which seem to stick until Abel Tasman suggests New Holland, on the back of his 1644 voyage, which charts much of the northern coastline, connecting the discontinuous fragments of coast into a coherent albeit incomplete continent.

For the Dutch, the birth of New Holland proves the death of Terra Australis. The two ideas, as they see it, coincide in a single place and not, as it happens, with the riches promised by legend. Not so for the English. More than a century later, in 1768, their belief in a southern land—as distinct from New Holland—persists. Spurred on by Alexander Dalrymple, whose account of Pacific explorations makes the case for the as-yet-undiscovered continent, with a population “probably more than 50 millions” (xxviii), they send the Endeavour to locate it.

Both Terra Australis and New Holland are ideas more than actual places, concepts bound up in European names applied from without. Both rely on projection more than understanding—Terra Australis on speculation, New Holland on incomplete and imperfect information. But whereas speculation cannot be verified, information can. Through charts and coordinates Cook is at least able to locate New Holland in space, due west of his position on March 31, 1770, off the coast of New Zealand. Terra Australis, by contrast, he knows only by a negative relation: where it is not.

In his journal, Cook relates his decision over their homeward route with a tone of apology, undertaking to explore New Holland not in a spirit of discovery but one of consolation. Why? Because New Holland is not Terra Australis. Because even though its east coast is yet to be mapped in detail, it has already been “discovered” by Europeans. In a letter he sends to the Admiralty Secretary two months after concluding his exploration of New Holland, he states it explicitly: “I have faile[d] in discovering the so much talk’d of southern Continent” (501). As Paul Carter notes in The Road to Botany Bay, “The chief discovery of the Endeavour was its discovery of nothing or, rather, of the non-existence of a great southern continent: from an empirical point of view, this can only be construed as a failure” (23). Only much later, after Cook’s third Pacific voyage, will the legend of Terra Australis be conflated with the actuality of New Holland. Only then will our understanding of Cook’s peregrinations shift from locating the unknown southern land to simply proving (or disproving) its existence, recasting the Endeavour expedition as a success and allowing all three—Cook, New Holland, Terra Australis—to be absorbed into the foundational mythology of the place we know as Australia.

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1 According to Marco Polo, Locac is “a good country and a rich”, with “gold in incredible quantity” as well as elephants “and much game” (Book III, 276).
2 Beach is likewise well appointed. On his 1569 map, Gerard Mercator caps Terra Australis with Beach provincia aurifera (“Beach, the gold-bearing province”), to the north-east of Lucach regnum. According to Thomas Suárez, Beach is a mistranscription of Locach, a mistake originating in the Novus Orbis Regionum of German cartographer Johann Huttich in 1532, rendered there as Boeich, then later shortened to Beach (160). The error is compounded by the misleading directions Polo gives for finding Locac, some 1.200 miles south of Java, which would throw us”, comment Henry Yule, “irretrievable into the Southern Ocean” (Polo, Book III, 276n). Yule believes that Polo means not “Java” but “Champa”, a collection of polities extending across what is now central and southern Vietnam. This accords with the theory that Locac is the southern Thai kingdom of Lavo (modern-day Lopburi), not some undiscovered land of gold and wonder. However, some “geographers of the 16th century, following the old editions which carried the travellers south-east or south-west of Java to the land of Boeach (for Locac), introduced in their maps a continent in that situation” (280n), hence Mercator’s map, along with a host of others.
The actual discoverers of Australia, its Aboriginal custodians, migrated here from Asia before spreading south, east and west, thousands of years before Cook and Tasman. According to Bruce Pascoe's study of Indigenous agriculture, *Dark Emu*, the date of this migration ranges from “the generally accepted figure for Aboriginal occupation of Australia of 60,000–65,000 years” (48) to more than twice that, with evidence from vegetation burning surveys implying that “people have been present on the Australian continent for at least 140,000 years” (A.P. Kershaw, qtd. in Pascoe 48-49). Of the multitude of tribal nations, clans and language groups that these people constitute, it’s the Guugu Yimithirr who have the most contact with the European interlopers in 1770. It’s in their country that the *Endeavour* lands, at a place called Gangaar (which we call Cooktown), in the mouth of Waalumbaal Birri (the Endeavour River), beyond the places we now know as Townsville and Cairns in the far north of modern-day Queensland. According to Guugu Yimithirr historian Alberta Hornsby, this country extends from Yuku Baja, which we know as the Annan River, in the south, where Kuku Yalanji is spoken; to what will one day be known as the Jeannie River, in the north, bordered by speakers of Guugu Nyigudji; and to what we call the Normanby River in the west, where Lama-lama is spoken (Hornsby 6-7; qtd. in McKenna 202). It’s here that the Europeans haul up two months after falling in with the coast, and it’s here they will remain for seven-odd weeks, repairing the ship and awaiting suitable conditions for navigating out of the harbour.3

The stopover provides Joseph Banks and the ship’s two naturalists, Daniel Solander and Herman Spöring, ample time to collect botanical specimens and get a better sense of the country’s fauna. They gather a variety of “new” plants—species distinct from those in Europe and those they have encountered elsewhere in New Holland—but the animals they meet are for the most part variations on known themes: pigeons and crows, mosquitoes and ants, alligators and turtles. Hardly a representative sample of the continent’s fauna, either by quantity or distinction. Absent are the emu and the cassowary, the wombat and the koala, the echidna and the platypus, not to mention the many reptiles and amphibians, the myriad rodents and small mammals. But on June 22 the Europeans stumble on something completely unknown to them: a large animal, with the bearing, size and movement of a greyhound. Banks writes of this peculiar creature: “what to liken him to I could not tell, nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him” (85).

Over the following weeks, Banks starts to make sense of the beast, abandoning his initial comparison to a greyhound and producing a more recognisable account of a creature that is “easily known from all other animals by the singular property of running or rather hopping upon its hinder legs carrying its fore bent close to its breast” (117). He also obtains from the Guugu Yimithirr a name for the creature: *gangurru*, which he renders in his journal as *Kangooroo* and *Kanguru* (116, 131).

Comparing the first reports of the kangaroo with Banks’ final reflections on it, we might read the intervening events as a sequence illustrating the Europeans’ gradual apprehension of the animal—literally, in that they capture three specimens, and conceptually, in their coming to terms with it. We can place the contrasting descriptions at different ends of the spectrum, the rough initial impressions evolving into a more complex understanding. But Banks’ first fleeting glimpse is so far removed from what we think of as defining a kangaroo that he seems to be describing an altogether different animal. The shift from the greyhound-like creature to the *kangooroo* is less like an image coming into focus than an animal coming into being. So what, then, does Banks see in that first observation that leads him to describe the kangaroo as a greyhound? What transpires between that event and the *Endeavour*’s departure from the banks of Waalumbaal Birri that changes this? How does Banks come to know the kangaroo?

Through a close examination of the *Endeavour* journals of Banks and Cook, this essay presents the explorers’ attempts at coming to terms with the kangaroo as an exemplary episode of category formation in the early modern period. Unlike other exotic-species encounters, such as Marco Polo’s discovery of the “unicorn” or Christopher Columbus’ “mermaids”, I contend that the kangaroo is unique in confronting the Europeans as an animal truly strange, a creature which doesn’t fit into Western categories. Apprehending it requires that Banks move past his pre-existing concepts to consider the kangaroo in its own right.

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3 Hornsby asserts that Kuku Yalanji representatives also interact with the Europeans at Gangaar (3).
The episode is also emblematic of the British encounter with the place we know as Australia. The epistemological slippage attending the kangaroo is characteristic of the explorers’ broader misapprehension of the continent, for their inability to comprehend its people, their laws and culture, their land and the various plants and animals within it. The unknowability of the kangaroo is an impediment to the colonial project of knowledge-gathering, reconnaissance and, ultimately, invasion. Here, the empirical is inextricable from the imperial. The importance of understanding the kangaroo, of finding the right name for it, reflects the power that knowledge and names can impart. Through names, the Europeans take possession, as Cook demonstrates in his final act before departing the east coast of New Holland, calling it New South Wales and claiming it for the King of England.

My methodology for this study is that of a literary historian immersed in Western traditions and epistemologies, applying the discipline of poetics as a form of cultural and philosophical inquiry. This entails reading the journals not for their evidentiary potential in relation to what transpires, nor as framed by national historical discourse. Following Carter’s assertion that explorers’ journals, as part of what he calls the literature of spatial history, “do not conform to the rules of cause-and-effect empirical history” (xxii), my poetical reading of the journals attempts to avoid participating in a form of history whose aim is legitimation rather than edification. Instead, my focus is on understanding the encounter as a textual event—one that occurs within and which is inextricable from language. If poiesis, as the root of poetics, is a making, then a poetical history is one that looks at makings in, with and for language.

This is why I’m recounting the events surrounding the encounter, as much as is grammatically and semantically possible, in the present tense. Using the present tense acknowledges that these events are unresolved, and potentially unresolvable; that they are continuous with and have an ongoing influence on our present moment, rather than being relegated to the past; and that their role within a text such as this is not to be staged but to invite further debate and discussion.

In attending to the textuality of the journals of Cook and Banks, in considering how they come to be created, both chronologically and retrospectively, as authored and authorised, this approach avoids the imperial historian’s tendency to depict events as simply unfolding in time. This is necessary, because the events that lead to the establishment of the European category kangaroo do not transpire according to a logic of their own, but following an authorial logic. I am not concerned, to paraphrase Michel Foucault, with Banks’ progress toward an understanding of the kangaroo in which we can objectively locate the animal, but toward a particular subjective understanding of it, one that continues to influence how we think of the kangaroo today. The shift from “an animal like a grey hound” to the kangaroo doesn’t mark the emergence of order from chaos, but a return to order. In the well-tended gardens of the Endeavour journals, the kangaroo irrupts as an anomaly, a harbinger of disorder, a threat to the knowability and possessability of the land the Europeans find themselves in.

Which is exactly what makes the encounter interesting. As rationalised records of events, the journals reflect little of the hesitation, the questioning, the prevaricating that undoubtedly takes place while the explorers are ashore at Gangaar. In the appearance of the kangaroo and the crew’s responses to it, however, we can locate what seems to be genuine uncertainty. This thesis exploits that uncertainty to unpack the relationship of the kangaroo, the Europeans’ perception of it and the language they use to construct the category kangaroo. I’m interested in the rhetoric and description of the Europeans, in their metaphors and metonyms, in how these have survived into the present and what they can tell us about that moment of encounter.

The chronological structure of this essay follows the authorial logic of the journals and the textual development of the kangaroo through the Europeans’ key interactions with it. This serves also as a topical structure, considering the various methods by which Banks and the crew of the Endeavour apprehend the animals of New Holland: by recognition, through attempts at equivalence (section 1); by developing a shared understanding of the animal (section 2); by general analogy, as contrasted with descriptive language (section 3); and by naming (section 4).

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4 “I am not concerned, therefore, to describe the progress of knowledge towards an objectivity in which today’s science can finally be recognized” (xxii).
My approach extends the thinking of Carter’s *The Road to Botany Bay* and Foucault’s *The Order of Things* to engage critically with the Europeans’ encounter with the kangaroo and consider its implications for our contemporary Western understanding of the animal. In this, I acknowledge that there are Indigenous perspectives on this encounter to which I don’t have access, systems of knowledge which are not mine to speculate on, subject positions not for me to inhabit. I make no claim to represent these knowledges nor for the primacy of my reading of these events. This is one version among many.

The primary resources for this study are John Cawte Beaglehole’s second editions of the journals of Banks (1962) and Cook (1968), which include valuable addenda and corrections to the first editions. More comprehensive than earlier publications, such as John Hawkesworth’s 1773 combined version, Beaglehole’s editions are unabridged and largely unamended, retaining the errors and inconsistencies of the originals, along with extensive annotations. In the words of the President of the Hakluyt Society, Beaglehole transcribes the explorers’ journals “as closely as the limitations of type permit” (Cook vi).

Regarding Marco Polo, I’m using the 1903 Yule-Cordier edition of *The Book of Ser Marco Polo* (popularly known as *The Travels*), the most comprehensive scholarly edition available in English, and Umberto Eco’s *Kant and the Platypus*, in which I first discovered Polo’s encounter with the unicorn and from which I draw some of the semiotics and semantics theory that inform this study. All references to John Wilkins’ *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* are to the original 1668 edition, accessed through the State Library of New South Wales.

These are the parameters within which this investigation traces the development of the concept *kangaroo* and demonstrates that this process is not the “discovery” and description of a new species so much as the invention of a new category. It shows that the intellectual apparatus the Europeans bring to New Holland—the Linnaean hierarchy, the ideal of empirical observation—does not facilitate the classification of the kangaroo into an objective taxonomy, but creates it as a subjective, culture-specific category in and through language.

This is why the encounter is an exemplary episode of category formation, and why a poetical history can provide new insights into it. Through poetics, this study considers the role of language in the perception and documentation of the kangaroo by the Europeans, and how that language continues to influence our Western contemporary categorisation of the animal. By analysing the *Endeavour* crew’s use of analogy, description, metaphor and metonymy to account for the kangaroo, we can appreciate the provisional nature of Banks’ final assessment of it. And by extending this provisionality to our own understanding of the animal, a poetical history might allow us to admit alternative conceptions of the animals we group under the name *kangaroo* and better appreciate its multiplicity.
Categorisation, writes George Lakoff, is “the main way that we make sense of experience” (xi). “Without the ability to categorize, we could not function at all, either in the physical world or in our social and intellectual lives” (6). If we accept this proposition, it’s understandable that our first response to meeting an unknown entity would be to categorise it, starting with attempts at recognition. This is what Marco Polo does when he encounters a “unicorn” on the island of Sumatra, as detailed below, and what Joseph Banks does when he meets the fauna of Endeavour River. This first section of my thesis compares these encounters to consider the paradoxical role of recognition in making sense of the unknown—paradoxical because something that’s unknown cannot be re-known (re-cognised) before it first comes to be known. Attempts at recognition necessarily involve the application of pre-existing categories and concepts.

These categories work well enough for the alligators and crows of New Holland, but the kangaroo demonstrates the limits of equivalence in apprehending the unknown and the limits of European systems of knowledge in accounting for the antipodean animals in 1770. This section establishes the historical and intellectual context of the Endeavour expedition, in particular the prominence of the Linnaean hierarchy within natural history in the late eighteenth century. However ill-equipped this system is for managing the kangaroo, it is what allows Banks to move past his attempts to recognise the animal that confronts him, and in so doing, to develop a more in-depth understanding of it.

The process starts on June 22, 1770, when Joseph Banks writes in his journal:

The People who were sent to the other side of the water in order to shoot Pigeons saw an animal as large as a grey hound, of a mouse coulour and very swift…. (84)

By this time, the Endeavour has been at Gangaar, in the far north of what we know as Queensland, for a week and a half. Banks describes the harbour as “beyond our most sanguine wishes: it was the mouth of a river the entrance of which was to be sure narrow enough and shallow” (81-82), its banks and tides allowing for the easy unloading and repairing of the ship. Having sustained damage on the rocks and shoals of a nearby reef, the Endeavour is in need of work, and “meeting with so many natural advantages in a harbour so near us at the very time of our misfortune appeard almost providential” (82).

The place is, in general, sandy and flat; the river runs “very far into the countrey, keeping its course over flat land overgrown with Mangroves; the countrey inland was however sufficiently hilly” (Banks 83). It is “barren”, making “walking very easy” (83), but not yielding a great variety of plants and animals. Banks is the ship’s senior natural historian, his role being to collect specimens of flora and fauna wherever the Endeavour lands, to observe and document the natural environment, and to communicate his findings to the Crown upon returning to England. He commands an entourage of
seven, including the two other naturalists, Daniel Solander and Herman Spöring, the presence of whom reflects Banks’ wealth (he finances them himself) and the recent elevation of natural history to the dignity of a science, largely due to the efforts of the Swedish botanist Carolus Linnaeus. This is a time when “the ordering of Nature’s diverse products became associated with a belief in progress and in the capabilities of human reason to produce order and harmony: in short, with Enlightenment” (Gascoigne 63). This ordering is known as taxonomy.

The taxonomy practised by the likes of Banks and Solander is centred on naming, following a neat trajectory “from ordering living things into groups, to naming those groups, to organizing those names” (Yoon, 301). This taxonomy adheres to the system Linnaeus establishes in 1735 with the publication of his 14-page pamphlet, the *Systema Naturae*. The *Systema Naturae* outlines a system for ordering plants, animals and minerals, using the hierarchical classifications of kingdom, class, order, genus and species. It lays down rules for naming and provides each plant and animal with an official two-part Latin name—a binomial—that denotes its genus and species. Thus the greyhound is *Canis familiaris*; the eastern grey kangaroo will one day become *Macropus giganteus*. Such binomials pre-date Linnaeus, but the *Systema Naturae* formalises them as an essential part of its system, setting the standard for the ordering and naming of life and inaugurating the science of classification.

When the *Endeavour* departs England in 1768, it does so very much in the shadow of Linnaeus. The man himself is still alive and publishing, with the *Systema Naturae* up to its 12th edition, having grown to encompass 4,400 species of plants and animals. Among his disciples he can count Banks (Gascoigne 63), who mentions the naturalist on the first page of his journal (Banks 153); Solander, his “much-loved pupil” (Gascoigne 105), who, after studying under Linnaeus at the University of Uppsala, is sent to England to promote his teacher’s system of classification (Chambers 236); and another student, Spöring, who has annotated Linnaeus’ *Species Plantarum* and *Systema Naturae Regnum Animale*, both of which are included in the *Endeavour*’s on-board library (Gascoigne 105). The first of these texts lists all known plant species and the second establishes a hierarchy for all known animals. Together they allow Linnaeus’ system to become a mobile apparatus for legitimating the naturalists’ observations of New Holland’s flora and fauna, and turning them into knowledge. The taxonomies at once document and determine the features that define each species, arriving at a description that can serve in place of an already identified specimen. The taxonomies thus become scientific proofs. Unlike already identified plant and animal specimens, they have the added benefit of being able to travel vast distances in great number aboard small ships.

The success of systematic classification in the eighteenth century, and of natural history in general, reflects not just an appetite for order, but a shift from the authority of texts to knowledge “derived as far as possible from first-hand observation” (Gascoigne 32). This is one of the fundamental doctrines of the Enlightenment. It marks a departure from inherited thought, from the conception of the world as set down in the Bible and the works of the ancients, and a move toward empirical thinking and observation. Prior to the Enlightenment, there is no division between “what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naïvely believe” (Foucault 129). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, this division becomes increasingly clear, and the practitioners of disciplines like natural history are required to adopt the scientific method. As John Gascoigne writes in *Joseph Banks and the English Enlightenment*, “the natural historian had to produce the evidence of systematic observation rather than simply reproduce untested belief” (63). The motto of the Royal Society of London for Improving Natural Knowledge, which co-sponsors the *Endeavour* expedition, is *Nullius in verba*, “Take nobody’s word for it”.

The evidence of the empirical observation of nature on such voyages is, in the words of Bernard Smith, “exemplified in the keeping of ships’ logs and seaman’s journals” (1). In this, the *Endeavour* expedition follows a well-established British maritime convention. What distinguishes it is the inclusion in the ship’s company of trained scientific observers working with professional draughtsmen to document the plants, animals and topography of the places they visit (2). It’s an approach to exploration that will “set the organizational pattern for the later exploratory work in the Pacific by England, France, Russia, and America” (7).

As Smith recounts in *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Banks’ naturalists and artists follow a rigorous process for documenting each “new” plant specimen they collect. First, Solander describes
the plant and attempts to classify it, before the botanical draughtsman Sydney Parkinson sketches it “to record the shape, size, coloration, and principal parts of the foliage and flower” (18). The specimen is then preserved for its journey to England, where Solander will write up its full description and Banks will employ artists to make finished drawings and engravings from Parkinson’s sketch. To get an idea of the scale of this undertaking, consider the fact that Parkinson makes a total of 955 drawings of plants during the three-year voyage (18).

The Endeavour voyage is the first large scientific maritime expedition sponsored by the Royal Society (2), occurring as it does during, not after, the Enlightenment, in the midst of the significant philosophical shifts and of the vast amounts of knowledge being generated in Europe in the eighteenth century. In such an intellectual climate, Gascoigne tells us, “exploration and discovery were particularly enlightened activities, since they both made available often dearly-bought first-hand observations to the public” (32). There is thus a direct, idealist link between Enlightenment thinking and the act of exploration, as well as the more pragmatic one: “such voyages of discovery offered further avenues for British commerce” (32).

It is also a time when the lead thinkers and public figures are, for the most part, still working things out. The ideal of reason has not entirely displaced tradition (nor will it); many long-held beliefs, like creation theory, continue to influence the practice of natural history; and a number of revolutionary ideas are yet to take hold. The first cohesive theories of evolution, for example, are yet to appear. It’s almost a century before Charles Darwin will outline in On the Origin of Species his concept of evolution based on natural selection, inherited characteristics and adaptation in response to environmental pressures. Banks, Solander and Spöring thus consider species much the same way as Aristotle does: as static, eternal entities (cf. Yoon 70). For them, different animals might bear out similarities or relations, but none undergo change, none can evolve from another or give rise to new species.

Not only is the factor of time, critical to evolutionary theory, excluded from eighteenth-century taxonomy, but so are the invisible characteristics that will come to define molecular biology and genetics. These branches of biology don’t exist in the eighteenth century, nor even does biology—only taxonomy (cf. Foucault 127-128). Hence the focus on naming and ordering, and the restrictions placed on observation. Observation in eighteenth-century taxonomy is almost exclusively limited to the visible, sight “being the sense by which we perceive extent and establish proof” (Foucault 132-133). “To observe, then, is to be content with seeing—with seeing a few things systematically” (134). These things exclude not only the characteristics that will later underpin molecular biology, genetics and evolution, but also hearsay, taste, smell and most tactile impressions. As Susan Howe puts it: “Facts are perceptions of surfaces” (32).

Within these limitations, argues Foucault, the epistemological precedence enjoyed by botany over zoology is no accident: most natural historians—including Banks, Solander and Spöring, not to mention Linnaeus—identify as botanists first, zoologists only by circumstance. This is at least partly because the apparatus for producing and verifying scientific knowledge can only account for visible characteristics, for what Foucault calls “displayed descriptability” (237). Quite apart from the fact that plants are more likely to sit still, “there are a great many constituent organs visible in a plant that are not so in animals” (137). By basing taxonomic knowledge exclusively on “immediately perceptible variables”, the stock of knowledge about plants is “bound to prove more extensive than that of animals” (137).

Underpinning the Linnaean hierarchy is the notion of the natural order, the sense that the living world reflects a pre-ordained structure which organises plants, animals, minerals and forces into natural categories. For some, this structure is the will of God, the Creator; for others it arises from Nature itself; in both, the common theme is an incontrovertible design. It’s an ancient idea based on similarities and differences, sympathies and antipathies, correspondences and relations. It’s what leads Aristotle in his “Meteorology” to speculate the existence of Terra Australis, which he believes must “clearly correspond” to continental Europe “in the ordering of its winds as well as in other things”, “bearing the same relation to the southern pole as the place we live in bears to our pole” (Complete, bk. II.5, 588). In his summary “Account of New Zeal and” in his Endeavour journal, Banks provides the following gloss on the natural order, what he calls “the admirable chain of nature”: 
Man, alone endowd with reason, justly claims the highest rank and next to him are placed the half reasoning Elephant, the sagacious dog, the architect Beaver, &c… from these descending through the less informd Quadrupeds and birds to the fish and insects… and at last by the medium of the Oyster, &c. (20)

Such a view of the world supports, and is predicated on, the existence of natural kinds—that is, ontological categories that tell us “what things are in themselves, and not in relation to other things, including the observer or knower” (de Sousa 569). Natural kinds entail a commitment to essentialism, John Dupré writes in The Disorder of Things, “through the idea that what makes a thing a member of a particular natural kind is that it possesses a certain essential property” (6).

The genius of the Linnaean hierarchy is that it doesn’t replace the natural order or natural kinds and essentialism. It simply systematises them, setting down rules for sorting and naming that reflect what people feel is natural. The result is that the system seems to be a consequence of the living world, rather than a construction projected onto it. We think of its classifications as timeless, even though they first emerge in the seventeenth century, through writers and thinkers like John Wilkins. In An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language (1668), Wilkins details his theory for a universal language, one where each word will define itself, and where “we should, by learning the Character and the Names of things, be instructed likewise in their Natures” (21). He divides the world into forty categories, which are subdivided into 251 characteristic differences, and which are in turn subdivided into 2,030 species (Borges Selected, 230; Eco Search, 238-245). To each category he assigns “a monosyllable of two letters; to each difference, a consonant; to each species, a vowel. For example, de means element; deb, the first of the elements, fire; deba, a portion of the element of fire, a flame” (Borges Selected, 230).

The project distinguishes Wilkins as “a pioneer of modern, scientific taxonomy” (Eco Search, 255), but not without drawing its share of criticism. In particular, his categories, which presents as rational and analytical, seem riddled with “ambiguities, redundancies, and deficiencies” (Borges Selected, 231). The eighth category, for example, classifies stones as common, moderate, precious, transparent and insoluble, without regard for the possibility of a stone being common and insoluble, precious and moderate. For all its supposed transparency, the system remains opaque and subjective.

In his essay “John Wilkins’ Analytical Language”, Jorge Luis Borges compares Wilkins “contradictory and vague” categories (232) to those of a “certain Chinese encyclopedia”—the Heavenly Emporium of Benevolent Knowledge—which divides animals into

(a) those that belong to the emperor; (b) embalmed ones; (c) those that are trained; (d) suckling pigs; (e) mermaids; (f) fabulous ones; (g) stray dogs; (h) those that are included in this classification; (i) those that tremble as if they were mad; (j) innumerable ones; (k) those drawn with a very fine camel’s-hair brush; (l) etcetera; (m) those that have just broken the flower vase; (n) those that at a distance resemble flies. (231)

While the encyclopaedia is fictional, his point is genuine. Borges uses it to demonstrate that “there is no classification of the universe that is not arbitrary and speculative” (231). For him, the process by which Wilkins establishes his categories and classifies his objects is no less arbitrary than the emperor asserting his ownership of an animal. It recalls some of the complaints people like Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon direct at the Linnaean hierarchy in the eighteenth century. A contemporary of Linnaeus, Buffon is highly critical of his fellow natural historian, arguing that nature “is too rich and various to be fitted within so rigid a framework” as a taxonomy (Foucault 126).

Linnaeus and his followers, however, insist the system can incorporate each new species the world throws at it. Which is exactly what Banks attempts to put into practice in New Holland: slotting the

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7 Although the term natural kind will not be coined until 1866, by John Venn, following John Stuart Mill’s “Kinds in nature” from 1843 (Hacking 111-112), the idea underpins much thinking around classification in the seventeenth, eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, defined either by inner constitution, according to Locke and Leibniz (Hacking 120-121), or recognised by external appearance, according to Linnaeus and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon (Foucault 132).
plants and animals he encounters into taxa the system has already named and ordered. He tries to know things he cannot possibly know by equating them with things he is already familiar with. But New Holland and, more broadly, the South Pacific, provide “a challenging new field of experience for Europeans” (Smith viii). Unlike the new antipodean alligators and crows, the kangaroo has no pre-ordained position in Linnaeus’ tables. Its inclusion in systematic classification doesn’t just add a new creature to the directory; it threatens to undermine it.

Smith tells us that “the vast amount of new and strange material” described by Solander on the *Endeavour* expedition creates “major problems in classification” (18). “His notebooks abound with erasures and cancellations of specific and generic names first allotted to the specimens collected” (18). As Carol Kaesuk Yoon writes in *Naming Nature*:

> The real problem is that as more and more organisms appear, we don’t just find that we need to put more things in existing categories or that we can simply add more categories to the total. We find instead to our dismay that the categories in our initial, simplistic system begin to fall apart. (31)

The Linnaean hierarchy (like Banks himself) turns out to be best suited to those things it has been explicitly developed (or, in Banks’ case, trained) to categorise: European plants and animals. New animals, like the kangaroo, resist the system. They unsettle it.

This unsettling begins with the initial report, on June 22, 1770, of “an animal as large as a grey hound”. The next day, Banks writes:

> The people who went over the River saw the animal again and describd him much in the same manner as yesterday. (84)

More sightings follow. Cook sees “one of the Animal s before spoke off” and describes it as of a light Mouse colour and the full size of a grey hound and shaped in every respect like one, with a long tail which it carried like a grey hound…. (351-352)

The creature appears again and again, until Banks is “hearing descriptions of the animal which is now seen by every body”. Everyone, that is, except him.

On June 25, however, his moment arrives. His journal entry for that date reads, in its entirety:

> In gathering plants today I myself had the good fortune to see the beast so much talkd of, tho but imperfectly; he was not only like a grey hound in size and running but had a long tail, as long as any grey hounds; what to liken him to I could not tell, nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him. (85)

And he’s right. There’s nothing in Western knowledge that resembles the kangaroo, nothing in the kangaroo’s countenance for Banks to recognise. So why, in the same entry, does he compare it to a greyhound? We might concede that in Banks’ “imperfect” sighting—possibly from a distance; perhaps obscured by trees; maybe of a juvenile rather than a full-grown adult, maybe—he could mistake its general being as greyhound-like. But the particulars undo him. Kangaroos don’t (and can’t) run like greyhounds. Nor do their tails bear much similarity, either in size or comportment. How, then, does a renowned natural historian, devoted as he is to the power of observation, a self-described “man of science” (Gascoigne 67), come to see a kangaroo as a greyhound?

Umberto Eco writes that “when faced with an unknown phenomenon, we react by approximation: we seek that scrap of content, already present in our encyclopedia, which for better or worse seems to account for the new fact” (*Platypus*, 57). His exemplar for this is Marco Polo encountering a “unicorn” in 1292 on the island now known as Sumatra. Unicorns are numerous in the kingdom of Lambri, Polo tells us, as well as in the kingdom of Basma, where they are almost as large as elephants. He describes them as having

> hair like that of a buffalo, feet like those of an elephant, and a horn in the middle of the forehead, which is black and very thick. They do no mischief, however, with the horn,
but with the tongue alone; for this is covered all over with long and strong prickles (and when savage with any one they crush him under their knees and rasp him with their tongue). The head resembles that of a wild boar, and they carry it ever towards the ground. They delight much to abide in mire and mud. ‘Tis a passing ugly beast to look upon, and it is not in the least like that which our stories tell of as being caught in the lap of a virgin; in fact ‘tis altogether different from what we fancied. (Polo, Book III, 284)

Faced with an unknown entity, Polo reacts by approximation. He perceives the animal’s features and accounts for them through a pre-existing category. In the rhinoceros he recognises a unicorn. Assuming Polo has never before seen a unicorn, we can infer that his concept of it comes from the stories he mentions. These are exactly the kinds of histories Foucault characterises as combining observation, document and fable: “what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naïvely believe” (129). It’s a structure Polo replicates in his description, juxtaposing observed physical properties (hair, feet, horn) with inherited ideas of the animal’s behaviour (rasping people with its tongue) and mythical beliefs (attracted to virgins). Despite the unicorn failing to meet all the criteria of the category, however, Polo doesn’t rethink the classification. Instead, he takes the qualities of the rhinoceros and integrates them with those of the unicorn. He edits the approved knowledge, the shared understanding of what constitutes the category unicorn, with his present phenomenological experience, the creature before him. Our ideal is misguided, he says. Let me tell you what a unicorn is really like.

While Polo’s account is inherently comical, his logic is not as flawed as it might seem. Consider that in thirteenth-century Europe the unicorn is not a mythical beast. Rare, yes, and legendary (in the sense that legends are legenda—to be read) but not fictional, not impossible. The first account of a unicorn in Western literature comes from Ctesias of Cnidus, a Greek physician to the Persian court in the fifth century BC. This is followed by Aristotle (who mentions two, one thought to be an Arabian oryx viewed side on, the other a rhino), then by Strabo, Pliny the Elder and Aelian. Importantly, these are all works of natural history, not mythology. They form the basis of the stories Polo cites. They tell him that where he is when he encounters the rhino—beyond the edge of the known world, in south-east Asia—is exactly the kind of place he could expect to come across a unicorn. It’s a belief that continues at least up to the time of John Wilkins, who in 1668 excludes from his Essay all “fictitious Animals, as Syren, or Mermaid, Phœnix, Griffin, Harpy, Ruck, Centaur, Satyr, &c.” (121), but includes the unicorn, a “one-horned beast”. 8

The rhinoceros, meanwhile, is all but unknown in Polo’s time, having become extinct in Europe or otherwise migrating off the continent around 10,000 years ago, at the end of the ice age. Its absence opens up a space for an animal exactly like the unicorn to emerge, as folk memory of the disappeared European rhinos, and as reports from the fringes of the Western world, such as those of Aristotle, Pliny, and now Polo.

With this in mind, Polo’s description is remarkable for its accuracy, conforming broadly with the species we know as the Sumatran rhinoceros, Dicerorhinus sumatrensis, which will not be officially described for another 500 years. 9 The Sumatran rhino is indeed hairy, unlike its Javan, Indian and African cousins. It wallows in mud and its head very much looks like that of a boar. It even has a rough tongue, as attested by Henry Yule in The Book of Ser Marco Polo, who notes that the “belief in the formidable nature of the tongue… is very old and wide-spread” (Book III, 290n).

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8 The unicorn does not appear in Wilkins’ categorical tables, but in the dictionary appended to An Essay, which also excludes the “fictitious” animals mentioned here. (The dictionary is not paginated.) The rhinoceros, however—or “Rhinocerot”—features in both the dictionary and in the tables. In the tables it appears under the designation “CLOVEN FOOTED BEASTS”: “Horned but not ruminant; having but one horn, placed on the nose, being a beast of great bigness, covered with a kind of Armature, and counted untamable.” (157)

9 The first official description of the species is made by William Bell and sent, along with drawings of the animal, to none other than Joseph Banks. After returning from the Endeavour expedition, Banks is appointed the secretary—then in 1778, the president—of the Royal Society. He publishes Bell’s “Description of the double horned Rhinoceros of Sumatra” in the Society’s Philosophical Transactions for 1793.
The main departure of Polo’s account from the features of *Dicerorhinus sumatrensis* is that this species has not one but two horns. The one at the end of the nose is typically less pronounced than it is in other species, like an extension of the snout, and the second is where Polo locates it, on the forehead. In his annotations to Yule’s edition of *The Book of Ser Marco Polo*, Henri Cordier suggests a possible conflation with *Rhinoceros sondaicus*, the Javan rhinoceros, noting reports of a one-horned species existing on the island in William Marsden’s 1811 edition of *The History of Sumatra* (Book III, 290n).

The disconnect between a rhinoceros and a unicorn is not clear to Polo because he doesn’t consider them categorically incompatible. While for us the rhino is real and the unicorn mythical, for him both are equally real and mythical. The absurdity of his claim of equivalence arises not from the misidentification, however, but from treating specific systems of knowledge as universal rather than local, from using European names and classifications to apprehend unknown, non-European entities.

We see the same slippage between name and identity in an encounter Christopher Columbus has in 1493, when he’s passing through what we now call the Dominican Republic. Surveying a river he sees “three mermaids who came quite high out of the water but were not as pretty as they are depicted, for somehow in the face they look like men” (Columbus and Casas 321). Like Polo, Columbus doesn’t look to the specificity of the animals before him, but calls upon a pre-existing category to understand what we today know as manatees. Like Polo, he doesn’t use the criteria that contradict his concept *mermaid* (that they are ugly, that they are manly) to question his classification, only to edit the category (they are less ladylike than we thought).

The absurdity is less striking in the case of the European explorers in New Holland in 1770 because the disparity isn’t so obvious. But their approach is the same. Most of the animals they meet seem to correspond to ones they already know from Europe or the Americas. The species aren’t fixed down, but no one is in any doubt over whether the turtles are turtles, or if the mosquitoes are mosquitoes. When Banks catalogues these creatures in his journal, he shows us none of the analysis he undertakes to arrive at his designations: he identifies the pigeons without rationalisation, the crows as “exactly like those in England” (83). For him, these creatures so clearly resemble their northern hemisphere counterparts that recognition is sufficient for categorisation.

It’s in these cases that we see the value of attempting to recognise the unrecognisable, of equating the unfamiliar with the already known. It helps the Europeans make sense of New Holland, generalising the strangeness of the colonial project of exploration, annexation and invasion. It prevents their being confounded with the specificity of each unknown species they encounter. And it is, at least to a point, functionally useful. The alligators they see are saltwater crocodiles, but calling them *alligators* places them in a category that ensures the crew members moderate accordingly their behaviour toward them. The category brings the crocodiles into relation with other reptiles and separates them from similar-but-not-similar-enough creatures, like lizards and snakes. It provides a set of expectations around appearance (scaly, greenish brown, big jaws), behaviour (found on land and in the water) and cultural codes (to be avoided).

So despite the *Endeavour*’s crew not having prior experience of almost all of the species they encounter in Guugu Yimithirr country, their daily incursions into the bush and up the river yield fewer descriptions of animals than we might expect. Instead, they bring back the epistemological objects most readily available to them, those objects they’ve inherited from European traditions of classification and categorisation. They bring back names.

These names are self-describing, containing the general properties of the creatures they designate, the features by which they identify and recognise them. This is why it’s enough for Banks to simply name the pigeons and crows and turtles without going into descriptive flights. These names mark out the pre-existing categories the crew uses to apprehend the unknown entities they encounter, masking the disjunct between their European frames of knowledge and the antipodean species they’re trying to perceive. They obscure the fact that these creatures are, for the most part, utterly new to Western eyes, placing them in a system that allows them to comprehend these exotic creatures.
The problem with using recognition to apprehend the unknown is that it has a limited capacity to deal with genuine difference. The very process that underpins its utility—collapsing specifics to establish equivalence—makes it prone to false identifications when it encounters something completely new. In The Road to Botany Bay, Paul Carter recounts one such misidentification by Banks, when the naturalist notes, from the deck of the ship, “many cabbage trees but nothing else which we could call by any name” (Banks 52). When Banks names these trees, however, “he is not identifying the trees, he is not naming them: he is only asserting their resemblance to a tree with which he is familiar. Under the guise of a scientific label Banks employs a simile based on what Erasmus Darwin later called ‘intuitive analogy’” (Carter 29). Banks’ recognition is metaphorical, giving “the illusion of knowing under the guise of naming” (29).

The limits of this approach also become apparent when the crew of the Endeavour don’t recognise an animal on sight, when they don’t have a concept that corresponds to it. It’s in these situations that their alienation from the land reveals itself. It’s also the only time they refrain from naming in favour of descriptive language. Take the following report of a flying fox, provided to Banks by one of the sailors “in so Seamanlike a stile that I cannot help mentioning it”:

> it was (says he) about as large and much like a one gallon cagg, as black as the Devil and had 2 horns on its head, it went but Slowly but I dard not touch it. (84)

It’s in such descriptions that we come to appreciate the importance of naming, not just to classification but to simple communication. How much more difficult is it to talk about this shambling devil than is it to say bat? This is significant in considering why, when recognition fails them, the crew members of the Endeavour struggle to talk about the kangaroo.

Eco relates Polo’s encounter with the unicorn in his book-length essay, Kant and the Platypus, whose premise is exactly what you think it is: How would Immanuel Kant account for an animal as strange as the platypus? Eco’s investigation is relevant to this encounter not just in the poetic parallels between Polo and Banks, but in Eco’s examination of the European modes of knowing used to apprehend the new world and the oddities within it, specifically his work in interpretative semiotics. Under that theory, words and signs don’t disclose their meaning to us in full, but invite us to construct signification in reference to them. This follows Kant’s belief that all perception is filtered through the categories imposed by our minds, the identity of something coming both from within the perceiver, through logical reasoning, and from without, through observation. In this conception, Polo doesn’t receive the visual information of the rhinoceros as a blank slate, but filters it through the categories in his mind to arrive at a position where he can recognise the animal in front of him.

Which is where Polo’s apprehension ends. What interests Eco with his hypothetical of Kant and the platypus, however—and what is interesting to us in the encounter of Banks and the kangaroo—is what happens when recognition fails. How do we make sense of experience when the categories in our minds do not account for the entity confronting us?

When Banks first sees the kangaroo he doesn’t have a pre-existing concept that corresponds to it. This forces him to attempt to apprehend it beyond the confines of recognition, to understand it on its own terms. Which marks a key distinction between these encounters. Banks still reacts by approximation, but he reaches for a comparison, rather than equivalence. He casts about for the nearest thing that will help him make sense of the strange creature. He lays his hand on his greyhound.
Not a greyhound: Group consensus, individual perception and interpretation

... there is no similitude and no distinction, even for the wholly untrained perception, that is not the result of a precise operation and the application of a preliminary criterion.

Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things*, xx

What my eyes beheld was simultaneous, but what I shall now write down will be successive, because language is successive.


In eighteenth-century Britain, greyhounds are primarily a gaming dog, used in the coursing of deer and hares. Both the sport and the breed are associated with royalty and nobility; the fact that Banks has not one but two with him on the *Endeavour* speaks to his social standing and the authority he commands on the expedition. These greyhounds are quite clearly *not* kangaroos, though, so how does he come to compare the strange animal of New Holland with his faithful companions?

This section of my thesis explores this question, tracing the development of the *kangaroo-as-greyhound* concept through the journals of Banks and Cook, and considering the role of the journals in the production of official knowledge of the expedition. The *kangaroo-as-greyhound* concept, I argue, functions less as a literal description than as a semantic marker, similar to a name, which facilitates the development of a shared understanding of the creature for the crew. This group consensus allows the crew to discuss and provide reports on the kangaroo, in turn leading to the refinement of their conceptual understanding of it. For this, Ruth Millikan’s theory of coordination conventions is instructive, with the crew seeming to agree on certain conceptual and linguistic terms in order to discuss the kangaroo. I look at how these agreed terms might influence individual perception, through Banks’ initial observation of the kangaroo, and how Banks’ acknowledgement of the consensus allows him to move past the greyhound analogy.

In looking at Banks’ comparison of the kangaroo to a greyhound—“not only like a grey hound in size and running but had a long tail, as long as any grey hounds” (85)—the first question we might ask is whether his own greyhounds are with him when he sees the animal. That answer is: we don’t know. In general, it’s surprising how absent the greyhounds are from the journals, considering their constant daily presence on the *Endeavour*. The first mention of the one Banks refers to as “my grey hound” (if they have names, they remain a mystery to us) is at Botany Bay on May 1, 1770, almost two years into the voyage. The dog sees an animal the size of a rabbit, gives chase, but immediately lames himself “against a stump which lay conceal’d in the long grass” (57). A working animal, the hound appears in the text only when he’s being productive, accompanying Banks on a survey or engaged in the hunt, running down wildlife on his behalf.10 The female greyhound, known only as “my Bitch” or “my Bitch Lady”, is all but invisible, rating only two entries: when a group of Guugu Yimithirr men feed her some fish (92), and when she is “found dead in my Cabbin laying upon a stool on which she generaly slept” (274).

Banks tells us that on June 25, when he makes his first observation of a kangaroo, he is gathering plants, not hunting or surveying, so it’s unclear whether he takes his hounds with him. All we know is that “the beast much talkd of” is like a greyhound in its size, its movement and its tail.

This partial characterisation strikes us as odd, not because the resemblance is inconceivable, but because the greyhound does not feature as a point of comparison in our contemporary Western conception of the kangaroo, either in whole or in part. Picture, if you will, a kangaroo standing on two legs, its thick tail extending along the ground behind it. Or picture it bending over and loping slowly

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10 The hound’s final appearance is when the ship lands on the island of Savu, west of Timor, on September 18, 1770, and the “Radja or Indian King” requests an “English dog” (Banks 152).
through the scrub, its weight on its forepaws and tail while its hind legs lurch forward. Picture the
shape of its body as it bounds effortlessly along, or else in repose, lying on its side, propped up on
one elbow. Now picture a greyhound. See its four narrow legs, its thin tail like a whip. See it galloping
low to the ground, leaning in to sharp turns. Where, exactly, does the comparison come from?

Through the journals of Banks and Cook we can trace the origin of the analogy to the first report of a
kangaroo, on June 22, when a company of men returns from across the river with an account of “an
animal as large as a greyhound” (Banks 84). The next day, the same men provide a second account,
adding no new details, or at least none that Banks takes down. By the third day just about everyone is
supplying reports that conform to the first description, with Banks “hearing descriptions of the animal
which is now seen by every body” (84).

These reports include Cook, who writes:

I saw my self this morning, a little way from the ship one of the Animals before spoke
off, it was of a light Mouse colour and the full size of a grey hound and shaped in
every respect like one, with a long tail which it carried like a grey hound, in short I
should have taken it for a wild dog, but for its walking or running in which it jumped like
a Hare or a dear; Another of them was seen to day by some of our people who saw
the first, they describe them as having very small legs and the print of the foot like that
of a goat, but this I could not see my self because the ground the one I saw was upon
was too hard and the length of the grass hinderd my seeing its legs. (351-352)

The account is actually two, Cook's own observation of “one of the Animals” along with some second-
hand details of “Another of them” seen “by some of our people”. Cook marks out the provisionality of
these second-hand details—the footprints and the length of the legs—distancing himself from the
features he can't confirm directly (“this I could not see my self”).

Up to this point, all the reports of the kangaroo that Banks and Cook record in their journals
paraphrase the observations of others. Cook’s account here represents the first documented first-
hand report of the animal. His description provides more detail about the creature than previously,
and marks a shift from a comparison of scale (Banks: “as large as a greyhound”) to one of likeness
(Cook: “shaped in every respect like one, with a long tail which it carried like a greyhound”). The
following day, Banks finally has “the good fortune to see the beast much talkd of” and records his own
first-hand observation: “he was not only like a grey hound in size and running but had a long tail, as
long as any grey hounds” (85).

We can thus see that the kangaroo-as-greyhound concept precedes Banks' initial observation,
begins with some unnamed crewmen. We don't know why they see a greyhound in the kangaroo,
but the subsequent sightings point to a species of what psychologist Peter Wason names as
“confirmation bias” (qtd. in Newstead and Evans 5-7), with each observer interpreting the visual trace
of the kangaroo in a way that reinforces the concept. It’s not surprising, with such consensus, that
Banks' observation should also conform to it. By the time he sees the kangaroo he has been “hearing
descriptions of the animal which is now seen by every body”. His first glimpse is influenced if not by
the presence of his own greyhounds, at least by what he's been told. He sees the creature within the
context of a collective agreement over the animal's appearance.

Another way to view the kangaroo-as-greyhound concept is as a functional, rather than literal,
linguistic convention used by the crew to solve a coordination problem. In Language: A Biological
Model, Ruth Millikan defines coordination conventions as “patterns of activity that proliferate…
because they achieve coordinations” (9)—that is, combined actions of different people achieve a
common purpose. If we take the crew's common purpose as communicating about the kangaroo, the
coordination to achieve this requires that the speakers use (and listeners recognise) descriptive
markers which they all agree refer to the animal in question. Under this theory, it's not that greyhound
has “intrinsic superiority” (10) over other descriptors; we could argue that deer or guanaco work just
as well. Rather, it's “that others are already doing things this way [that] causes new participants to
follow after” (10). For the crew members reporting sightings of the kangaroo, following the established
precedent is easier than revising it.
Such a reading of the *kangaroo-as-greyhound* concept recalls the thinking of linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, who writes that “any means of expression accepted in a society rests in principle upon a collective habit, or on convention, which comes to the same thing” (“Sign”, 12). De Saussure defines a linguistic sign as an arbitrary link between a sound pattern and a concept (10)—that is, between a signifier and a signified (11)—“ratified by collective agreement” (“Object”, 8). If we take the general description of the kangaroo as a sign linking the signifier *greyhound* to the signified concept of the kangaroo, the gap between the two becomes inherent rather than anomalous. All signs are arbitrary, this one is just more obviously so.

In all this, we shouldn’t disregard the influence that the journals necessarily have on our understanding of these events. We don’t have the exact words of the crew members, only the textual traces left by Cook and Banks. Traces so similar that we could be persuaded to believe that the two men are recording verbatim the words of the crew members. Take Cook’s first report of the kangaroo, on June 23:

one of the men saw an animal something less than a grey hound, it was of a Mouse Colour very slender made and swift of foot. (351)

This accords almost word for word with Banks’ corresponding account—“an animal as large as a grey hound, of a mouse colour and very swift” (84)—not just in the details provided but in the order of those details, in the specific language he uses to describe the animal, and in the lack of extraneous or contradictory features. Compare also these fragments from their respective entries documenting their own first sightings:

a long tail which it carried like a grey hound (Cook 352)
a long tail, as long as any grey hounds (Banks 85)

Their common use of a greyhound as a unit of measure resonates with the earlier reports and with each other’s sightings. The focus on the tail appears in each description, with a rhythm and prosody almost to the syllable.

How do such correspondences come about? One answer might be copying. Beaglehole notes a number of passages in Cook’s journal that the captain copies almost verbatim from Banks’ (Beaglehole in Cook ccxiv), typically the more elaborate descriptions, what Carter classifies as “reflective generalization” and “heightened descriptive prose” (18). These include Cook’s description of the kangaroo shot by second lieutenant John Gore on July 14 (Cook 359), where he incorporates additional detail into his original entry. According to Beaglehole, these revisions occur most likely in Batavia, where Cook has the opportunity to look over Banks’ journal and the time to reflect on events. But the similarity of some of these shorter, less elaborate passages would seem to indicate that the skipper is looking at the botanist’s journal much earlier than this, or that something else is at work. Indeed, the sense we get from these entries is that the men are quoting from each other’s spoken descriptions. The similarity of their journal entries point to the possibility of discussions between the two men to fix down the details before committing them to paper. They develop a shared understanding of events, their own consensus, whether they’re conveying the reports of the crew or their own first-hand experience.

There are formal reasons for this. The British maritime practice of keeping a journal is well-established by Cook’s time, stretching back at least as far as the sixteenth century. “By 1588,” Bernard Smith tells us, “British explorers were already being advised in their official instructions to keep daily diaries” (8). Cook’s instructions are no different, advising him to provide “accounts of your Proceedings, and Copies of the Surveys and discoverings you shall have made” to the Crown (Cook ccxxiii-ccxlv). His journal, along with that of Banks, forms the official record of the expedition.

Accordingly, Cook takes great pains over his journal. *Endeavour*, after all, comes from *devoir*, meaning one’s duty or utmost (*OED*). To put yourself in *devoir* is to commit to doing your best. Thus he makes a version of his journal in his own hand—his holograph journal, which supplies the majority of his quotes for this thesis—while Dick Orton, his clerk, transcribes two further versions, to be dispatched to the Admiralty once the ship reaches Batavia. Cook continually revises his journal,
famously rearranging placenames as new landmarks reveal themselves (cf. Carter 1-33). When the Endeavour departs Botany Bay, for example, it has the altogether less dignified name of Sting Ray’s Harbour. Gore strikes a number of stingrays there—“the biggest of which weighd without his gutts 336 pounds” (Banks 61)—leading Cook to declare:

The great quantity of these sort of fish found in this place occasioned my giving it the name of Sting ray’s harbour. (310n)

Only several months later, once they reach Batavia, does Cook revise his nomination, changing the journal entry to read:

The great quantity of New Plants &c of Mr Banks & Dr Solander collected in this place occasioned my giving it the name of Botany Bay. (310)

Such a revision might strike us as disingenuous, even cynical, especially if we were to view the journals for their value as foundational texts. That the great Botany Bay is, for however many weeks and months, known as Sting Ray’s Harbour, doesn’t sit well with imperial history. But Cook is not necessarily being deceitful. Reflecting on his time there, perhaps the variety of plants does leave a more lasting impression than the size of the stingrays. The problem is with the way information is organised in a journal, with events presented and read chronologically. It’s a structure at odds with the revisionist method by which Cook edits, a method which makes clear the role of the journal in the mediation of events, rather than the simple documentation of them, and demonstrating the difficulty in reading these texts for their evidentiary potential. Anyone’s final rendering of a day might not just recount the relevant events, but may be influenced by information obtained after the fact. With their many crossings-out, erasures, gaps and interlinear additions, the journals quickly become palimpsests. Their entries reflect different time periods and changing attitudes, but they make it difficult to pin down exactly what their authors believe on a given day. We cannot take the journals at face value.

This is as much a symptom of the journal’s purpose as of its technology. It’s in the officers’ common interest that the journals, as the official accounts of the voyage, constitute a space for agreement over what transpires, what is said, what is seen. Thus, the change of Sting Ray’s Harbour to Botany Bay is appropriately reflected in Banks’ journal. Likewise, we can view the mutual decision to return home via New Holland, discussed in the introduction to this essay, as official more than actual. These are true accounts, where true means collectively agreed. The journals are not just authored, but authorised.

Like any genre of text, the explorer’s journal adheres to specific rules and conventions for managing information. For navigators like Cook, these conventions are set down in the Royal Society’s “Directions for Seamen, bound for far voyages” published in the first volume of the Society’s Philosophical Transactions in 1665 (140-143). These advise keeping an “exact Diary” (141), an endeavour that requires not the transcription of every waking moment, but the documentation of nine specific kinds of information, including compass bearings, tidal fluctuations, coastal charts, water depth, and wind direction and speed. By focusing on phenomena that can be measured and verified, the directions ensure the knowledge collected conforms as closely as possible to the demands of scientific observation. At the same time, they confine this knowledge to a limited number of variables. Excluded from the directions is anything that cannot be recorded with some certainty, anything extraneous to the interests of the Royal Society. As Foucault says, to observe “is to be content with seeing… a few things systematically” (134).

The genre of the journal thus shapes the documentation of the expedition by the inclusion and omission of certain types of information. We can see this approach to recordkeeping play out in Banks’ focus on events of note, sometimes reducing an entire day’s events to a single line. Take his entry for July 21, 1770, which reads: “No signs of the Indians to day nor indeed any thing else worthy note” (98). Here his observation is an absence, what he wants to see but doesn’t. So light are the details that we can barely speculate the conversations, interactions, observations, reflections and emotions he leaves out. What, we might ask, is he not telling us?
The journals—as genre, as technology—also mediate the experience of their authors by the intervention of time, recording things not as they happen, in the moment, but at a remove of hours, if not sometimes days, afterwards. Between an event and its description, the experience is mulled over, rationalised and no doubt discussed with other members of the crew, all of which invariably influences the author’s attitude to the event.

Thirdly, and most importantly, as a written technology, the journals filter and shape the events they recount through language. Recording observations in writing fundamentally alters the quality of the information, by transferring it from one system (visual) to another (linguistic). As Patrizia Violi writes in *Meaning and Experience*, “the two systems are not completely convertible” (47). Language, as a system of signs, doesn’t necessarily correspond to Banks’ and Cook’s sensory experiences. The link between concepts and words, between signifieds and signifiers, is arbitrary (de Saussure “Object”, 12).

While we can’t therefore treat the journals of Cook and Banks as unimpeachable accounts, the peculiarities of language and phrasing in them do give us some insight into the conversations that may be occurring behind the scenes. The specificity of Banks and Cook using *greyhound* as a frame of reference for the kangaroo—in terms of size, movement and, regarding the tail, morphology—together with the repeated use of this frame, indicates a kind of collective agreement borne out by discussion. Through suggestion and confirmation bias, this group consensus may very well influence the men’s individual perception and interpretation of the animal, particularly within the regulated and mediated production of written knowledge on the expedition. Whatever Banks sees in the moment he first lays eyes on the kangaroo, by the time he puts it in ink, it has become a greyhound.

Which is why it’s all the more interesting that he should introduce an element of doubt. He effectively repeats Cook’s first-hand account of the kangaroo, invoking the greyhound to support the observations that precede him, but then undermines these accounts, saying “what to liken him to I could not tell” (85). Yet if there’s one animal he sees every day, in the long weeks ashore and the long weeks at sea, it’s the greyhound. He uses the animal he knows most intimately to describe the one he can’t place in any branch of classification.

By the logic of Banks’ account, whatever we imagine based on the first half of his observation (“like a grey hound in size and running [and with] a long tail, as long as any grey hounds” (85)) we must erase with the second (“nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him”). The kangaroo does and does not look like a greyhound.

Why is this important in the development of the category of *kangaroo* for the Europeans? For one thing, it’s the first acknowledgement that the kangaroo is truly unknown. It highlights the epistemological slippage between the greyhound and the kangaroo, between the European corpus of knowledge and the antipodean creature they’re trying to apprehend with it. If nothing resembles the kangaroo, there is no pre-existing category by which the animal can be understood, no pre-ordained place for it in the Linnaean hierarchy.

This acknowledgement also serves as the springboard out of the greyhound analogy. If the group consensus that emerges from the early sightings of the kangaroo has two components—that they’re talking about the same animal; that it looks like a greyhound—Banks provides confirmation of the first by way of the second, by invoking the greyhound and following the rules of the coordination convention. I see the animal you see, he says, but we are far from fixing its identity. The kangaroo might resemble the greyhound in some finite ways, but the concept is incomplete.

If we look closely at his initial observation, we see that Banks takes care not to say that the kangaroo *is* a greyhound, nor even that it looks *like* a greyhound, just that it can be compared to one in three particular ways. We see this caution elsewhere in his writing. On May 1, 1770, a few days after landing at Botany Bay, a party including Cook, Banks and Daniel Solander goes ashore. This is when

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11 Debates over the correspondence between things and signs occupy a central position in structuralist thinking about linguistics and cognition, starting with de Saussure’s formative essay “Nature of the Linguistic Sign”. This thinking is relevant here, but it is beyond the scope of the present thesis to provide a comprehensive analysis of these debates.
the Europeans have their first encounter with the terrestrial fauna of New Holland in the form of the animal that evades Banks’ greyhound. As with their accounts of the kangaroo, Cook and Banks record for this animal the same details in the same arrangement and to roughly the same degree of resolution. But this time they differ in one important respect. While Cook’s language strays into direct comparison, saying it was “a small Animal some thing like a Rabbit” (307, my italics), Banks reports, in a more reserved manner, a quadruped “about the size of a Rabbit” (57, my italics). In their discussions after the fact, we can imagine the men agreeing on rabbit as the point of reference, but as with the greyhound, Banks invokes the rabbit not in a qualitative sense, but a quantitative one, as a unit of measure.

Aside from the non-rabbit,12 Banks reports that

we saw also the dung of a large animal that had fed on grass which much resembled a Stag; also the footsteps of an animal clawd like a dog or wolf and as large as the latter; and of a small animal whose feet were like those of a polecat or weesel. (57)

Within this proliferation of traces, Banks withholds from any direct identifications. He doesn’t say these footprints belong to a wolf and a polecat, but that the claws and feet are like those of these animals, leaving everything above the ankle to our imaginations. His resemblances are limited to comparisons of the signifier, not the signified. Regarding the droppings, he doesn’t say they are from a deer or they might indicate one so much as this dung looks like the dung a deer might do. He is the antithesis of the palaeontologist speculating a whole species from a single bone. From a footprint he’ll barely commit to imagining a foot, much less the animal attached to it. Following the scientific method, he knows he needs to repeat the experience, to see the animal again before he can pin it down.

When it comes to second-hand reports of fauna sightings in New Holland, Banks is more cautious still. He has reservations about the crew’s powers of observation, commenting more than once on the “unintelligible stile of the describers” from which he cannot “even determine whether [the animals] were such as I myself had seen or of different kinds” (117). “Tupia saw a Wolf,” he writes on July 6, “so at least I guess by his description” (89).13 If they can’t agree that they’re talking about the same animal then they can’t achieve a consensus and their respective observations can’t be combined to build on their shared understanding of it. Nullius in verba.

Banks’ reservations are not unfounded. During their time in New Holland, conflicting accounts give rise to separate beasts that we now know are one and the same, as in the various wolf and wild dog descriptions of the dingo (Banks 57, 86, 89, 117). Other accounts mistakenly collapse distinct species into each other, with glances and traces of possible bandicoots conflated with quolls and who knows what else.

When the second reports of the kangaroo come in, on June 23, Banks records them as descriptions “much in the same manner as yesterday”. If we believe Cook’s account, however, these reports don’t just repeat those of the day before, but include the details of the animal “having very small Legs, and the print of the Feet like that of a Goat” (352). Given the similarities between their other accounts, are we to view this as a rare occasion when they don’t resolve the particulars in discussion before writing them up? Perhaps the crewmen go into more detail with Cook, or perhaps Cook and Banks are referring to separate reports. But what if Banks makes a conscious decision to omit these details? What if he leaves them out because they don’t conform to the earlier report? What if they do conform, but Banks leaves them out of that entry as well? Perhaps because of scientific circumspection, perhaps because he doubts the men providing the reports.

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12 Beaglehole: “Australia was not yet cursed with rabbits. The small animal, one of the smaller marsupials, is not identifiable” (Cook 307n). Also: “An outdoor Australian would probably be inclined to guess here a bandicoot or a kangaroo-rat” (Banks 57n).

13 We might also suppose a social and racial dimension to Banks’ circumspection. In the case of the unintelligible sailor, it’s possible that class is reinforcing the botanist’s reservations: Banks is a member of elite society, a landed gentleman; the seaman is, by the tenor his description, audibly less educated (at least as Banks represents him). In the case of Tupia, a Polynesian navigator from the place the Europeans call the Society Islands, the added racial dynamic may help account for Banks’ facetiousness (“so at least I guess”).
These possibilities are interesting because they implicate Banks more directly in the development of the *kangaroo-as-greyhound* concept. Despite being the last to see the kangaroo, his potential suppression of some details in favour of others may function to guide the consensus rather than simply document it. Banks is not, by any means, a passive observer.

We could say that the *kangaroo-as-greyhound* concept functions as a temporary working definition while the crew go about acquiring the knowledge that will lead to a more accurate convention. But this assumes that when the men talk about the kangaroo they do so with a desire for descriptive fidelity. I would argue, however, that they talk about it for other reasons: to report a sighting, to confirm that it’s the same animal they saw previously, to participate in general discussions about it. That these conversations likely include speculation about the animal’s appearance, this I don’t doubt, but the crew in general don’t have any stake in resolving this. That is Banks’ responsibility. As the ship’s leading natural historian, it is his task to better understand the kangaroo. So while he might be as susceptible as everyone else to the collective delusion of the greyhound-like creature scurrying about the scrub, while he may even be its primary author, it’s his job to challenge this characterisation, to steer the crew’s shared understanding toward a more accurate reflection of reality.

Banks’ virtue, then, in his first encounter with the kangaroo, is his prevailing reticence, his circumspection. Yes, we’re talking about the same animal, he says, but we don’t yet know what it might actually be. In this admission, he’s the first to meaningfully depart from the concept of *kangaroo-as-greyhound*. 
The way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe. We never look at just one thing; we are always looking at the relation between things and ourselves.

John Berger, *Ways of Seeing*, 8-9

To see a thing one has to comprehend it. An armchair presupposes the human body, its joints and limbs; a pair of scissors, the act of cutting. … If we really saw the world, maybe we would understand it.

Jorge Luis Borges, “There are more things”, *The Book of Sand*, 41

When Banks encounters the kangaroo, he tries to apprehend it by recognition, as Polo does with the rhinoceros, comparing it to what he knows, what he’s read about, what’s he been told. But, he says, “what to liken him to I could not tell, nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him” (85). There’s no beast in Western zoology or cosmology that corresponds to the kangaroo, not even a unicorn, so there’s nothing to recognise. There’s no obvious place in the tables of Linnaeus’ *Systema Naturae* for the kangaroo to be classified. Banks cannot apprehend it by equivalence, so he must instead rely on analogy.

In the previous section we looked at how an analogy might function in the creation of group consensus around an unknown or partially known entity. Whether or not the crew of the *Endeavour* believe in its descriptive accuracy, the kangaroo-as-greyhound concept serves as a discursive anchor for them to talk about the kangaroo and build their shared understanding of it. In this section I look at one of the more productive roles of analogy in category formation: contributing to a general understanding of an entity and facilitating the identification of its essential properties. This includes a consideration of the ongoing influence of essentialism, as well as the limits of detailed description and, ultimately, the limits of analogy.

“All our reasonings concerning matter of fact,” writes David Hume in his 1748 treatise *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, “are founded on a species of ANALOGY” (142). It’s through “a general habit, by which we always transfer the known to the unknown, and conceive the latter to resemble the former” (145n), that we perceive the world. This is the way the European explorers apprehend New Holland in 1770, recognising and cataloguing new creatures and plants with “the illusion of knowing under the guise of naming” (Carter 29). They make sense of their experience by perceiving the familiar in the unfamiliar, by understanding the dingo as a wolf or wild dog (Banks 57, 86, 89, 117), the quoll as a polecat (57, 117). By conceiving one thing as another, ignoring its specificity and collapsing difference to equate it with one they already know, the names they use take on a metaphoric character.

When an animal’s features don’t inhere in a name they already know, however, they rely instead on analogy, invoking other animals as points of comparison. These comparisons are often partial, stitching together pieces of different animals to build a characteristic whole.

Such an approach is a well-established trope of natural history. Take this description from Pliny’s *Natural History*, wherein he talks of

> a very fierce animal called the monoceros which has the head of the stag, the feet of the elephant, and the tail of the boar, while the rest of the body is like that of the horse…. (bk. 8, ch. 31)

Written in 77AD, Pliny’s take on the rhinoceros prefigures Marco Polo’s by some 1,200 years, yet both build their beast from the bits of others (Polo: “hair like that of a buffalo, feet like those of an elephant…. The head resembles that of a wild boar” (Book III, 284)).
Barron Field uses the same method in the early settler poem “Kangaroo”, first published in 1819:

Thy fore half, it would appear,
Had belong’d to some “small deer;”
Such as liveth in a tree;
By thy hinder, thou should’st be
A large animal of chace…. (qtd. in Farrell “Bounding”, 2)

The cataloguing of the kangaroo is outdone a century later by D.H. Lawrence in his poem “The Kangaroo”, where he introduces the animal “with references to seventeen distinct animals before mentioning the kangaroo itself” (8). As Michael Farrell comments elsewhere: “Both poems try to explain the kangaroo, using/other animals to do so” (“Poetics”).

In comparing these analogic descriptions we can identify a methodology shared by natural history and poetry, one that Roman Jakobson would call synecdoche (57). Writing in the mid-twentieth century, Jakobson defines synecdoche as a subspecies of metonymy, where the part is substituted for the whole or the whole for the part. In their descriptions of animals, Pliny, Polo and Field all build an image of the whole through a synecdochic aggregation of parts.

Which is, in effect, what Banks does when he compares the kangaroo to the greyhound. His picture just has less beasts and more gaps. These he hopes to fill out over subsequent sightings and investigations, but the days following his first observation fail to provide such details. His corresponding journal entries give off an air of disappointment: “we saw 3 of the animals of the countrey but could not get one” (89). On July 7, however, having ventured a few leagues upriver, Banks and John Gore meet four kangaroos in a pivotal scene for the development of the category kangaroo. At dawn they “set out in search of Game”:

We walkd many miles over the flats and saw 4 of the animals, 2 of which my greyhound fairly chas’d, but they beat him owing to the lengh and thickness of the grass which prevented him from running while they at every bound leapd over the tops of it. We observd much to our surprize that instead of Going upon all fours this animal went only upon two legs, making vast bounds just as the Jerbua (Mus Jaculus) does. (Banks 89)

Twice now, and in locations a thousand miles apart, long grass thwarts the hound. But here it also plays an illustrative role. Banks sees, because of the grass, that the kangaroo doesn’t run like a greyhound. He apprehends the kangaroos and the hound in the same frame, in a kind of proto-Muybridge motion study. The differences between their movements play out in action (the bipedal locomotion of the kangaroos) and result (they get away).

The problem with the kangaroo-as-greyhound concept as Banks records it (“not only like a greyhound in size and running but had a long tail, as long as any grey hounds”) is not just that it’s inexact, but that it’s inaccurate. The kangaroo doesn’t run like a greyhound, nor does its tail bear out a meaningful resemblance, especially in the context of its movement. Now, however, Banks perceives some features that better allow him to comprehend the kangaroo. The animal doesn’t run on four legs but bounds on two. His understanding begins to take shape. The kangaroo is not like a greyhound, he thinks. It’s like a jerboa.

A week after this encounter, Gore shoots a small kangaroo, providing the naturalists with their first opportunity to examine the creature up close. The picture develops:

Our second lieutenant who was shooting today had the good fortune to kill the animal that had so long been the subject of our speculations. To compare it to any European animal would be impossible as it had not the least resemblance of any one I have seen. Its fore legs are extremly short and of no use to it in walking, its hind again as disproportionately long; with these it hops 7 or 8 feet at each hop in the same manner as the Gerbua, to which animal indeed it bears much resemblance except in Size, this being in weight 38 lb and the Gerbua no larger than a common rat. (93-94)
It resembles no European animal, only another exotic animal, from another exotic place.\textsuperscript{14} It’s as if now, with more information, more time to turn the impressions over in his mind, he can say, yes, this \textit{is} like that, more so than I first thought. The comparison of mechanics (“this animal went only upon two legs, making vast bounds just as the Jerbua... does”) becomes a direct analogy (“to which animal indeed it bears much resemblance”). They eat the beast, which proves “excellent meat” (94).\textsuperscript{15}

If you’ve ever seen a jerboa, you’ll know it is not like a kangaroo. At least, not our contemporary archetype of the kangaroo, which I would argue is constituted by the eastern grey, the western grey and the red. By contrast, a jerboa is a kind of hopping mouse with large ears. Aristotle describes it as “larger than our field-mouse, with its hind-legs a span long and its front legs the length of the first finger-joint” (“Animals” 606b6, 946). That is, the finger joint of you or I. The jerboa is not just the size of a rat, an animal it resembles much more than a kangaroo, but it is properly a rodent, living in burrows, foraging at night. All in all, the jerboa looks like a mouse onto which someone has grafted large ears and long spindly legs.

The jerboa is, however, more like a kangaroo than a kangaroo is like a greyhound. Once we take size out of the equation, both animals have short front legs which they hold about their chest, long tails they carry behind them, and long hind legs on which they stand and hop. The \textit{kangaroo-as-jerboa} concept, for all its flaws, is useful as an analogy. It allows the crew of the \textit{Endeavour} to continue to talk about the kangaroo in general terms without getting bogged in specifics, while also steering their consensus understanding of it toward a more accurate reflection of reality.

Perhaps the main difference between the \textit{kangaroo-as-greyhound} concept and the \textit{kangaroo-as-jerboa} concept is, however, the relationship between the features observed and the respective animals invoked. All the details pertaining to the greyhound comparison are integral to the analogy; only the kangaroo’s speed can stand on its own: “very swift” (Banks 84). In the jerboa comparison, by contrast, the bulk of the features exist independent of the analogy; “this animal went only upon two legs, making vast bounds” (89); “Its fore legs are extremely short and of no use to it in walking, Its hind again as disproportionately long; with these it hops 7 or 8 feet at each hop” (93-94). These properties not only lead to a more meaningful point of reference—the jerboa—but allow Banks to appreciate what distinguishes the kangaroo from other animals.

The identification of these properties also creates a description that conforms more closely to scientific observation. According to Foucault, Linnaean classification depends on the observation of four variables: “the form of the elements, the quantity of those elements, the manner in which they are distributed in space in relation to each other, and the relative magnitude of each element” (134). In the two \textit{kangaroo-as-jerboa} descriptions above, Banks gives us the \textit{form} of the fore and hind legs (and their respective function), the \textit{quantity} of legs, and their relative \textit{magnitude}. He also introduces the jerboa by its Latin binomial: \textit{Mus jaculus}. After hesitating to place the kangaroo within systematic classification, Banks now identifies a property that suggests to him an appropriate genus. It’s not a jerboa, he says, but it might sit next to one.\textsuperscript{16}

Historically, in the West, all the information about a creature is bound up in its definition—what it looks like, how it behaves, the stories we tell about it, its symbolism and how we generally relate to it (Foucault 39). With the advent of the \textit{Systema Naturae} in 1735, the Linnaean hierarchy systematises these definitions and replaces them with taxonomies, the aim of which is to describe what a species

\textsuperscript{14} Banks later clarifies his jerboa reference as the “Gerbua of Egypt” (116).

\textsuperscript{15} It’s unclear how the Europeans know they can eat the kangaroo beyond their motivation for doing so: hunger. In following the instructions from the “Crown, Banks is seeking to discover what he can of the “products” of the continent (Cook cclxxii), including their edibility. Finding the hulls of a certain nut around the campfires of the Guugu Yimithirr, some of the men are inspired to try the nuts themselves, but are “deterrd from a second experiment by a hearty fit of vomiting and purging” (Banks 115). At the time they eat the kangaroo, there’s no indication they know that the Guugu Yimithirr consume it. Not until July 22 will they see “a quarter of the wild animal” hanging in a tree beside two Guugu Yimithirr men and a boy (98).

\textsuperscript{16} Banks is not altogether off the mark here. While the modern-day \textit{Mus} genus contains only mice, in 1770 its members are much more diverse, including, as we know, the jerboa (\textit{Mus} meaning mouse but also muscle). The first binomial classification of the kangaroo, undertaken by Status Müller in 1776 based on the specimens Banks brings back to England, designates the animal as \textit{Mus canguru} (Chambers 237). It will be another 14 years before George Shaw proposes a separate genus for the kangaroo, \textit{Macropus} (Chambers 237).
is, to define it as distinct from others. But knowing what a species is doesn’t necessarily coincide with a capacity to identify it, and it is at this time that we begin to see a separation of classification (how the world is structured according to scientific principles) from categorisation (how we perceive that same world). The exploration of the east coast of New Holland thus takes place just as the Western Enlightenment science of classification is starting to be pulled in new directions, away from the natural order. It is a time when the way we define animals begins to challenge our long-held, traditional understanding of categories. Banks encounters the kangaroo at the very moment when a split is occurring between scientific taxonomies and perceptual categories, between what something essentially is and the properties we use to identify it.

The distinction between taxonomies and folk categories that emerges in the eighteenth century has a number of parallels with the dictionary-encyclopaedia dialectic Umberto Eco details in his widely cited essay, *Kant and the Platypus* (231). Within this dialectic, dictionary schemata are succinct, scientific instruments of classification (238). They first appear in works such as John Wilkins’ 1668 *An Essay towards a Real Character, and a Philosophical Language* (Platypus, 227), and later evolve into the scientific taxonomies of Linnaeus. Encyclopaedic definitions, by contrast, “indulge in complex descriptions” of all the details by which we might, in aggregate, identify an animal (226), manifesting in our perceptual categories. Both forms of description, both ways of knowing, share a commitment to essentialism, but in markedly different ways.

 Broadly speaking, essentialism in classification is the idea that each species is defined by a feature or characteristic unique to that species and shared by all its members. It “connects with conceptions of natural kinds,” writes John Dupré, “through the idea that what makes a thing a member of a particular natural kind is that it possesses a certain essential property, a property both necessary and sufficient for it to belong to that kind” (6). An essential property is “an objective feature which can answer the question, independent of any context of inquiry, To what kind does this thing belong?” (6).

Taxonomies are essentialist in their formulation of dictionary definitions that attempt to describe the common properties of a species or genus as specifically and as concisely as possible. As an example, the online *Oxford English Dictionary* definition for *kangaroo* reads: “A marsupial mammal of the family Macropodidae, remarkable for the great development of the hind-quarters and the leaping-power resulting from this”. This definition contains only the details that apply to all species of kangaroo, with reference to the specific (marsupial) rather than the general (mammal, animal). This is the scientifically correct classification, but one that falls short of constructing a kangaroo in any detail. As such, while a classification may reference an essential property, it “does not capture the essence of the thing itself; it simply embeds things in a system of increasingly inclusive classes” (Eco *Search*, 227).

At the other end of the spectrum we have encyclopaedic definitions that allow for the identification of a species or genus but do not necessarily classify it. These engage in essentialism through the distinction between essential and typical properties. While encyclopaedic definitions gather together all the perceptual details by which an entity may be recognised, built out of a shared understanding of what an animal is, they are loaded with redundancy, with features that might apply only in part (such as the pouch, exclusive to female kangaroos), too broadly for recognition (that it has a tail, claws, fur, eats grass), or that constitute perceptual fallacies which don’t bear out scientifically (it is like a jerga). Not all these properties are necessary, according to Eco, who argues that certain features of a perceptual category can be deleted—the whiteness of the unicorn, for example—“because the cognitive type does not organize the features hierarchically, nor does it rigidly fix number (of features) or precedence” (*Platypus*, 234). That is, a unicorn needn’t display all the potential features by which we might identify it, nor are these features coded hierarchically: *whiteness* does not precede *horseness* nor *attraction to virgins*.

These features are what Eco, referencing Patrizia Violi, calls typical properties: “it is essential that the cat is an animal; it is [merely] typical for it to meow. The second property can be deleted, but the first cannot” (*Platypus*, 236; cf. Violi 142-144). The essential features of a perceptual category are “indelible”—without them, the entity becomes functionally unrecognisable (*Platypus*, 236-237).17 What

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17 All the features of a dictionary schema or scientific taxonomy, by contrast, “cannot be deleted” (*Platypus*, 234).
makes the unicorn a unicorn, beyond being an animal, is the essential property of the horn. As far as Marco Polo is concerned, all its other properties can be deleted. It doesn’t matter that they contradict his idea of a unicorn, or even that the horn itself is black and thick rather than slender and pale. What matters is that unicorns have horns and this animal has a horn and other animals do not. He sees a unicorn. Categories don’t simply order the world, they construct it.

When it comes to the kangaroo, the property that unlocks the animal for the Europeans, both in terms of the perceptual category and the scientific taxonomy, is its movement, its bounding. From a contemporary Western perspective, we’d agree that this feature is crucial to its identification and recognition—in short, essential to the kangaroo’s being. In his essay “Affective and Transnational: The Bounding Kangaroo”, Michael Farrell suggests that the “leaping verb… was waiting for the kangaroo’s arrival in the lexicon” (1). He traces the lineage of the word in poetry about the kangaroo, including Field’s “Kangaroo” (1819) and Charles Harpur’s “The Kangaroo Hunt” (1843) and “The Kangaroo—A Ballad for Washington” (1859). He directs us to one of Harpur’s notes to “The Kangaroo Hunt”, in which Harpur remarks

how peculiarly emphatic is the epithet [bounding] when applied… to the motions of the kangaroo! No doubt the running of most animals at the top of their speed is a bounding forward… but in none is it, to the instant perception of the eye, so markedly and specifically a bounding, as in the running of the kangaroo. (Harpur 494n; cf. Farrell “Bounding”, 2)

It is worth mentioning that Banks provides us with the first recorded use of this verb in reference to the kangaroo, initiating its conceptual association with the animal. But if bounding is so essential to the kangaroo, why, we might ask, don’t the crew of the Endeavour notice it sooner? Why don’t they see it?

The reality is they do. Cook is the first to make a note of it, on June 24, remarking: “I should have taken it for a wild dog, but for its walking or running in which it jumped like a Hare or a dear” (352). The corresponding entry in Banks’ journal reads: “Gathering plants and hearing descriptions of the animal which is now seen by every body” (84). This is before Banks sees the kangaroo himself, but if he and Cook are conferring over kangaroo sightings, it’s interesting that Banks would leave out this detail. Cook’s observation of the kangaroo’s jumping comes in the same report as the crew’s questionable observation of the animal’s “very small legs and the print of the foot like that of a goat” (Cook 352), which Banks also omits. As discussed in the previous section, perhaps these details don’t agree with previous sightings, perhaps they seem too far-fetched. Banks, we must remember, follows the scientific method. He’s interested in repeatable phenomena, in the features common to all sightings, not the exceptions. More curious is that he then fails to grasp the character of the kangaroo’s movement in his own observation, asserting instead that it moves like a greyhound.

As we’ve seen already, Banks’ journal functions as a framework for filtering his immediate experience to arrive at a selective, communally agreed, and linguistically mediated account of events. In his initial characterisation of the kangaroo, we can see how this interpretive framework isn’t just applied post-facto, but directly impacts on what he is capable of perceiving in the moment. In not seeing that the kangaroo bounds, and instead seeing it run, Banks doesn’t perceive the kangaroo so much as his pre-existing idea of it, the kangaroo-as-greyhound. He admits his observation is imperfect, but by not correcting it in subsequent sightings—July 6: “we saw 3 of the animals of the country but could not get one” (89)—we can only infer that this is what he continues to see. His early impressions of the kangaroo reflect not just a failure of language to interpret perception but an inability to see the animal as it is, demonstrating one of the limits of analogy: how it can impede, rather than facilitate, understanding. His perception is influenced by categorical thinking in the moment it takes place, as Polo’s is when he confronts the unicorn. In both cases, their “seeing is conditioned by knowing” (Smith vii), a knowing we might understand as linguistic. Lyn Hejinian, for example, writes in her essay “Language and ‘Paradise’” that “language is the principal medium through which we objectify things and our experience of them” (69). Which is to say, seeing takes place in and through language.

In these instances, our perception can act “not to encourage but to block the process of perceiving something new” (Eco Platypus, 116-117). It’s an effect that Banks himself comments on, on April 22,
1770, north of the place we know as Bateman’s Bay. Seeing a group of five Aboriginal people from the ship, he considers the influence of earlier accounts of New Holland on his perception: “So far did the prejudices which we had built on Dampier’s account influence us that we fancied we could see their Colour when we could scarce distinguish whether or not they were men” (50). When Banks encounters the kangaroo, he sees it not in a pre-linguistic way, but in specific terms that allow him to extract sense from the experience and communicate it to others.

If pre-existing concepts influence our perception, what are we capable of perceiving when we don’t have an appropriate category? When Banks encounters the kangaroo, the notion of mammal does not exist, only the overarching Mammalia and the indispensable quadruped. Accordingly, he considers the kangaroo a quadruped. As for its marsupial characteristics, none of the men note the pouch of the small female specimen they obtain on July 29. Even Daniel Solander, one of the ship’s highly trained naturalists, neglects to mention it in his detailed manuscript description, despite the fact that he describes the mammae (Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 46), which are found inside the pouch. Were he to mention it, however, it’s unclear whether he or anyone else on the expedition would comprehend its function or perceive the reproductive process of marsupials. The botanical draughtsman Sydney Parkinson’s comments on a possum indicates his specific ignorance of pouches: “This creature has a membraneous bag near the stomach in which it conceals and carries its young when it is apprehensive of danger” (Parkinson 146n).

While pre-existing categories and concepts certainly influence our perceptions, they aren’t the only input for this process. Polo uses an inherited idea to apprehend an unknown entity, but his choice of category isn’t arbitrary: it is based on what he sees before him, on the actual features of the rhino. Categorical thinking is intrinsic to perception and interpretation, but so are the things we perceive and interpret.

“Things that have been experienced several times,” writes literary theorist Viktor Shklovsky, “begin to be experienced in terms of recognition: a thing is in front of us, we know this, but we do not see it. This is why we cannot say anything about it” (163). Here Shklovsky is detailing what he calls ostranenie, which is traditionally translated as defamiliarisation but which Alexandra Berlina, in her recent translation, renders as estrangement (152). “The goal of art,” Shklovsky says, “is to create the sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing, things” (162). Its device “is the ‘enstrangement’ of things”, “to make us feel things”, “to make a stone stony” (162). In this formulation, habituation precludes perception, preventing it from achieving “its greatest strength and length” (171). The work of enstranging or defamiliarising something is to stop recognising it by an “unconscious-automatic” response (161) and start perceiving it.

Shklovsky focuses on examples of enstrangement that describe things “as if seen for the first time” (163). The evidence we have of the Europeans’ initial observations of the kangaroo, however, suggests that our apprehension of things in the first instance is not enstranged so much as falsly familiar, influenced by pre-existing knowledge. The Europeans’ observations are comprised primarily of attempts to recognise the unrecognisable. The move from unfamiliarity to familiarity is not of recognition supplanting perception, but of new knowledge and concepts replacing older ones.

This does not preclude the possibility of enstrangement, however, if we view the process not as a reversion to an ideal (and impossible) prior state, but the discovery of a new way of seeing something, the replacement of old analogies with new ones. This is, I propose, what happens to Banks when his greyhound and the kangaroos occupy the same frame: the juxtaposition disrupts his recognition of the kangaroo-as-greyhound and forces him to see it anew. The scene “increases the duration and complexity of [his] perception” (Shklovsky 162), as reflected in the more detailed description of the event.

Another example of enstrangement is Sydney Parkinson’s description of the kangaroo. Parkinson is responsible for the botanical illustrations and sketches on the Endeavour, making 955 drawings of

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18 It gets coined as a technical term in 1791 (Eco Platypus, 232).
19 First used as a noun in 1805 (OED Online) and established in 1811 as a mammal infraclass, Marsupialia (Chambers 237).
plants on the voyage (Smith 18), as well as a number of zoological and topographical drawings. His notes on the animal read, in their entirety:

a kind nearly approaching the mus genus, about the size of a grey-hound, that had a head like a fawn’s; lips and ears, which it throws back, like a hare’s; on the upper jaw six large teeth; on the under one two only; with a short and small neck, near to which are the fore-feet, which have five toes each, and five hooked claws; the hinder legs are long, especially from the last joint, which, from the callosity below it, seems as if it lies flat on the ground when the animal descends any declivity; and each foot had four long toes, two of them behind, placed a great way back, the inner one of which has two claws; the two other toes were in the middle, and resembled a hoof, but one of them was much larger than the other. The tail, which is carried like a grey-hound’s, was almost as long as the body, and tapered gradually to the end. The chief bulk of this animal is behind; the belly being largest, and the back rising toward the posteriors. The whole body is covered with short ash-coloured hair; and the flesh of it tasted like a hare’s, but has a more agreeable flavour. (145-146)

Like Polo with the unicorn and Pliny with the monoceros, Parkinson divides the kangaroo into its constituent parts. Focusing on its attributes individually, he builds a much more comprehensive kangaroo than Banks or Cook. Indeed, apart from Solander’s manuscript description, he provides the most in-depth account of it of anyone aboard the Endeavour. Yet he falls short of creating a unified picture of the creature. Why is this?

For one thing, he leaves out the key feature identified by Banks: the animal’s movement. With all the detail he provides, he misses this “singular property” by which it may “be easily known from all other animals” (Banks 117). Instead of depicting a kangaroo bounding through the grass or over rocky flats, he provides a confusion of legs and feet and toes, a clumsy image of a kangaroo shuffling downhill. It’s as though the accumulation of detail results in the loss, rather than a gain, in clarity. His starting point, flawed though it is (a greyhound-sized mouse), is in many respects clearer than the disjointed set of particulars we’re left with at the end. He enstranges the kangaroo, creating Shklovsky’s “sensation of seeing, and not merely recognizing” (162), but the specifics somehow impede, even actively work against, the formation of an image in the reader’s mind.

Both Banks and Parkinson come to know the kangaroo by kinds of metonymy: for Banks, the attribute of bounding is a metonym for the animal; for Parkinson, the profusion of its parts stands in synecdochically for the animal as a whole. In Jakobson we find a critique of the use of synecdoche in fiction that we could just easily apply to Parkinson’s description: “the reader is crushed by the multiplicity of detail unloaded on him in a limited verbal space, and is physically unable to grasp the whole, so that the portrait is often lost” (60). Similarily, we can read Parkinson’s description as what Borges calls a “chaotic series” in his essay “On Literary Description” (Selected, 234). He would say that the draughtsman proceeds by a “censurable method” that invites us “to conjure up those disjecta membra and coordinate them in a single coherent image. The mental operation is impractical: no one would think of imagining type X’s feet and then adding them to type Y’s throat and type Z’s cheeks” (Borges Selected, 234). It’s as if Parkinson is unable to apprehend the beast as a whole, only in parts.

General analogies may seem vague and inexact, but Parkinson’s description demonstrates why we defer to analogy, rather than detailed descriptive language, when we discuss unknown or partly known entities. It’s not simply more efficient, but more effective. Detailed description is indispensable in the task of classification and differentiation, for documenting minute distinctions between the morphological characteristics of similar species and varieties. It’s just not particularly effective when it comes to identifying and prioritising the features that allow for recognition.

Beyond the specific limits of descriptive language and the individual shortcomings of Sydney Parkinson, we can see this as a systematic problem of language in general. “The difference between

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20 Here Jakobson is quoting literary critic Anatolij Kamegulov’s analysis of the work of nineteenth-century Russian novelist Gleb Ivanovič Uspenskij.
the meaning of *dog* and *cat,*" writes Violi, "is difficult to grasp through a linguistic description, because the difference is perceptual-morphological" (47). That is, rendering the kangaroo in descriptive language is difficult because the kangaroo is not, in the first instance, a linguistic construct, but a visual one: "a perceptual gestalt and not a set of properties" (47). Parkinson, Banks and Cook all know by seeing; to document what they see they must convert it to another system, a process that doesn't necessarily preserve the integrity of the experience.

To be fair to Parkinson, however, his description is not intended first and foremost as a textual record, but to assist him in making an illustration of the kangaroo (Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 47). As with those of Banks and Cook, Parkinson's perceptual field is shaped by his profession and his obligations on the voyage. It's tempting to say that as a result he doesn't see the kangaroo *as it is,* but this would be to advocate for a singular way of seeing the animal, for an objective idea of the kangaroo's being. As would saying that Banks is more correct in identifying the kangaroo's movement as its essential property rather than its posture in repose, simply because this accords with our contemporary Western idea of the animal. “The philosophical search for natural kinds," writes Ronald de Sousa, "is motivated by the hope of finding ontological categories that are independent of our interests. But no such categories are to be found" (562). We might say that as a natural kind, the kangaroo bounds. But how does it bound, and for whom?

We can understand Parkinson's artistic interest in the kangaroo in depicting it in a portrait—a still life, rather than a moving image. That's why he leaves out the kangaroo's "singular property". But when we look at the pictorial evidence he leaves us—his two sketches of the kangaroo, shown below at Figure 1—we can't help but see the motion in them. One sketch depicts a kangaroo bounding; the other, crouching down, but with the rough outline of an straightened leg drawn over the bent one, extending from the knee, signalling its capacity for jumping.

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21 There are also issues of authorship and authorial intention with Parkinson's journal. His original journal is misplaced between his death on January 26, 1771, and the *Endeavour's* return to England in July. The final journal, edited and published by his brother Stanfield, is an assemblage of the "memorandums and materials" from which Parkinson composed the original (Parkinson in Parkinson xv-xvi) and of "so many of his manuscripts and drawings", which Stanfield procures "by purchase, loan, and gift" from others aboard the *Endeavour* (xvii). Parkinson's quotes in this thesis are all drawn from this reassembled, edited, posthumous version of his journal.

22 Images sourced from the National Museum of Australia website (full reference in Works Cited below).
The kangaroo as a natural kind manifests differently for each observer, shaped by their specific professional training and their distinct obligations on the voyage. The interest of second lieutenant Gore is in how it may be hunted and shot; the crew more generally confirm an interest in the kangaroo when they taste its “excellent meat” (Banks 94). Solander’s interest as a natural historian is demonstrated by his manuscript description of it. Unlike Banks’ descriptions, which exist within the discursive framework of the journal, Solander’s account fully conforms to the stylistic conventions of a taxonomic description. It’s written in Latin, its details are even more atomised than Parkinson’s, and it focuses on key points of differentiation (such as dentition) that allow for its identification under the knife, rather than from across the room. They are notes toward an official description and taxonomic designation of the kangaroo.

The particularities of Parkinson’s description, by contrast, can be read as instructions for building the animal pictorially, piece by piece. But he’ll never put these into practice. He dies of dysentery before the *Endeavour* makes it back to England, leaving only his notes and the two rough sketches, possibly based on the wallaroo Gore shoots on July 27 (Chambers 234).

![Figure 2: George Stubbs, “The Kongouro from New Holland”, National Maritime Museum, Greenwich](Image sourced from Royal Museums Greenwich website (full reference in Works Cited below)).

It’s not known if George Stubbs has access to these in 1772 when he makes his famous painting, “The Kongouro from New Holland”, shown above at Figure 2. Stubbs is “England’s foremost illustrator of animals in this period” (Chambers 244). He succeeds in depicting the animal’s feet, hindquarters and tail more or less accurately. Even the fore paws come out looking okay. It’s only when he gets to the upper body and head, distending like a kind of bloated rabbit (Parkinson: “the belly being largest”), that he runs into trouble. According to Neil Chambers, Stubbs is working “from a stuffed or inflated kangaroo skin, which would explain the oddly swollen form of his depiction” (245). The seemingly small size of the kangaroo implies that his primary reference is “the young female caught by Banks’s greyhound on July 29, 1770” (Chambers 245), which also explains, to a degree, some of the problems of scale in the image. I would suggest that he’s also working from some version of
Parkinson's notes, as the painting depicts a number of features in a manner strikingly similar to Parkinson's description of them: "a head like a fawn's; lips and ears, which it throws back, like a hare's" (145). In this, we can see another limit of analogy: Parkinson's comparisons to the deer and the hare are insufficient for the pictorial reconstruction of the kangaroo. The painting has the *kongouro*’s head swivelled around to look behind itself (in a pose impossible for the actual animal), its neck curved to meet the skull like an afterthought. Stubbs might be the best in his field—Smith calls him “that eighteenth-century master of visual empiricism” (14)—but in the absence of a specimen that he can dissect himself, he can’t arrive at a convincing reconstruction of the kangaroo. The result, interestingly enough, is a painting of a kangaroo-like creature with the head of a jerboa.

Parkinson's sketches, by contrast, achieve what Stubbs' painting does not. More than any written account of the kangaroo—including his own—Parkinson's drawings capture what we, in our contemporary moment, might consider the essence of the animal: “the singular property of running or rather hopping upon its hinder legs” (Banks 117). They contain a kind of iconic character. Comparing them to his written description, we might recall John Locke's words on the value of drawing in *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693): “[drawing] helps a man often to express in a few lines well put together what a whole sheet of paper in writing would not be able to represent and make intelligible” (qtd. in Smith 9). In these sketches we see the concept *kangaroo* separate from analogies with jerboas or greyhounds or hares or deer.

In section 1 of this thesis I argued that names are self-describing, that they contain the general properties by which we can identify and recognise the entities they designate. To pick up that concept again, we might say that names don’t stand in for detailed descriptions, like Parkinson’s notes, but for the various perceptual and otherwise ineffable details evoked by and expressed in his sketches. The associations retrieved by the name *kangaroo* are mapped onto a visual-perceptible object of knowledge and achieve, by a kind of metonymy, what descriptive language on its own cannot. Following Jakobson, this is a key principle of the poetics of description: the relation between language and entities. This is why bringing a poetic perspective to the study of this encounter is valuable. It allows us to unpack the arbitrariness inherent in the descriptive language the Europeans deploy for the kangaroo and the role language plays in constructing their perception of it.

In this, a key function of analogy is to stand in for complex perceptual details, to transfer the familiar to the unfamiliar such that, over time and with repeated exposure, an understanding of the entity can emerge. These repeated exposures are what Hume calls “experience” (142-145). “It seems evident, that animals, as well as men, learn many things from experience, and infer, that the same events will always follow from the same causes. By this principle, they become acquainted with the more obvious properties of external objects” (142). This is how we, animals and humans, come to know the unknown. Thus, says Hume, “An old greyhound will trust the more fatiguing part of the chase to the younger, and will place himself so as to meet the hare in her doubles” (143).

It’s this very principle that we see play out at Endeavour River, on July 29, a day “dedicated to hunting the wild animal” (Banks 100). The kangaroos have evaded Banks’ greyhound on at least two prior occasions, but the dog, like his owner, has more experience now, and a better understanding of the animal. Spying a group of kangaroos, the hound targets a juvenile—“a very small one”—and takes it “with ease” (100).

From an examination of this juvenile and the two other specimens the Europeans catch at Gangaar, Banks provides his final description of the kangaroo in his summary, “Some account of that part of New Holland now called New South Wales”, in his journal:

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24 Upon returning to England in 1771, Banks takes immediate formal possession of Parkinson’s effects, precipitating a legal dispute with the draughtsman’s brother, Stanfield (Parkinson in Parkinson v-xxiii; Chambers 245). While Banks claims not to have Parkinson’s journal, he does have the “memorandums and materials” from which Parkinson has composed it (Parkinson in Parkinson xv-xvi). He delivers these to Stanfield in January 1772, who has copies made and the originals returned to Banks shortly after. It’s thus highly likely that Banks has in his possession some version or copy of Parkinson’s description of the kangaroo when he commissions the painting from Stubbs.
It is different from any European and indeed any animal I have heard or read of except the Gerbua of Egypt, which is not larger than a rat when this is as large as a midling Lamb; the largest we shot weighd 84 lb. It may however be easily known from all other animals by the singular property of running or rather hopping upon its hinder legs carrying its fore bent close to its breast; in this manner however it hops so fast that in the rocky bad ground where it is commonly found it easily beat my grey hound, who tho he was fairly started at several killd only one and that quite a young one. (116-117)

Here, Banks retains the comparison to the jerboa, but also states how the kangaroo “may however be easily known from all other animals” by its “singular property”: its bounding. This, for him, is its essential feature, what separates it from a greyhound or a deer. But it’s also what establishes its relation to another animal, the jerboa, allowing Banks to propose a place for the kangaroo within systematic classification: the *Mus* genus. It’s a suggestion that Statius Müller will formalise in 1776 when he classifies the animal as *Mus canguru*. The kangaroo thus finds its place in the Linnaean hierarchy by way of analogy, but also remains somewhat resistant to it. As *canguru* (an approximation of the Guugu Yimithirr word *gangurru*), the classification retains a clear trace of the Aboriginal knowledge of the animal—even if the Europeans misunderstand and misapply that knowledge, as discussed in the next section.

The Europeans leave Waalumbaal Birri with a categorical understanding of the kangaroo that will have a lasting impact on the identity of the animal. While the comparison to the jerboa falls away by 1790, when George Shaw proposes the genus *Macropus*, the prominence of the property of bounding persists into the present and remains central to our contemporary Western concept of the kangaroo as a natural kind. But having seen how pre-existing categories can influence perception, in particular through language, we might ask if we perceive the kangaroo’s bounding because this is its essential feature—revealed “to the instant perception of the eye” (Harpur 494n)—or whether we do so because that’s what we’ve been conditioned to notice. Were the *Endeavour* to depart Gangaar prior to Banks perceiving this characteristic, what would our understanding of the animal be? Would we think of kangaroos in different terms, defined by grazing, perhaps, or reclining on an elbow? Would we compare them to greyhounds or middling lambs?
4 | Not a kangaroo: Naming as a way to take possession

*O wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here!*  
*Shakespeare, The Tempest, 5.1*

*It is enough to know the name of a god or of a divine creature in order to have it in one's power.*  
*Jacques Vandier, quoted in Borges, 25 “A History of the Echoes of a Name”, Selected Non-Fictions, 405*

Patrizia Violi writes that “the various processes by which we arrive at the point of ‘giving a name to things’ are not distinct from those with which we think, recognize, and categorize, or, in a word, understand” (xii). In this formulation, naming doesn’t come after understanding, nor does it precede it. Rather, it’s an integral part of the process of coming to knowledge. The process of discovering an appropriate name for the kangaroo is thus a necessary aspect of understanding it. While previous sections of this thesis have considered how a name functions self-descriptively, containing all the visual-perceptible details that constitute the idea of an entity, and enabling efficient communication about it, this section looks at the political implications of naming: how names facilitate possession. Finding a name for the kangaroo is not an arbitrary act for the Europeans in New Holland in 1770, but one that has a direct bearing on the colonial project and which can be seen as emblematic of the work of all taxonomy.

The British Crown provides Cook with specific instructions regarding the exploration of *Terra Australis*:

*If you discover the Continent above-mentioned… You are to employ yourself diligently in exploring as great an Extent of the Coast as you can… surveying and making Charts, and taking Views of Such Bays, Harbours and Parts of the Coasts as may be useful to Navigation. You are also carefully to observe the Nature of the Soil, and the products thereof; the Beasts and Fowls that inhabit or frequent it, the Fishes that are to be found in the Rivers or upon the Coast and in what Plenty and in Case you find any Mines, Minerals, or valuable Stones you are to bring home Specimens of each, as also such Specimens of the Seeds of the Trees, Fruits and Grains as you may be able to collect… You are likewise to observe the Genius, Temper, Disposition and Number of the Natives…. (Cook ccxxxii-cclxxiii)*

While Cook fails to find the continent abovementioned, we can see the logic and methodology of these instructions at work in his exploration of New Holland. He makes maps and charts; his journal records details of tides, currents, wind speed, water depth; he makes note of bays and harbours, coves and capes. At the same time, Banks and his naturalists collect seeds and specimens, cataloguing the various beasts, fowls and fishes of the continent. When it comes to the kangaroo, they return to England with the skulls of the eastern grey and the wallaroo they shoot (Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 48, 49), as well as the skin of the young eastern grey taken by Banks’ hound (Chambers 245). As for the Aboriginal occupiers and owners of New Holland, Banks records what he can of the customs, dress, diet, houses, tools, weapons and language of the people they encounter (111-137).

The diversity of information requested by the Crown’s instructions is profound. The different disciplines by which it might be obtained include cartography, geography, botany, zoology, geology, anthropology, agriculture and politics. By placing these distinct kinds of knowledge in a list, Cook’s instructors make them of a type. They become knowable. The objects of these disciplines are all presumed, for the purposes of the *Endeavour* expedition, to be accessible to British modes of understanding—that is, observation, collection, documentation, interpretation. They are all marked out

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as valuable to the Crown, specifically in their capacity to facilitate possession of the lands to which they pertain. For Britain there is only one meaningful category: “those that belong to the emperor” (Borges Selected, 231).

Such an approach to knowledge illustrates the hubris of eighteenth-century Western imperial exploration and the project of colonialism: the idea that the explorers could look upon the unknown and, by virtue of their reason and rationality, instantly come to know it. That they could know things as complex as peoples and cultures simply by documenting their “Genius, Temper, Disposition and Number” (Cook cclxxiii). Cook and Banks do not question this presumption, however, documenting a multitude of details for every country, continent and island on which they land. A quick scan of Banks’ “Some account of that part of New Holland now called New South Wales”, inserted in his journal after the entry for August 26, reveals details about the Guugu Yimithirr and other Indigenous inhabitants; the general character of the country; its soil, trees, valleys and waterways; its climate and topography; its edible or otherwise “usefull plants”; and its quadrupeds, birds, insects and fish (111-137).

His summary also reveals the shortcomings of this approach to knowledge production, specifically in his mistaken assumption that all Indigenous New Hollanders constitute a singular people (111-112). Banks thus makes few distinctions between the Guugu Yimithirr and the other people he observes, collapsing the differences of a diverse range of cultures and people up the east coast. He laments that he “much wishd indeed to have had better opportunities of seeing and observing the people” (111), but it’s a regret that upholds the original hubristic premise of knowledge-gathering: that with more time he could truly come to know these people.

Despite the exploration of New Holland being rationalised by Cook as a practical detour, “such a rout as might conduce most to the advantage of the service I am upon” (272), it is far from innocuous. The service Cook is on is not simply getting the ship home in one piece, as I intimated in the introduction to this thesis, but to assertively expand the field of knowledge of the Pacific for the British. The surveying he and Banks undertake in New Holland is thus concomitant with the extension and continuation of empire, with establishing the conditions for invasion and colonisation. Empirical knowledge is central to this project, and naming is central to knowledge. “For Cook,” writes Carter, “knowing and naming were identical” (8-9). The explorers apply names to the things they encounter—not just plants and animals but headlands, bays, mountains and islands—so that they may know and possess them. The kangaroo, in its namelessness, is an impediment to empire.

In their separate professions, naming is the area in which Banks and Cook most overlap. Cook names places (geography), Banks names species (taxonomy). Neither of them, however, ventures a name for the kangaroo. Cook’s way of referring to the kangaroo is recursive. On three occasions he calls them the “Animals before spoke off”, pointing to his initial account. Banks is more symbolic. He uses the placeholder “the animals of the countrey”, the kangaroo for him already an icon of this strange land. Neither of them suggests using the name of another animal for it, nor do they hazard the invention of a new one. We can read in this hesitation a kind of wary respect, perhaps, an acceptance that the kangaroo is truly foreign to them, that the right name for it is outside their language.

When it comes to the animals the Europeans “recognise” in New Holland, the English names function adequately as working titles because the features that inhere in these names—those properties they use to identify the European animals corresponding to these names—can be found in the new animals. The names transfer the known to the unknown. The problem with the stranger creatures the explorers encounter is that they can’t apply existing names to them without editing the list of features attached to those names.

Which is what Christopher Columbus does when he sees the mermaids, and what Marco Polo does when he sees unicorns. In their cases, however, there is an absence of credible counter-examples.

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26 The value of this information is pre-empted by Cook’s instructions, which direct him to “demand from the Officers and Petty Officers the Log Books and Journals they may have Kept, and to seal them up for our inspection and enjoying them, and the whole Crew, not to divulge where they have been until they shall have Permission so to do” (Cook cclxxxiv). The knowledge they collect is exclusively for the benefit of the Crown, until they hear otherwise.

27 This is the date they depart New Holland.
Neither explorer is in danger of returning home to have mermaids or unicorns confound their definitions. The individuals they encounter become the leading representatives of their respective categories, the parameters of which can be revised to accommodate them.

Banks has no such luxury. The categories he would apply to the kangaroo—greyhound, jerboa, lamb—contain too many individuals that adhere to the existing categorical parameters. He can’t establish equivalence between them and the kangaroo, so he needs a new name.

The kangaroo, of course, already has a name. In 1770 there are more than 250 Aboriginal languages (Walsh 27), each with their own ways of talking to, of and about kangaroos, of bringing them into being. The Guugu Yimithirr, in whose country the Europeans find themselves, have at least 10 names for kangaroos, according to linguist and anthropologist John Haviland:

- **gadaar** small wallaby
- **bawurr** rock wallaby
- **bibal** small scrub kangaroo
- **dyadyu** kangaroo rat
- **gangurru** black kangaroo
- **nharrgali** red kangaroo
- **ngurrumugu** large black kangaroo
- **walurr** female kangaroo
- **wudul** whip-tail kangaroo
- **dhulmbanu** grey wallaroo

To these we can add **wutal**, the mountain wallaby, **galbala**, another apparent name for the red kangaroo, and the gender distinctions of **jirarr**, female wallaby, and **galkarungurr**, male wallaby (Cilento 160). In addition to these, the Guugu Yimithirr distinguish between kangaroo-as-animal and kangaroo-as-meat through the word **minha**, “edible animal” (Haviland 372), and as ancestor, through names like **Galgarungal**. Alberta Hornsby tells us that when the *Endeavour* hauls up in Waalumbaal Birri, the Guugu Yimithirr are “awaiting the return of their ancestors Milganduur (masked plover) and Galgarungal (wallaroo)” (qtd. in McKenna 202).

These different categories are all accounted for within and through the Guugu Yimithirr kinship system and reflected in the words they use for them. The 32 clan groups of the tribal nation share the one language, Guugu Yimithirr, which divides, according to Hornsby, into two dialects: coastal (**Thalun-thirr**, “with the sea”) and inland (**Wargurr-ga**, “the outside”) (6). The language takes into account the relationship of the speakers through a form of speech known as “brother-in-law language” (Haviland 365-393; Walsh 44). This is an avoidance or respect style of speech, using the same grammar as everyday Guugu Yimithirr but substituting different, more respectful words. If you were talking to your brother-in-law or father-in-law about any of the kangaroo species, you’d use the general term **daarraalngan** (Haviland 371).

When the Europeans ask the Guugu Yimithirr about the kangaroo, it seems they select the name most appropriate to the particular animal the Europeans inquire about—**gangurru**, the black kangaroo, corresponding to what we know as the eastern grey—and give it to them. The particular occasion of the gift, however, does not appear in the journal either of Banks or Cook. The two men record eight interactions with the Guugu Yimithirr, all occurring between July 10 and July 22. It’s during these encounters, Banks writes, that “Myself and 2 or 3 more got from them as many words as we could, and having noted down those which we thought from circumstances we were not mistaken in we compared our lists” (136). From this comparison, Banks derives 41 words; Parkinson, more than 140. Banks’ list does not include any approximation of the word **gangurru**; Parkinson’s does.

From Banks’ and Cook’s continued use of general terms to discuss the kangaroo we can infer that they learn the name **gangurru** toward the end of their stay. As late as July 29, only a week before they leave Gangaar, Banks refers to the young eastern grey his hound catches simply as one of “the

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28 The words quoted in Cilento are recorded in 1970 by Howard Pohlner, then reverend of the Hopevale Mission, which consists of a large Guugu Yimithirr community.
animals” (100). Only in the kangaroo’s final appearance in his journal, in his summary account of New Holland, is it given a name, rendered as Kangaroo (116) and Kanguru (131). Similarly, Cook uses the animal’s name only as they weigh anchor, on August 4, adding the variation Kangura to the mix (367). He doesn’t revise his journals to interpose the kangaroo’s name in the earlier entries, as he does with places and landmarks. Both men let their original words stand.29

From this I’d conclude that neither the captain nor the botanist are present when the Europeans receive the word gangurru. The last recorded interaction the crew has with the Guugu Yimithirr is on July 22, when one of the crewmen, “straying from his party”, comes upon two Guugu Yimithirr men and a boy (Banks 98). He stays with them about half an hour before they sign “that he might go away”; hanging on a tree nearby is “a quarter of the wild animal and a cockatoo” (98). This is the last occasion on which the word might gangurru be imparted, but a week later Banks is still using the generic “animals” to describe the kangaroo (100). It seems that he only learns the word much later, possibly after resolving his glossary, possibly even after setting sail.

Parkinson’s more extensive list of Guugu Yimithirr words does include kangooro, as well as Je-quoll, the other unrecognizable animal for the Europeans. He may very well be the one, or one of the ones, to whom the name is gifted.

Banks is aware of the flawed method—“obnoxious to many mistakes” (136)—by which they learn Guugu Yimithirr words. His circumspection is perhaps another reason why his list is shorter than Parkinson’s.30 Because of time constraints,

> the list of words I have given could be got no other manner than by signs enquiring of them what in their Language signified such a thing… for instance a man holds in his hand a stone and asks the name of [it]: the Indian may return him for answer either the real name of a stone, one of the properties of it as hardness, roughness, smoothness &c, one of its uses or the name peculiar to some particular species of stone, which name the enquirer immediately sets down as that of a stone. (136)

His concerns are not misplaced. Gangurru doesn’t mean kangaroo in the general sense we use it now. Excluding the brother-in-law term daarraalingan, the Guugu Yimithirr have no generic word encompassing all kangaroos (Haviland 371). Gangurru refers only to the black kangaroo, a species we know as the eastern grey; it is a name “peculiar to some particular species of stone” and not, simply, stone. The Europeans, however, apply the name of this species as it appears in particular conditions, to the genus as a whole under all conditions. They also use the local in place of the global, not just by bringing the name into English, Anglicising it as kangooroo and kanguru and kangura, but in assuming that Guugu Yimithirr is spoken by all the Indigenous peoples of New Holland. After England invades the Eora nation in 1788, one of the British marines, Watkin Tench, writes: “Kanguroo, was a name unknown to them for any animal, until we introduced it. When I showed Colbee the cows brought out in the [HMS] Gorgon, he asked me if they were kanguroos?” (171n).

The Europeans ignore other potential distinctions, applying the name equally to males and females, to juveniles and mature adults, to the animal in itself and as it is utilised (for its meat, pelt, sinews), in whole and in part, moving and stationary, solitary and in a group, as ancestor and not. For the Guugu Yimithirr, the properties of the black kangaroo and only the black kangaroo inhere in the name gangurru, seen in particular circumstances and spoken of within certain conversational dynamics. The Guugu Yimithirr don’t categorise in the same way Europeans do, and the concept of gangurru does not correspond to the English kangaroo. They perceive and conceive of kangaroo as an overarching category only within brother-in-law language, as daarraalingan. Such a general category does not translate into everyday speech, for which they use much more specific concepts. Even Guugu Yimithirr, as a concept, functions differently to Western nouns. Haviland writes: “Guugu Yimidhirr” (literally, ‘word this way’) is not, itself, an ordinary proper name but, rather, a description; one says of

29 The exception to this is Banks’ running head for July 14, the date on which they obtain their first specimen of the animal, which reads “Kill Kanguru” (Beaglehole in Banks 94n).
30 Conversely, one of the reasons why Parkinson’s list might be longer is because his journal is posthumously edited by his brother. Parkinson himself may have intended to cull any number of terms in his final version.
one’s language, ‘guugu nganhdhanun, guugu yimidhirr’, i.e. ‘our language, this kind of language (that I am speaking now)” (369).

The explorers don’t spend long enough with the Guugu Yimithirr to understand these distinctions, nor with the kangaroo itself. Were they to look more closely, they might realise that the animal they shoot on July 14, likely an eastern grey (Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 48), is a different species to the one they kill two weeks later, a presumed wallaroo (Beaglehole in Banks 100n; Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 49). But the kangaroo is altogether too different from anything the Europeans know for them to discern this. The taxonomies they bring to New Holland don’t account for it in a generic sense, much less in its specifics, providing no obvious place for the kangaroo in the Linnaean hierarchy. Rather than inventing a new genus for the kangaroo, however, as George Shaw does in 1790 with *Macropus*, Banks and his naturalists attempt to work with the existing ones. They suggest the genus *Mus*, which Statius Müller formalises in 1776 in his binomial classification, *Mus canguru* (Chambers 237).

Placing the kangaroo in the *Mus* genus doesn’t just bring it into contact with animals which we now believe are unrelated to it (jerboas, mice, other rodents), but it collapses the differences of the three captured specimens into a single species. Solander bases his detailed manuscript description on at least two of the specimens captured at Endeavour River, without realising that they probably constitute different species (Morrison-Scott and Sawyer 46). Classifying the kangaroo as a species of *Mus* and not establishing it in a genus of its own also limits the possibility of additional kangaroo species emerging. More importantly, it limits the impact the kangaroo can have on systematic classification.

For the Europeans, only by understanding the kangaroo first in a general sense can the work of differentiation begin. That’s why the name is so important. It enables them to classify the animal and place it in a system of knowledge where its relations to other creatures can be determined, shakily at first, but with increasing certainty over time. It allows them to talk about the animal unambiguously, to gather under it the various properties they identify in the animal, and to start the process of discovering which of these properties indicate a difference in kind and which merely a difference of degree.

The importance of finding the right name also reflects the power that names impart, as Cook demonstrates on August 22, 1770, planting the British flag on the island the Kaurareg people call Bedanug and which he calls Possession Island. If the fabled southern land is inhabited, read his instructions, he is to obtain the consent of the occupants “to take Possession of Convenient Situations in the Country” (cclxxxiii). Only if it is uninhabited is he to “take Possession [of it] for his Majesty”. Cook, however, is in no doubt as to how this is to be applied in practice:

Notwithstanding I had in the Name of His Majesty taken possession of several places upon this coast, I now once more hoisted English Coulers and in the Name of His Majesty George the Third took possession of the whole Eastern Coast from the above Latitude down to this place by the name of New South Wales, together with all the Bays, Harbours Rivers and Islands situate upon the said coast, after which we fired three Volleys of small Arms which were Answered by the like number from the Ship. (387-388)

In this performative episode we see how the gesture of conferring a name (both to Possession Island and to New South Wales) accompanies—indeed, facilitates—the act of taking possession. To take this account at face value, however, and believe that Cook proclaims the name *New South Wales* before the gathered men, would be to fall into one of the key traps of imperial history: putting too much stock in facts which come after the event (cf. Carter xvi). As with the naming (and renaming) of Botany Bay, the words “by the name of New South Wales” in Cook’s journal are, Beaglehole tells us in a note on Cook’s entry, “written in over erasure” (Cook 388n). That is, when he documents the events of that day, he leaves the space blank. “It is clear that the name was not given at once,” Beaglehole writes, that “Cook took possession of the east coast without naming it at all” (388n).
Naming facilitates possession, but naming can, it seems, be applied retrospectively, once possession is said to already be in effect. Naming is thus not only a broadly linguistic act, but a specifically textual one, taking place as part of the written production of knowledge of the *Endeavour* voyage. The possession of the east coast of New Holland, then, is achieved less by the ceremony as it happens *out there*—the planting of the flag in a particular place on a certain day, the number of rounds fired—than by its documentation as an ideal event *in here*, within the discursive space of the journal.

To end with a name, then, as Cook does with New South Wales and Banks does with the kangaroo, is to end at the beginning. It’s the beginning of the process of understanding of the animal in its complexity, of apprehending the eastern grey as separate from the western grey, from the red kangaroo, the wallaroo and the multitude of wallabies, pademelons, quokkas and tree kangaroos; of categorising, recognising and discussing these species. But it’s also the beginning of England’s invasion of New Holland, ushering in a violent era for the First Nations peoples of the continent. Possession for the British means dispossession for the Guugu Yimithirr, who will be largely forced from their country when the colonisers return to settle Gangaar in 1873, and rename it Cooktown. Their language, Guugu Yimithirr, will be suppressed along with other Indigenous languages, the Crown’s acquisition not only making “sovereign Aboriginal land *terra nullius*”, but making “Aboriginal people *vox nullius*” (Heiss and Minter 2). The arrival of the First Fleet in 1788 will see “the sudden appearance amongst Aboriginal people of a new set of linguistic and rhetorical conditions” (2), from which it will take “only a few generations for almost two-thirds of the pre-contact Aboriginal languages to be made extinct” (2). As colonisers, the British will impose the use of certain terms, such as kangaroo, and prohibit the use of others, including alternative species, gender, kinship, utilitarian, ancestral and totemic names for the animal. This will be done through “oppression, genocide, and forced assimilation” (Clyne 14), through formal and informal language policies that regard, in the nineteenth century, Aboriginal languages with “consistently negative attitudes” (13), and will evolve, in the twentieth century, into policies of “aggressive monolingualism” (14).

*Kangaroo* is a “creolised word”, writes Michael Farrell, “as is any word derived from an Indigenous language that uses the English-Latin alphabet” (“Bounding”, 11). From the perspective of First Nations people who don’t speak Guugu Yimithirr, “it is a word appropriated via English: a foreign or transnational word” (11). Particularly for the British, it is a word that conveys the strangeness of the kangaroo. It allows them to take possession of the mysterious animal, to remove it from its local Aboriginal context and place it, as an object of knowledge (*Mus canguru*), in their imperial system of classification. In doing so, however, they fail to appreciate the cultural and discursive specificity of gangurru. Their approximation of it, kangaroo, is not equivalent to gangurru, but becomes a new category altogether.

In this way the name kangaroo does not contain the various Guugu Yimithirr ways of conceiving and categorising kangaroos in different circumstances, nor does it acknowledge Guugu Yimithirr sovereignty over the concept gangurru. Neither the British in 1770 nor non-Indigenous Australians today have a claim to knowing or understanding these Indigenous concepts, but that does not discount the damage done by a dominant language in the service of colonisation. The British colonise the name gangurru—claiming ownership and authority over it—and turn it into a colonial term, one that denies and suppresses a multitude of Aboriginal terms and concepts corresponding to kangaroos. When they introduce the name kangaroo into New South Wales in 1788, it takes up residence as a settler word, neither Indigenous nor English but somewhere in between.
The Lion looked at Alice wearily. “Are you animal—vegetable—or mineral?” he said, yawning at every other word.

“It’s a fabulous monster!” the Unicorn cried out, before Alice could reply.

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*, 103-104

Apart from the kangaroo and the platypus, which is a horrible animal, made from the pieces of other animals, now there are camels too.

Jorges Luis Borges on why he never visited Australia

When Joseph Banks first spies a kangaroo in Guugu Yimithirr country, on June 25, 1770, he writes: “what to liken him to I could not tell, nothing certainly that I have seen at all resembles him” (85). He records the subsequent revelation of the kangaroo in his journal, as does James Cook and the botanical draughtsman Sydney Parkinson, the latter also making two sketches of the curious animal. It’s tempting to read in these documentary traces a sequence of well-ordered events leading to the discovery and description of a new species, but as we’ve seen, the textual and pictorial development of the category *kangaroo* does not proceed in a linear fashion, nor is it independent of those who document it. Rather, it’s replete with accidents and misperceptions, with the particular subjectivity of the animal’s European observers. The visitors to New Holland in 1770 do not arrive at an objective understanding of the kangaroo so much as they construct a monolingual category for it, one that suppresses all other cultural, linguistic and conceptual differences.

This thesis has followed the authorial logic of the journals—their chronology—in order to trace the development of the explorers’ particular subjective understanding of the bounding kangaroo. Because this concept accords with our own contemporary Western understanding of the kangaroo (specifically, our archetype or natural kind of the three larger species: the eastern grey, the western grey and the red), we consider it more accurate than their earlier attempts to describe the animal. But does the capacity for bounding seem obvious to us because it’s more apparent than other features, or because it’s the one we’ve been conditioned to see? Our categorical understanding of the kangaroo is a direct inheritance of Banks’ final assessment. As soon as Banks sees those kangaroos evade his greyhound in the long grass, bounding becomes bound to the kangaroo (cf. Farrell “Bounding”).

This doesn’t mean that such an understanding is arbitrary (the animal does indeed jump) but nor is it definitive. Were the kangaroo encountered in 1770 by a culture other than the English, we can imagine adherents of Buffon interpreting the animal differently to the Linnaean disciples who sail in on the *Endeavour*. We can imagine an archetype centred on tree-kangaroos or quokkas or pademelons, treating the big three as outliers rather than type species.

For alternative ways of conceiving and categorising the kangaroo, however, we need only look to the owners of the word *gangurru*. The Guugu Yimithirr people conceive of the different species of the kangaroos and wallaroos and wallabies in their country as separate categorical entities with individual names; only in certain kinship relations do they generalise with the all-encompassing term *daarraalngan* (Haviland 371). All other discursive arrangements require a greater degree of specificity, with distinctions between genders, between the kangaroo as an animal and as meat and as ancestor.

Our contemporary Western concept of the kangaroo is just as culture-specific: it doesn’t exist independent of us any more than it exists independent of actual kangaroos. Following Kant’s theory of

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31 Quoted in Eco *Platypus*, 6.
categorically mediated perception and Eco’s theory of interpretative semiotics, each kangaroo we encounter isn’t complete in and of itself, but reveals its meaning in relation to our individual perception and our shared understanding of the category kangaroo.

One of the central concerns of this thesis has been exploring how such meaning is constructed in the absence of this category—specifically, how Banks and Cook perceive and interpret the kangaroo while they’re still developing a functional understanding of it. By examining the interaction of the kangaroo, the explorers’ encounter with it and the language they use to describe it, we’ve seen how object, perception and language together create this understanding.

The category kangaroo thus represents a return to order for the Europeans, following Foucault’s assertion that order, in the eighteenth century, is not the arrangement of things but the doctrine by which they’re established as objects of knowledge (219). As it applies to the exploration of New Holland, order is not an objective reflection of the flora and fauna the Europeans encounter, but the act of instantiating those plants and animals within an imperial taxonomy—“those that belong to the emperor” (Borges Selected, 231)—and an empirical one—the Linnaean hierarchy. The knowledge collected by Banks, Solander and Spöring thus serves two masters, reflecting the shared sponsorship of the Endeavour expedition by the Crown and the Royal Society.

But these objects don’t sit easily in such systems. The “discovery” of the kangaroo is altogether different from the hoped-for discovery of Terra Australis, an object which already has a place marked out for it in the field of geography. (The eventual non-discovery of the Great Southern Land interestingly has no material impact on geography nor its objects of knowledge—the world keeps turning, its winds and currents unaffected.) The kangaroo has no pre-ordained position in systematic classification, either as species or genus or even family, confronting the Europeans as truly strange. Perhaps not any more so than a rhino or a manatee, but because it doesn’t fit pre-existing categories, because there’s no premade concept to explain it, it can’t be apprehended under an approximation. It asks instead to be dealt with in the moment. What is needed—in order to conceive, discuss and better understand the kangaroo—is to consider it in its own right, to develop for it a new category.

Thus, the encounter with the kangaroo is an exemplary episode of category formation, demonstrating the quantitative limits of European knowledge, and the limits of the theories for managing that knowledge. Over the course of this thesis we’ve seen how empirical observation and the Linnaean hierarchy in the eighteenth century are incapable of classifying the animal in an objective sense, instead constructing the kangaroo as a Euro-centric category. The initial attempts to classify the kangaroo using Linnaeus’ taxonomies—first in the Mus genus, then in one of its own, Macropus—don’t just fail to account for the complexity of the kangaroo and the diversity of its species and forms, but threaten the very foundations of systematic classification. The kangaroo unsettles the category and resists the forces of settlement, jumping fences and eating crops. Finding a place for it and the other zoological oddities of New Holland is an endeavour that eventually upends and redefines the whole order of the quadrupeds. “The anomalies of the old paradigm,” Bernard Smith writes, become “substantive evidence for the new” (viii).

This study thus ends on the cusp of the new paradigm, anticipating a number of avenues for future research. Of particular value would be an investigation into the parallel development of the kangaroo as a colonised object of knowledge (manifesting in early settler poetry like that of Barron Field and Charles Harpur) and as an object of classification in Europe (with the various taxonomic shifts required to account for the kangaroo and save the category of mammal from collapsing on itself) during the post-invasion period. I’m interested in understanding how these events and intellectual transformations maintain the idea of the kangaroo as strange and as an icon of the place we know as Australia, starting with Banks’ “the animals of the country” (89).

Recent research by Guugu Yimithirr historian Alberta Hornsby and the late Guugu Yimithirr elder Eric Deeral has added valuable insights into the Indigenous encounter with the Endeavour crew at Gangaar in 1770, filling some of the spaces left in the journals of Cook and Banks.32 Ongoing Indigenous scholarship in this area continues to excavate these settler texts and will invariably

32 Documented in McKenna (186-212).
contribute to a more nuanced understanding of *gangurru* and the other Guugu Yimidhirr categories of these animals.

There is also scope for expanding the present study to undertake a poetic reading of the journals of Banks and Cook as literary texts, rather than as journals, following Roman Jakobson, Lyn Hejinian, and perhaps most importantly, Michael Farrell. While my project here shares some aims with Farrell’s poetics of unsettlement, as articulated in *Writing Australian Unsettlement*, his case studies focus on the agency of authors to unsettle their respective literary genres and modes of written knowledge production, such as Bennelong’s “Letter to Mr Philips, Lord Sydney’s Steward” and Ned Kelly’s *Jerilderie Letter*. I have not applied this theory to the journals of Banks and Cook because in the encounter with the kangaroo it is the animal that does the unsettling, not the explorers. An unsettlement reading of the journals would, however, be a valuable addition to both the growing scholarship of unsettlement poetics and the study of the kangaroo as a textual concept.

After all, the men who cannot comprehend the complexity of the Guugu Yimidhirr concept of *gangurru* are the same ones who overlook Aboriginal people as the original discovers, inhabitants and traditional owners of New Holland. And the imperial attitude that leads these men to annex half a continent without the agreement of its owners is the same one that will later usher in the legal fiction of *terra nullius*.

By acknowledging the textual nature of the category *kangaroo*—made *in, with and for* language—we come to understand Banks’ final assessment of the kangaroo as provisional, along with our own contemporary Western understanding of the animal. Finding the appropriate taxonomic place for the kangaroo resolves it for the Europeans, returns it to order, but the animal’s hopping in and out of different classifications demonstrates the conditional nature of this resolution. The kangaroo is strange, no matter how familiar we are with it, no matter how settled it seems categorically. Our apprehension of it has simply become habituated—we don’t see it so much as we recognise it. Were we able to look on the animal without our pre-existing concept of *kangaroo*, we might see an entirely different beast. We might find ourselves saying, “what to liken him to I cannot tell, nothing certainly that I have seen resembles him” (Banks 85).


