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Dancing comes from the land

WRITINGS ON DANCE

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INSTALLATION VIEW FROM THE EXHIBITION **BLAK BEAUTY**, THE AUSTRALIAN MUSEUM, DJAMU GALLERY,
PART OF THE 1999 SYDNEY GAY AND LESBIAN MARDI GRAS, CURATED BY BROOK ANDREW

WRITINGS ON DANCE 20

DANCING COMES FROM THE LAND

SALLY GARDNER

In a recent lecture given in Melbourne[1], Pat Anderson, Director of Danila Dilba, Darwin's Aboriginal Health Service observed that ATSIC[2] Chair, Gatjil Djerkerra had recently made a significant gesture in the spirit of reconciliation. He had opened his son's sacred man-making ceremony to Prime Minister, John Howard, and Cabinet Ministers, John Herron and Michael Wooldridge. He had done this, Anderson explained, in the hope that "these men might understand, because if they understood they might act more appropriately". Anderson was arguing that while Aboriginal people have worked ceaselessly over the last 200 years to try to counter the ignorance of their culture(s) amongst white Australians, European efforts to acknowledge Aboriginal perspectives and to understand their "law" have been, at best, minimal. This, despite the fact that in a narrowly anthropological sense Indigenous Australians are some of the most studied peoples in the world.

One of the relatively few white historians concerned to rewrite Indigenous culture and resistance back into Australian history is Henry Reynolds. Reynolds claims that fundamental to the encounter between Aborigines and Europeans has been a "conflict between the Aboriginal concept of reciprocity and sharing and the European one of private property"[3]. Reynolds calls attention to this conflict not in order to construct a nostalgic or utopian view of Aboriginal societies but to underscore the contradictions, from an Aboriginal perspective, of European law. Reynolds points out that "at the time of Australian settlement English law protected property more than it protected life itself ... English law like most other legal systems in Europe paid great respect to possession – it was 'nine points of the law' as the old legal maxim ran."[4] Needless to say, Aboriginal people were positioned radically outside this law and the failure to "retreat from (this) historical injustice"[5] continues to have major implications for relations between European and Indigenous Australians.

Where it does exist, the non-Indigenous Australian's concern "to know" or understand Indigenous Australians can never be pursued outside the fundamental inequalities and asymmetrical relations of our history. One aspect of this disparity has been described by Kay Schaffer[6] in terms of "the different costs and values related to telling and listening." To illustrate with a case in point: when beginning work on this issue of *Writings on Dance* I contacted an Indigenous colleague whose first question was whether I had read the material on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property and Australian Copyright Laws (see Janke p.88). I understood this question to be a cautionary one – directing me to carefully consider how the printing, availability and circulation of "knowledge" or "information" has more often than not, for Aboriginal people, meant dispossession or appropriation of their culture. Indeed, Eric Michaels, who is also represented in this issue, has suggested that "there is something essential to (Indigenous) cultural maintenance associated with not writing which is yet to be understood."[7]

It is not within the scope of a preface such as this to debate or elaborate on the fundamental issues and questions touched on above. They are raised as a way of introducing the present collection of interviews and articles by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous "voices" that issue from, speak to, and attempt to move forward from this violent history and problematic terrain. As a collection, this volume of *Writings on Dance* seeks to contribute to a reciprocity and sharing between Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dance and other cultural practices. It includes a diverse range of discourses arising from some of the many relations to Indigenous cultural practices that co-exist in contemporary Australian society. Perspectives include that of Gurruwun Yunupingu who lives and teaches in the Arnhem Land community of Yirrkala, and the committed and self-reflexive anthropological viewpoints of Franca Tamisari and Naomi Smith. This collection also includes different critical perceptions and political implications that Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences can bring to and draw from Indigenous performances (see Lieman and Scott); and it examines the impact of Western institutions and paradigms and the modes of Indigenous engagement and resistance (see Michaels, Janke, and the "Awaye" and "Arts Today" interviews).

The title of this issue, "Dancing comes from the land", drawn from the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Land Artists report to the Indigenous Reference Group (see Janke p.88), is intended to evoke, not a primitivist conception of Indigenous cultures, but the very concrete and profound existential and political relations that all of the articles in this collection, in one way or another, demonstrate to exist between living body and country.

1 October 12th, 1999: The Sixth Annual Eleanor Shaw Lecture, ABC Studios, Southbank, Melbourne.
2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commisssion
3 Reynolds, H. *The Law of the Land*. Penguin, 1987, p. 14
4 ibid. p.2
5 ibid. p.4
6 In her Keynote Address to Synthetics 1999: Conference of the Cultural Studies Association of Australia, University of Western Sydney, Nepean, Dec., 1999.
7 Michaels, E. 'Hollywood Iconography: A Warlpiri Reading (1987)' in *Bad Aboriginal Art*. Michigan: University of Minnesota Press, 1994 p.84

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CONTENTS

Language and Traditional Dance Performing in Public Schools

Gurruwun Yunupingu

SEMINAR PAPER DELIVERED AT THE 2ND NATIONAL ABORIGINAL DANCE CONFERENCE "YAITYA – MEYU NGUNYAWAIETI INBARENDI" (KAURNA LANGUAGE) 1997

Nha mirribukmak? My name is Yalmay Yunupingu. I am a teacher at Yirrkala School in North East Arnhem Land, it is situated in the Gulf of Carpentaria. I've been with the school for a number of years. I belong to the Rirratjingu clan, the language that my father speaks. My skin name is Gamanydjan. I have six daughters who attend the school I work in. My totems are Djarrak, Mutjalanytjal, Djanda, Buwata and a few others.

Performing in public schools I'd like to tell you from my past experiences when I was still in school and during my teaching experiences. In that time a lot of people were very interested in our culture, they were amazed by the body paints and the costumes, the atmosphere was stark and silence all around, eagerly waiting for the ancient unique and sophisticated Yolngu traditional music and dance. Many audiences were astonished and unsure how to react because they had never seen or heard traditional dance and music before. It made many cry, for in some parts of the world some indigenous peoples have lost their culture because of the assimilation and colonisation.

Performing in schools we are initiating a strong relationship. Identifying ourselves as traditional Yolngu of Australia with many rich cultures where our foundation, our core, the fundamental basis of our religious, sacred and social order of life comes from.

Performing in schools we are initiating a foreign culture to the children. We are identifying ourselves as a traditional Yolngu of Australia with many talents, artistic skills and integrated culture. It is identifying who we are in terms of land, where we stand, the songs, images, language and totems. It is teaching the others that our culture is still living today.

Through song and dance there is a strong message that some people do not respect and understand the culture that has been around for 40 thousand years which we are now practising. We come from a large and rich resource where everything is divided into two world views, Yirritja and Dhuwa, it is to keep the two sides in balance, every place, every person, every element, every song, dance and everything. This is our purpose in performing in public schools.

Yolngu culture that we are teaching people is with a story that we want to get across about reconciliation. To build a closer relationship between black Australians and

white Australians. To make people understand and respect it, even though the culture is different to one another. We imitate and celebrate what happens in the past, present and the future. It talks about our journey of our ancestral beings.

We celebrate the happy and the sad events, the young and the old, farewells and welcoming, funerals, men's and women's cleansing, purify, Raypirri (discipline) and any other formal or informal ceremonies.

We celebrate the renewal of the new generation in every clan and renewal of the new environments that grow from seeds and eggs. In every ceremony we come together as one because it brings in the sense of celebration of the differences, bala ga lili.

A word Galtha has been introduced to the school by the community elders in 1986 for a course of study of Yolngu knowledge. Galtha can also be understood as a place. It is a place people can assemble, arriving from their own territories. It is more than this, a place where negotiations are carried out, agreements made, plans formulated. More importantly it points to the whole process of meeting, discussing, negotiating, planning agreement, and acting. It is a starting point.

Gathering here today we are celebrating something important and unique occasion for Yolngu people. I would call this a Galtha, a place where there is another meaning. For a ceremony to work properly, negotiation must be done before the performance can start, to put forward our ideas to reach agreements. It reflects the coming together and meeting of ideas.

The meaning of this conference is like Galtha. A hunter or a man throws a spear, the spear flies in the air, it lands and marks a hole where the point of the spear made a hole. The interpretation of this Galtha story is pinpointing to the elders and to us as educators where is our starting point for our children to begin in what ground and in what level. We need to focus this more seriously and effectively collaboratively. Collectively to continue having this idea of performing in public schools.

I would like to urge schools to have cultural exchange program happening or even conduct a workshop on any other culture. To stop these most irritating and childish ways of attitudes while children are young. Children will grow up in a sense of understanding the attitudes of the white and black Australians. A good education means that all the different views and different ideas must be brought together to make a Galtha. So let's start again.

As part of the colonisation process, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander performing arts have been portrayed as primitive ritual lacking in the sophistication and complexity of contemporary western civilisation. At best, they have been portrayed as exotic or of limited historic interest. Through this narrow view of the world, western civilisation reveals itself as ethnocentric and naïve.

Aboriginal theatre: does 'sold out' mean 'selling out'?

John Scott

THIS ARTICLE WAS FIRST PUBLISHED IN *RACE AND CLASS*, 35, 4 (1994) REPRINTED WITH PERMISSION OF THE AUTHOR

Western thought is preoccupied with a linear view of time and space, seeing the individual on some form of timeline which begins with 'primitive' and moves forward to the present and future to a time when the individual is presumably 'civilised'. This time-space perception is consistent with the colonisation mentality and is backed up by the western pseudo-science of social Darwinism. Yet history would tell us that the human race has not 'developed' along linear projections. A study of past and present civilisations reveals human civilisation to be cyclic and irregular in nature. This historic fact is incompatible with western developmental views which, through various social and psychological constructions, have labelled indigenous people and their cultures, and their performing arts, as primitive or at an early stage of civilisation and/or development. This labelling of indigenous cultures as 'primitive' probably provides some relief for the guilt-ridden group consciousness of a civilisation that would destroy the world in the name of progress and trample indigenous cultures in the race to do so.

Western civilisation has seen Aboriginal performing arts as 'natural' or 'instinctive' outlets used by 'primitive' people who were forced to come to terms with their natural environment. Aboriginal performing arts are in fact much more than these oversimplified explanations could suggest. Ancient Aboriginal performing arts involved sophisticated deliverance of complex and abstract ideas and were the result of the need for self-expression inherent in human nature. A central theme was the natural environment, where the performers became accomplished mimics of other beings which inhabited the world. The performers reflected the rhythms in nature and used them in their dances.

Western civilisation would tell us that an inability to explain the mysteries of life led to the creation of spirits and 'myths and legends'. However, this is the interpretation of an overly materialistic and spiritually denuded civilisation. From an Aboriginal point of view, these people were not looking for explanation of the unknown but were, in fact, reflecting spiritual truth as they saw it. They were people in touch with the spiritual life of the earth and living an environmentally and economically sustainable lifestyle which would last longer than any other civilisation on the planet. The presentation of the performances was as detailed and complex as any contemporary (or traditional) European play, with the exception of stage backdrops and settings which were inappropriate to the Australian lifestyle. Costume, colour and sound usually played an important part in performances, as well as body-painting, feathers, head-dresses, emblems, brightly-coloured beads/stones, totem poles, ochre markings and even crystals. Some dances were characterised by the stomping of feet, intricate hand and foot movement, beating of drums, clicking of sticks, clapping of hands, rhythmical chanting and the sound of resonant and repetitive music. The complexities of ancient, traditional Aboriginal performing arts were so intricate as to be difficult to interpret within a western mode of thought.

Hence, with the arrival of the European, Aboriginal civilisation entered a 'dark age'. The struggles of the first hundred years were centred on land ownership. In the second hundred years, the battle centred on Aboriginal children and culture. The invaders held strongly to the belief of social Darwinism and used a capitalistic Christian doctrine to justify the genocide of a race of people whose civilisation and spirituality were alien and incomprehensible to them. By the early twentieth century, white Australia regarded Aborigines as a dying race and used liberal reform to establish missions and reserves which were paternalistic in nature. Aboriginal traditional cultures were actively discouraged. Indigenous languages and customs were banned. Aboriginal children and parents were forcibly separated. Aboriginal people were moved from traditional territories to alien landscape. In Queensland, in particular, reserve policy forced coastal people to live inland and vice versa.

Despite this active genocide, by the 1930s the Aboriginal population began to increase and culture, although sometimes in tatters, was still handed down from generation to generation. Paternalism and assimilation were the modern answers to 'the Aboriginal problem' of White Australia. Kevin Gilbert, in his book, *Because a Whiteman'll Never Do It* (1973), gives an interesting insight into how wounding paternalism is and how effective it can be as an agent for cultural genocide. He discusses how the tool of assimilation and separation (of mixed race children and their mothers) actually assisted the renaissance of Aboriginal drama/writing. For most Aboriginal writers, writing in English was a direct result of such divide and control policies. Assimilation gave them a limited education and the incarceration of the most militant Aborigines in the prisons also helped the rise of Aboriginal writing in English. Prison for many Aborigines has been their college. This gave rise

to the Aboriginal literature of the 1970s which was often based on anger and frustration, rather than to an Aboriginal literature based on traditional forms. The Aboriginal writers who arose during the 1960s and '70s were the products of assimilation revolting against assimilation. The struggles for dignity and identity were led by such writers as the late Oodgeroo of Noonuccal and Kevin Gilbert. Under the benign federal government of Gough Whitlam, struggles developed for justice, land rights and self-management, and these were reflected in the literature and drama of the day.

As Aboriginal cultures entered their renaissance inside a white mainstream culture, the pressing question arose of Aboriginal content presented in white forms. Aboriginal culture contains all the dramatic elements that western theatre demands, but can Aboriginal theatre represent itself truthfully within these white constraints and is it necessary to represent ourselves within white restraints? Under the pressure of European mainstream society, merely to be heard, we have had to adopt European art forms. Within the theatre, our first steps towards telling our stories have been taken fairly recently. The first play, *The Cherry Pickers* by Kevin Gilbert (1988), was written in 1968. *The Cake Man* by Robert Merritt (1978) grew out of the formation of the Black Theatre Company of the early '70s. These have been followed by many more 'successful' plays written by black Australians. But in what form do we judge success? Is success filling a mainstream theatre with middle class white Australians? Can this be achieved without selling out our Aboriginality? Who is the audience for black theatre?

There is no doubt about the Aboriginality of the black plays of the 1970s and '80s. Their themes represent a counter culture – a reaction against the dictates of white Australian society. Aboriginality within black theatre has been described by Robert Merritt as 'an inheritance from black Australian history and an immediate and sometimes violent reaction to the black Australian present'.

There is a need, however, to examine the form or presentation of black plays. The early texts of the '70s were often accorded introductions by non-Aboriginal people. In the cases of *Kullark and the Dreamers* by Jack Davis (1982) and *The Cake Man*, both volumes are accompanied by explanatory introductions by H.C. Coombs and R.M. Berndt. These introductions are accompanied by preface and stage and historical notes before the playwrights' names even appear in the text. H.C. Coombs, in his introduction, suggests that Aboriginal writers have formed a black intelligentsia which is made up of 'men and women who have seized upon what our (white) society can offer them in education and access to the ideas of our (white) civilisation.'

He neglects Aborigines who have rejected the ideas and art forms of the invader's culture to find their own sources of inspiration within Aboriginal culture. He neglects also the inadequacies of mainstream audiences in coping with Aboriginal drama. Often in our black plays, large sections necessary to explain traditional

elements have been edited out to make them more palatable to western tastes. Many plays have been accepted by mainstream society as biographical (e.g., *The Cake Man*) but, because of the white format of the drama, symbolic elements vital in black dramas have been overlooked or purposely neglected. The accent on community rather than on the individual is also ignored in mainstream theatre, where often individual advancement is emphasised rather than community health and well-being, as was traditionally the focus. Aboriginal theatre in contemporary Australia faces an interesting paradox. The Aboriginality of the discourse and dramatic structures weaken it as European drama and, conversely, the reliance on European theatrical conventions weakens it as Aboriginal drama. Within this paradox, black Australia must face its cultural revival.

In 1992, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dance Company and Dance Theatre toured northern Australia with the dance dramas, *Harold* and *Maralji*. These both received mixed reviews from varied audiences of urban and community people. The standard of dance and acting was excellent but both received criticisms levied at dance concept/interpretation, choreography and general exposition of story. Comments from community members of Doomadgee[1] echo the dilemma of Aboriginal theatre. They felt that the storyline was difficult to understand, urban concepts in *Harold* had little or no correlation with the community and too much liberty had been taken with traditional elements. This latter comment was also repeated by Elders of the Townsville community. It is interesting to note that the heaviest criticisms come from Aboriginal people themselves.

Malcolm Cole, one of the founding members of the Dance Theatre, made an interesting comment in reference to *Maralji* and their northern tour: 'What is the purpose of Aboriginal theatre if Aboriginal people cannot understand or follow it?' He felt a need for the drama to be accompanied by sufficient explanation to render it comprehensible for community members. However, this may not be appropriate for urban Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

Kim Walker's production of *Harold*[2] won national acclaim, yet community members in the far north found it incomprehensible. The concepts in the storyline were clearly beyond their worldview. Is it culturally correct, then, to produce black theatre for white audiences? Must good black theatre receive Aboriginal support in order to be successful? What is success and on whose terms? Andree Reese, an Aboriginal and Islander dance company representative, explained in a magazine article (*Outrage*, November 1990) that she saw no problem with Aboriginal theatre being viewed as 'primitive or exotic' by white audiences if this proved to be a good selling point. The black community must question the role of indigenous theatre in both black and white Australia. Theatre audiences have traditionally been white-dominated in Australia and Aborigines have felt little affinity with a theatre that did not reflect or portray black Australians.

The inroads made by black plays have largely centred on exposing white audiences to a black Australian point of view. The issue of Aboriginal people understanding black theatre is reversed in this situation, when black writers must ensure that white audiences can comprehend their language use without detracting from the Aboriginality of their works. Kevin Gilbert grapples with this dilemma in *The Cherry Pickers*. In a play striving for linguistic credibility, the author is placed in the unenviable situation of elevating the Aboriginal English to make a socio-political point at the expense of the play's naturalism and plausibility (i.e., in the character Zeena). This problem is increasingly apparent in contemporary black dramas which must strive to make its message clear to both black and white Australians and yet clearly maintain its Aboriginality.

As Aboriginal culture continues to grow in this country, black Australia must and will come to terms with the issues of cultures within a culture. As more black faces appear on the white stages of Australia, white Australia also will face the issues of decolonisation and the establishment of a national identity which is truly and uniquely Australian.

1 Doomadgee is a remote Aboriginal community in western Queensland
2 The story of an Aboriginal opera singer in the 1940s

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Charles Messey
Murray Island Dancers
"Mixtures at the Mart"
May Day performance
Brown's Mart Community Theatre

TRANSCRIPT AND ARTICLE

Tania Lieman

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[TRANSCRIPT OF CHARLES MESSEY'S COMMENTARY]

Hello everyone, we got some Murray dancers from the Torres Strait Islander community and we're putting on a couple of numbers.

This is an introduction because a lot of people have talked about Mr. Mabo and he was a Murray Islander. So it is a small community dancing some songs and the Murray people will show you some of our culture, our dances, and I know that you'll enjoy it.

Now, I'll just go and see if the dancers are ready. I think you will enjoy our style of dancing. Thank you.

[PAUSE WHILE CHARLES IS BACKSTAGE]

They're not quite ready folks, so I apologise for that. I'll tell you a little bit about Murray Island. It is toward the east of Torres Strait. There are three major groups of island – central, west and east – start of the Great Barrier Reef. And Native Title was won because the people knew the culture and the customs and we still tell those stories generations after generation, and tonight you'll see some dancing which has been handed down from our forefathers, and some practice steps.

So, ah, we are the living example of our culture, and although some of us don't speak the language, we relate to it and we still carry on with our traditions.

But, ah, what we'll do is we'll present a couple of numbers simply telling you about our lifestyle back home.

I'll explain the couple of the songs and also toward the end we invite all of youse to participate in a dance when everyone sits down and we ask you follow our actions as we sing the songs.

But just give me a minute and I'll go and check again.

[PAUSE WHILE CHARLES GOES BACKSTAGE.
DANCERS AND MUSICIANS ENTER AND TAKE THEIR POSITIONS.]

This song is about - simple song, about building a grass hut out of grass.

[DANCE AND SONG]

Thank you people, as you can see it is a little bit different, but we have the dancers there, we have Allen, James, Walter and [gestures to musicians] Alice, Serene, Marika.

As you can see we have an instrument here of bamboo, supplies our rhythm, it keeps the timing, we have support group [gestures to musicians] we have Jenda on the drum as the bass.

The next song is simply a song about Murray Island describing the island, it's a beautiful island, we have a magic volcano and the island is surrounded by the Great Barrier Reef.

This song is about the island, the sea, the land and the wind.

[DANCE AND SONG]

Well, I hope you are enjoying the dancing folks.

The next one is Hope Island, telling the people how we record our history, of the divers, diving for trocus outside of Cairns. The song is called *Keegorkeh* (PHONETIC SP.)

[DANCE AND SONG]

Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen and especially the dancers.

Now we are going to ask youse all to come and participate in some of our dancing.

So you can get up and come and sit in the circle, with our troupe here with you in the circle. And you watch them and follow them.

Ok. It's going to be a little fast – just keep with the rhythm.

The next one is simply Banana – sacred fruit of the South Pacific Islanders and everyone eats it a lot. Here is a song about it.

[DANCE AND SONG]

Anyway, you did a good job. Do you want to have another go at it?

How about our support group? I wish I could sing like that.

[THE DANCE BEGINS AGAIN]

Thank you very much. It feels like everyone is appreciating it. So we've got one more. It's a nice simple straight forward one like Banana (everyone laughs!)

Banana is about growing the crop. There's a lot of work, but everyone has a different way of growing it and everybody tries to grow the biggest bunch of bananas.

The next one is Tabanaba – simply about going out to the reef and getting the right tide. If you get the wrong tide, you miss your boat.

Follow the group again, the men and women and I think you'll pick it up.

[SONG AND DANCE. ONE OF THE SINGERS, MARIKA, SAYS THE WORD 'SMILE!' AT THE END]

Ladies and gentlemen, thank the organisers, thank you everybody for giving us the opportunity to show part of our culture. And I know that we would like to become a major force in this community and participate in all actions and all the agendas that this group might plan.

We want to be, be, part of it. Thank you very much.

What is interesting about this particular performance and why I have chosen to reproduce Charles Messey's commentary in full, is because the commentary was such an integral part of the 'dance'. Charles wove his narrative throughout the performance and his posture was a willing transmitter of his culture. He wanted to communicate the fullest possible meaning of the culture, implicit in the dance, for our understanding.

The group mainly consisted of elders of the community and the dances were traditional. The 'support group' Charles refers to (which made me think of back-up singers) were women elders with great skill vocally and percussively. They were seated on the back of the stage cross-legged and to some members of the audience, entirely invisible behind the PA. They weren't hiding, just sitting in the place they should be regardless of the dictates of the given performance space. They were motivated by different spatial considerations.

The evening was called *Mixtures* – held at Brown's Mart Community Arts Space in an open courtyard with a raised stage. The Murray Island Dancers arrived early (as I did) and took up a central table in the audience. The performers ranged from local acapella groups, performance poets, musicians and groups of varying styles. The evening was included as part of the May Day celebrations. May Day remains an important social and community event, unlike other states where it has become relatively obscure.

The Murray Island Dancers were the only culturally specific (non-white) group included in the program and this seems to be because of Charles Messey's personal links with the organisers and his genuine desire to, as he put it, 'be part of it'.

There were a number of distinctive features of this performance that I would like to identify:

- Charles' commentary,
- the spatial configuration of the space and the relationship of performers to the audience,
- the way the use of the single word 'smile' produced multiple layers of meaning, and
- the context of the dance itself.

Ordinarily in dance, there is not usually an accompanying commentary. However in culturally specific forms or 'traditional' dance where the sung and spoken language is other than English and where the meaning of the dance is both ritualistic and/or cultural the type of commentary that Charles developed occurs, particularly in Aboriginal and Islander dance performances designed as part of a tourist program or where the dancing is classifiable as 'traditional'. Charles' commentary was very relaxed and casual, in fact he chewed gum through the entire of it. In the transcript there are moments where Charles is checking to see if the performers are ready.

This business went on for about ten minutes and the audience either sat quietly waiting, or listening to Charles. He introduced the group three times before they were actually ready to come on stage. They had been sitting in the audience watching right up until their turn in the program.

Already I was observing two different values or attitudes to performance protocol and time running in parallel. The organisers were also late, but there was a sense of hurry and urgency, waiting in the audience was frustrating and tense as microphones were moved about, tested and equipment fiddled with. The Murray Island Dancers were differently engaged in the time and space of the event. They made their presence very strongly felt, sitting around a large table in the centre from the audience where everyone else was either seated on chairs or the floor. They were very attentive to the other acts but never clapped. I wasn't sure what this meant. They spoke very quietly and constantly to each other. Then when it was their time to perform they moved from the audience, not up to the stage, but backstage, to the dressing room to begin getting changed and ready, leaving Charles to make introductions. About 15 minutes later, they were ready to begin. No-one thought it opportune to call an interval, so we all just sat there.

Once the performance was underway however, there was a momentum and energy that moved from dance to dance. The commentary didn't interrupt or fracture this sense of movement. The performers held a relaxed but dynamic focus and I felt held in it as well. I presumed that the difference in time and attitude I perceived were related to my western notion of performance conventions and protocol. I felt the frame of reference stretching. I was assuming that the Murray Island Dancers were performing their dances entirely out of context, in one sense reducing it to the status of a demonstration. In fact, the dances were being performed with their ritual and cultural significance intact. The integrity of the dance was not compromised, and the performers were comfortable in the setting and able to empower the space in order that it become a culturally appropriate setting for them. They created the conditions they needed almost in spite of the disparate elements of the event. They infused the space with their ritual and culture.

I felt this contrasted very strongly to dance performances I had seen that were placed within a tourist frame. There, I have felt the ritual and cultural significance lacking, as if the performers were going through the motions, dulled by repetition, boredom and the superficial level of exchange and consumerist expectation that rushed and overburdened tourist itineraries often dictate.

Here, the Murray Island Dancers were infusing the event with genuine and fresh offers of community and their interpretation of the spirit of May Day. Their choice of dances reflected their work, and ethic of production, in a delightful and not patently obvious way. The songs weren't expressive of freedom struggles or fights for the basic wage or an 8 hour day, but they were entirely fitting. They were about growing their crops, diving, fishing and sailing for food. Charles constantly referred to each

dance as simple, and indeed there was a simplicity to the entire performance, not of form or content, but the kind of simplicity that creates clarity and a space of intimacy for an audience to enter.

Charles warmed us all up to participation and in doing so energised the audience and was able to completely refigure the audience/performer relationship. The performers and audience moved to join each other in a circle seated on the ground. The spatial configuration of audience separated from the performers by the stage, that had dominated, was dismantled in a matter of moments. It was quite amusing to observe how difficult it was to reassemble for the next act.

The dances we learnt were quite complex (even though we only had to follow hand and arm gestures) and there was much laughter as we struggled to find the co-ordination and timing.

To shift an audience beyond passive reception to active participation is a risk in any performance and generally difficult to achieve. In the tradition of Western theatre I had been taught to conceive the audience/performer relationship as a fragile enterprise based on resistant, often hostile power relations, or else woven with the glamour of an encompassing and authoritative aura. I recalled theatre companies such as The Sydney Front who deliberately exposed and exploited these supposed power relations by removing the seating, demanding the audience participate by offering them money to remove their clothes, herding them with a cattle prod, dispersing them, dividing them, seducing them and sometimes refusing to perform for them. But here in Darwin, I felt far removed from these post-modern imperatives and the preoccupation with 'stages of terror'. This aspect of the Torres Strait Islander's performance was not self-conscious, it was not a device or a manipulation, but an offering, and received an equally spontaneous response.

Passing from performer to audience there was, however, as far as I can trust my own interpretation, a deliberate and self-conscious moment of superb irony. Historically, the people of the Torres Strait Islands were heavily influenced by Missionary forms of colonialism, and it is this aspect of the performance that the occasion for irony arose.

The main singer, Marika, came down from the stage to join the male dancers and the audience in the circle. There was no-one leading the teaching of the dance, in fact there was no teaching, we were simply invited to follow the actions and join in. At the end of the final song, Marika took a moment to engage the audience and with a huge grin she told us to 'Smile'.

In that moment she evoked with humour and irony the tensions, the contradictions, the paradoxical nature of relationships between black and white, of missionary authority and the humiliation of being told to smile while singing Bible songs or to perform as 'good blacks'. She evoked her own missionary past as well as reflecting aspects of our racist history to us. She enacted a complete role reversal, issuing a

gentle mocking reminder of her ambiguous status, position, role and authority as an indigenous person and with one word spoke volumes about the performance of being black.

I don't think the reminder was meant to chastise, it was a good joke, she thought it was very funny, and for me, it was an enormously potent moment of theatre. Though I had the feeling that she had done this before.

It was also a shift from an indirect style of engagement with the audience, to a very direct and bold engagement. One where a performer deliberately broke the ranks of a well behaved, silent ensemble to emerge and speak and express a strong individuality. For me, there was a delicacy and subtlety in the entire performance. I reflect on this performance and consider it a truly radical piece of performance. I say that because of the complex power relationships and multiple layers of meaning present, that were negotiated with great subtlety, delicacy and wit.

For some reason, I am reminded of an incident at Anabaroo Store, just north of Kakadu National Park. Anabaroo is a pub, petrol and tucker stop along the highway between Katherine and Darwin. I stopped in there with a friend and heard the shopkeeper ask a group of Aboriginal people travelling from Arnhem Land to Darwin where they were from. The shopkeeper was really trying to be Aboriginal friendly and obviously liked the people and was very curious. He said "so where are you mob from?" The group took a pause like a Greek chorus and one old man smiled and said, "Australia!"

From Milingimbi, a small island off the coast of North-east Arnhem Land[1], Alfred, David and Jeffrey came to Sydney in September 1998 to attend a conference on financial management organised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). I went to meet these old and knowledgeable community leaders in the foyer of a city hotel where they were relaxing at the end of the day. With them there were two other senior men representing the neighbouring community of Elcho Island, another major settlement in North-east Arnhem Land. While I instantly exchanged prolonged hand shakes with my adoptive relatives from Milingimbi and shared with them the pleasant surprise of such a fortuitous meeting, I could not remember meeting the other two men. As in many other situations when meeting for the first time Yolngu people in their community or elsewhere, I was introduced by being told the way I relate to them in the kinship ties which link most Yolngu people of this region. Alfred, my adoptive brother, introduced me to the other men by saying that one was my 'son', and the other my 'paternal cross-cousin' and thus urged me to address them with the appropriate kinship terms. Eagerly I did so while we exchanged greetings under the approving eyes of my adoptive relatives from Milingimbi. After this short but accurate introduction, perhaps to show that ours was not a mere relationship according to the position we came to occupy in the intricate kinship network following my recruitment, one of the men told me: "I know you as I saw you dance at a mortuary ceremony on Elcho Island". This remark struck me at the time and, once again made me think about the significance of dancing and more specifically the implications of my participation in ceremonial dancing in North-east Arnhem Land.

Dancing the land, the land dances through us

Franca Tamisari

I start by telling this story because in what follows I approach the significance and meaning of Yolngu dance not in relation to its complex political aspects, namely the transferral and negotiation of knowledge between groups and individuals, but especially to illustrate how a kind of knowledge or embodied knowing is acquired through participation in dancing and should thus be considered and understood from a performance perspective. As my own learning and participation in dancing will show such a "performance perspective" aims to go beyond the discursive, cognitive and referential meanings of dance movements as symbols or mere representations of ancestral events associated with country, and to shift attention to *the way* in which symbols acquire meaning and effectiveness by being performed. It is from a performance perspective that attention is shifted from *what* is performed to *the relationship* that dancing establishes between people, country and ancestors as well as between the participants in a ceremony. While the significance of dance as a system of signs and what these mean or represent, should not be neglected, I intend, to paraphrase von Sturmer (1987:74), to go over-and-above the meaning of dance as the mechanical playing out or enactment of sign systems and to show how dance embodies statements about being-in-the-world and being-with-others. It is thus by overcoming the analytical polarisation between movement and experience (Best 1978:137), symbol and feeling (Langer 1953:183) text and structure (Kapferer 1986:192) that I begin to explore how, in Yolngu dances "the body speaks – directly and in its totality" (von Sturmer 1987:74) of our being-in-the-world and being-with-others.

IN THE FOOTPRINTS OF THE ANCESTORS

If, as Best (1978:137) points out, human movement, and I would add performance in general, "does not *symbolise* reality, it *is* reality" (original emphasis), the reality of Yolngu performance and in particular dance, is yet another way in which performers body forth, manifest and transform ancestral actions and meanings in and on the land into visible, embodied forms or "footprints" (*djalkiri*) as Yolngu would say. As I explain elsewhere (Tamisari 1998) the Yolngu term *djalkiri*, "footprint", which is often rendered in English as "foundation" of the Law or Culture (*rom*) refers to all visible marks left by the ancestral beings during their cosmogonic journeys across the land. It was during their travelling over long distances across the shapeless land that ancestral beings imprinted and transformed their bodies into the country and thus, bestowed it upon groups of people they also created at different

FRANCA TAMISARI AT YOLGNU CEREMONY, MILINGIMBI, NORTHERN TERRITORY
(A DETAIL OF THIS IMAGE IS ALSO REPRODUCED ON PAGE 112)

locations. These manifestations include named places and landscape features (*waanga*), kinship relationships among groups resulting from their positioning across the land (*gurruṭu*), stories recounting the creative actions and journeys of the ancestral beings (*dhaawu*), personal and group names (*yaaku*, *bundurr* and *likan*, respectively). Djalkiri also refers to the embodiment and activation of these manifestations, that is the re-creation of ancestral cosmogonic actions through the performance of designs, music, songs and dancing. It is in the performance of songs, dance, body and ground designs that the ancestral actions of movement, trajectory and naming are brought into presence. If in addition, as I have argued (ibid. 1998), knowledge of the country and of the associated Law is acquired, legitimised and negotiated by seeing and experiencing the ancestral "footprints", performances may be seen as the most structured context in which ancestral power is not only brought into presence but to a certain extent, by being known and absorbed by the performers' bodies, it transforms and it is transformed into their experience.

As the image of the footprint indicates, these visible marks should not only be understood as a production of the body, the permanent and static result of particular ancestral cosmogonic acts which characterise the unique identity of places and people associated with them. Nor can footprints be considered in isolation but, following one another, like dots in a line or links in a chain thus forming a track or a path, they establish spatio-temporal connections and emotional bonds between people and places. The track or path left behind by an ancestral being thus conveys notions of stasis and permanence as well as of movement and flow, unique, individual and localised as well as shared, group and regional identities which are played out in ceremonial performances. The reality of Yolngu performance, and especially dancing, is thus one of epiphany and transformation in which relationships with place and people are established, lived-in and embodied by the dancers.

As the meaning of footprints thus can be said to reside in between, that is in the social, political links and emotional bonds they fashion between places and ancestral events as well as people and country, the meaning of dancing is between the steps, between the participants of a ceremony, the intersubjective space of desire and compassion, love and competition, that one enters through dancing.

STEPPING INTO KNOWLEDGE

Like Yolngu children I learnt how to dance before I could speak one of the local languages of North-east Arnhem Land. Like children I started by observing the dancing movements of older people and, in my case, the energetic foot movements of young women dancers. Stamina and strength are in fact required in following the fast tempo of many songs which are often performed with fluidity and apparent effortlessness for several hours in the heat of the day.

As soon as they can stand up toddlers are encouraged to dance by imitating (*yakarrman*) their older siblings and other relatives and they do so, often eagerly, amongst the laughter and encouragement of the immediate spectators. Unlike Yolngu children, I started practising the basic foot and arm movements in the seclusion of my residence.

The double shuffling stepping which characterises most Yolngu and particularly women's dances, is performed by bending the knees and leaning backwards[2]. In turn each foot is lifted, made to lightly touch the ground in front of the body and then, once it is aligned backwards with the stationary foot, the weight is then shifted and the same movement is repeated with the other foot. The stepping is also started by shuffling the forward-moving foot towards the other with an inward movement which kicks sand over it[3]. Whereas the stepping only varies in intensity and accent[4], it is arm gestures which change according to the ancestral character or phenomenon which is performed. While still sitting and observing the dances I would ask and be told the subject of each song. "This is water" (*gapu dhuwal*), the

women would say cupping their hands and moving them up and down in front of their stomach; "this is rain (*waltjan*)", their fingers together just above their faces bending at the knuckles; and for seagull fishing in flight, they would reach for a stick or a blade of grass lying around and, by holding it at its extremities, would move it up and down perpendicular to the ground.

Given the apparent simplicity of Yolngu stepping and arm movements, I quickly felt confident enough to perform in public. Despite my confidence, however, the first time I stood up and joined the women dancers I found that it was very difficult to co-ordinate stepping and arm gestures in a fluid bodily movement which would at the same time follow the tempo. In my solitary practice I rehearsed the movements without music and more importantly apart from surrounding performers and away from the eyes of attentive and vociferous observers. Overwhelmed by the rhythm which was beaten out by the moving bodies around me and by the shouting encouragement of the seated participants, the mechanical confidence my body had learnt in isolation completely dissolved. My knees started trembling uncontrollably and I was almost unable to move my arms. This made me realise that, like Yolngu children I had to practise and learn by performing with others and for others, and like children, albeit more painfully, I had to endure the laughter and shouting that my undeveloped arm movements and rhythmically insecure steps provoked.

Despite my initial awkwardness I was always encouraged to participate and advised on how to improve the shuffling, stress my arm gestures, beat time correctly and especially to stop by emphasising the stepping and arm movement on the last beat. As my dance improved so did my language skills. While dancing with the women or tape-recording the songs sitting next to the male musicians, I was taught the generic and proper names of the ancestral beings and phenomena which were being performed, their creative deeds at named places and the intricate connections songs fashion between people and countries when retracing the ancestral journeys across the land. As I became familiar with the song series which recounted particular ancestral journeys across the land, so was my ear being educated and I started recognising the tempo and understanding the text of an increasing number of song units[5].

After several months of public practice and mistakes, I finally felt I had learnt to dance with others and for others on the occasion of the funeral of a close family member. Having stopped to think about what I was doing, my body became "a knowing force of action" (Ness 1992:5) which, propelled by the music, started guiding my motor projects. If at first I experienced this new bodily awareness with a powerful sense of physical relief, a kind of corporeal lightness, this sudden buoyancy soon transformed itself into an uncontainable joyful energy which seemed to fill the spatial and temporal gap between myself and the other performers and the seated participants. As the musicians intensified the singing leading to a ceremonial climax where ancestral proper names are chanted, sacred

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objects appear, and choreographic dances are performed, everything came together, my body expanded to incorporate all the other moving bodies around me, the music and my immediate surroundings. My-self became other and the other was incorporated by my-self, an experience that at once changed my consciousness by carrying out a transformation of the spatio-temporal relationship with others. Dancing is thus not merely a form of self-expression or entertainment nor only a way through which I learnt the symbolism of movements and their semantic relationship to the song narratives. More importantly dancing is the learning of a body technique or "art of using the human body" (Mauss 1979:101) which, by forming the grounds of an "empathic understanding" (Jackson 1989:135) educated me to grasp the intersubjective sense of Yolngu performance. It was my participation in dancing that allowed me the perception and understanding of how knowledge embodied in the land can be experienced, revealed, tapped, negotiated and managed in performance. Dancing, as Yolngu would say, is holding the Law, knowing the country and, in mortuary ceremonies, showing love for the deceased and his/her family.

As I was to find out later, it was not by chance that, revealing itself through my movements, my achievement was noticed, and in the late afternoon I was summoned by my mother's brother. During a short conversation, Charles Manydjarri told me how much he had appreciated my dancing at his younger brother's mortuary ceremony and, emphatically, encouraged me to keep on dancing not only for close kin but for everybody. Following his suggestion was easy as I enjoyed dancing, although at the time, I could not understand the implications of his words. Nor did I appreciate the significance that Yolngu people attach to the participation in dance performance.

DANCING AS KNOWLEDGE, WORK AND PLAY

At a more inclusive level the term *bunngul* refers to all the activities which constitute a ceremony and thus could be appropriately glossed as "ceremony" or "performance". Often, however, the term *bunngul* (from *bon* and *bun'kumu* knee-cap or knee), is used to refer exclusively to dancing in contrast to other activities such as singing.

Dancing, like painting and song, is a means by which knowledge is acquired, accumulated and transmitted. To dance as a virtuoso or as an ordinary background dancer is to show oneself to be knowledgeable and to legitimise such knowledge through performance. As apprentice singers are said to copy their father's style of singing, people recognise and notice the stepping style (*gakal*) of a youth's father in the movements of his knees and lower legs[6]. The learning of the Law – the creative ancestral events along the journeys which constitute and distribute rights and duties to knowledge associated with country - is in fact often recognised in the

dancing proficiency of the young dancer. During all ceremonies the watchful eyes of the elders look at the knees of the young performers to judge their learning before revealing further knowledge to them and thus entrusting them with subsequent ritual responsibility. The knees of the performer moving up and down in the dance stepping are said to be talking (*bonwanga*).

If knowledge associated with country is thus absorbed through the body (Tamisari 1998), the potential psycho-physical changes brought about by such an absorption through the body present a degree of danger. Prior to the physical exposure of a novice to further knowledge to be literally in-corpor-ated through dancing, elders often rub their underarm sweat onto the youths' knees in order to protect them from the potentially dangerous consequences of such bodily transformation[7]. As with paintings and songs, dances are owned by particular groups and individuals and they are performed by related groups and individuals who, according to their kinship position, have the right and the responsibility to do so. Similarly, as with the execution of paintings, (Morphy 1991:60ff), people have the strongest rights in the performance of their mother's (M) clan dances, their mother's mother's (MM) and their own patrilineal group in that order[8].

Dance leaders, who usually indulge in virtuosity, are often in the relationship of a man's sister's children (ZC) to the singers who are the members of their mother's group. In this position the ZC and especially the sister's son has the strongest right to the knowledge of his mother's group and is said to be their "manager" or "boss", "custodian" (*djaga-mirri*, literally care-having) and the "mother's owner". The lead dancer not only dances in front of the other dancers, thus closer to the singers, but is also responsible for emitting the dance calls and, by means of these, directing the singers. The leader always dances with energy and passion and his performance often outshines the others. The jumping is higher, the movements more dramatic, the interpretation theatrical and emotional. Being a virtuoso is his right and duty, a way in which he embodies the creative and destructive ancestral power in the land, displays his legitimate ownership of knowledge of his mother's group and the fulfilment of his rights and responsibilities[9]. It is significant that such claims, together with their implicit affirmation of knowledge and rights, are made through dancing as these are brought and displayed into the public arena, usually in front of a large seated group of participants who observe, comment upon, recognise or ridicule the performers' "dancing statements" about their affirmation or claims to knowledge. As Yapupu, a young singer explained to me: "Yolngu dance because they hold the Law" and he continued: "Ancestral beings do not dance. They taught us how to dance and now it is Yolngu people who dance to show that we have Law and Culture (*rom*)".

Dancing as a means of legitimising one's knowledge and consequent authority is also a duty, a notion which is conveyed by speaking of dance and song as "work". As in other parts of Indigenous Australia, the sister's children are the workers for

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their mothers' group(s) and as such they are expected to take the responsibility for organising the ceremonies as well as leading the dancing. In this sense dancing as work fullfils duties to one's kin, the responsibility of carrying out a successful performance, a labour which produces and reproduces the knowledge associated with the country of one's maternal relatives.

In addition, if it is difficult to understand how participation in dancing can be considered as work rather than a pleasant activity it is necessary to note that ceremonial dancing can be extremely physically and emotionally demanding. The apparent effortlessness of Yolngu stepping from a semi-crouched, back-leaning stance requires a continued muscle tension in the legs. This is accompanied by the fact that ceremonies are carried out over periods from one to two weeks in which dancing is performed during the hot tropical sun to conclude late at night. In addition, dancing as work is considered a form of help and a way of showing love to all close relatives belonging to all groups who participate in a ceremony.
When people do not help or show their love through dancing in a ceremony they are usually expected to contribute in other ways. Close and distant relatives would offer gifts of cloth, sheets, food, money, and/or assume the responsibility of carrying out particular tasks and actions in the staging of the ceremony. However, if dancing is just another way of helping in a ceremony, it is singled out from the others as expressing love rather than sadness, grief or generosity. As I was repeatedly told: "Through dancing you show your love. When we cry we share our sadness, when we dance we are not sad, we share love". Since participation in dance is viewed as an individual contribution of love towards the deceased as well as towards his or her closest relative, with some exceptions, non-participation is not only often criticised by the ritual organiser as a lack of law, it is also interpreted by all present as a lack of care, love and compassion[10].

I more fully understood the appreciation and encouragement for my dancing I received from Charles Manydjarri when the importance attached to dancing as work and help was made evident to me in the following circumstances.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, some young people broke into my home while I was away and spent a few nights there. Nothing was taken but the place was left in a mess. Lapulung, my adoptive son, offered to speak for me through the school loudspeakers to give a warning to the culprits. In his speech, the main reason he gave for why people should not break into my house was that I had helped many times and I had lived there "in the middle of the community" for a long time. These reasons intrigued me because during my stay I had offered to help by giving people lifts in the car, and doing some work at the school and at the church. Despite my efforts, however, I always felt that it was I who for most of the time was at the receiving end of people's care, protection, generosity and especially their patience. After the speech I asked my son how I had helped them and what it meant by saying that I lived in the middle of the community. His answer was brief and the

reason unexpected: "You helped us with dancing, and you not only dance for your closest family but you helped everybody".

Although dance performances, especially when reaching ceremonial climaxes, are often characterised by seriousness, concentration, tight coordination and charged with strong emotions of duty and love, they also involve play and licentiousness. *Giritjirr*, another term for dancing is also used to mean "play" in general and intercourse in particular. Whereas men are said to look at women dancing with sexual desire, women are not allowed to dance near their brother because this would be considered a breach of the strict rules of avoidance between brothers and sisters. Despite attracting men's sexual desires, a married woman who shows interest and performs assiduously (*bunnguldumurr*) accompanying the songs performed by her husband or her husband's group is noticed and recognised as knowledgeable. Commenting on another attempt by youths to break into my house while I was asleep, one of my sisters explained this event by warning me that I should dance but not too much as men would notice me. She advised me thus only to participate in the dances of the groups I was adopted in, those of my mother's mother and my husband's or children's group[11].

Apart from the solemnity and tension which characterise particular phases of performance, Yolngu mortuary ceremonies were mostly carried out in a light-hearted and relaxed atmosphere which is in part animated by the welcome presence of visiting relatives from other communities. Singers and dancers joked and laughed among themselves and the audience openly enjoyed being entertained and amused by the "show". Young men who had recently begun to lead the less important songs and dances and especially very young children were subjected to continual observation, encouragement and jokes. The audience expressed their appreciation by shouting the subsection terms[12] of the performer while the singers often tease one another about their skills and virtuosity. Because of the avoidance rules between brothers and sisters and the fact that a woman should never be the subject of attention when she is near her brother, women performers very rarely received such comments although they were the worst teasers and the most vociferous commentators.

THE CURSE OF COMPLIMENTS

The political and emotional relationships of competition and love, appreciation and derision, danger and attraction, which dancers and participants engage in and negotiate are well illustrated in the following practice surrounding virtuosity. Coordination, rhythm, dramatic and spectacular interpretation in performance embody the ancestral beings. Further they affirm one's right in and authority to the knowledge associated with particular countries. However, there are more ambiguous and dangerous consequences of skillful dancing. This, in fact, exposes the virtuoso to compliments which at once offer appreciation as well as demanding attention. In the ceremonial context, if one is particularly and somewhat

unexpectedly gifted in playing music or dancing one is complimented by being told "*wamaarrkanhe* !"[13],an expression which is followed by a request for material goods.

Once again I came across this practice through participating in the dances and it was only then that I started to understand how flattering yet dangerous compliments may be if they are not repaid appropriately.

My ability in learning Yolngu dances and my assiduous participation surprised people but pleased my close adoptive relatives. Often I was told: "*Wamaarrkanhe Wuluku* "[14], and in the same breath the speaker would ask me for something in return – an item of clothing, cigarettes or a few dollars, or substantial possessions and amounts of money. It was explained to me that if I did not give them what they asked for I would fall ill. On one occasion one of the singers asked me for my Commonwealth-provided vehicle, a request that I could not satisfy. The fact that a few days later I contracted hepatitis A and had to go to Darwin for treatment, was interpreted as the consequence of not having repaid for the compliment. On another occasion I was asked for a few hundred dollars which again I could not afford to give. I was then advised to give a token. When I presented twenty dollars to the man who had paid me the compliment, he rubbed his sweat on me saying that, in this way, I would not suffer from any illness.

Initially, from this and other similar episodes I concluded that such compliments carried out a warning, which, if not repaid in kind, could act like a curse[15]. I in fact described this practice as "the curse of compliments" – a means by which virtuosos, who could misuse their skills to humiliate or overcome others, are prevented from imposing their supremacy in an unjustified and exaggerated manner.

Whereas my description of this practice as the "curse of compliments" emphasised how virtuosity can be understood as the interweaving of two conceptualisations of power: a manifestation or footprint stemming from the ancestral being and an expression and imposition of control and authority from individuals (von Sturmer 1987), the notion of *maarr* in the expression wa-*maarr*-kanhe deepens and expands a far more complex dimension of power in the relationship between who pays and who "re-pays" such a compliment. *Maarr*, which manifests itself in the footprints left behind by ancestral beings in the landscape features, names, objects, designs, songs and dances – is not only ancestral power, as it has usually been approached in the anthropological literature, it also refers to people's innermost feelings of love and care, silent wishes "which make things happen", concealed desires which are not expressed but which are nonetheless felt and met[16]. To "see somebody's *maarr*" is to recognise another person's feelings and fulfil their wishes. For instance, when a person awaits in silence while visiting relatives in a camp, his or her hosts eventually see that person's *maarr* when they offer him or her food or money without being asked for it. In these circumstances, "seeing another person's

maarr" can be understood as "waiting to be given", but in the context of performance, the practice of *wamaarrkanhe* highlights more ambiguous aspects of social relations between people who become embroiled with each other.

Through their unusual skills and virtuosity the performer is said to have seen the *maarr* of the observer, when the latter declares his or her appreciation. Virtuosity and appreciation, however, go deeper than an intent to impress and a willingness to recognise. The practice of *wamarrkanhe* seems to mutually lock the two persons in an intimate relationship which by penetrating each other's being, reaching each other's inner feelings at once constitutes and jeopardises each other's embodied consciousness. As the virtuoso dares to enter the observer, to see the other's feelings and fulfil his or her wishes, the observer responds by appreciating this invasion in proffering a compliment which in turn has the ability to affect the performer by challenging his or her very existence. As it is less evident but nevertheless characteristic of the everyday relationships people construct, transform and share with others, the "curse of compliments" can be seen as epitomising the constituting as well as destroying potential of social relations. Dancing is about embodied power, which is however not limited to the ancestral cosmogonic actions nor to ancestral and human bodies. By harnessing ancestral power onto human agency, the knowledge associated with country to particular social and political circumstances, dancing in general and skillful dancing in particular, refracts the social dynamics of everyday existence.

DANCING INTO BEING, BEING-IN-DANCING

More than seventy years of colonisation has seen no diminution of dancing. This process, which saw the establishment of five major settlements, mostly established as Methodist missions starting from the beginning of the 1920s, has not displaced the re-enactment of ancestral events which constitute Yolngu knowledge and Law with which people identify and are responsible for country in both public and restricted ceremonies. In these ceremonies, which are regularly held across North-east Arnhem Land to mark an individual's life-stages, such as circumcision, initiation to higher levels of knowledge and mortuary rituals, the connections of persons and groups to country are affirmed and their social standing and political rights to them negotiated.

It is in the staging of Yolngu ceremonies that the ancestral footprints are followed by embodying the force of movement and naming in the songs, dances, designs and sand sculptures. As has been repeatedly noted ancestral trajectories are retraced in the journeying narratives of the songs which, like road maps criss-crossing the land, connect land and people, the creative power of naming is condensed in the chanting of ancestral names, ancestral places are recreated through the polymorphic plasticity of visual media such as designs, sculptures and ground patterns and the ancestral beings' particular creative transformative actions are embodied by the dancers' movements and choreographies.

In concert with painting and song, dancing is thus a way in which the creative and destructive power of the ancestral beings is brought into presence, revealed to be absorbed and manifested in order to be interpreted and tapped. By retracing the ancestral paths people however not only dance a complex web of connections into being, the following in the footprints of the ancestors also conveys notions of moral orientation, the following of life-ways, correct practices, rules as well as the sharing and the renewing of fundamental social values. It is by focussing on Yolngu ceremonies from a performance perspective that Yolngu dance can most importantly be better understood as revealing the existential dimensions of everyday life - the intimate and consuming relationships we live with others. By shifting attention to Yolngu dance as a technique of the body which transforms one's consciousness through absorbing knowledge and fashioning relationships of care and competition, desire and compassion, it is possible to understand how dancing celebrates being-in-the world and being-with-others.

If the Law of the songs and the Law of the dances (*manikay* and *bunngul rom* respectively) bring the world into being by recreating ancestral events, the social world one steps into when participating in dance constitutes the ground of being. As the land is not a product or objectification of ancestral transformations but, by embodying the ancestors, is a living country, the meaning of Yolngu dance goes beyond the referential meanings of dance movements and overflows into the social play of life. In the poetic words of Witiyana: "We dance the land, the land dances through us".

It is precisely this social space of work, help, compassion, competition, love and attraction I entered through dancing, and it was precisely into this space I was welcomed by my mother's brother with his words of recognition for my dancing. I learnt to dance when, lifting my eyes from the ground, I looked at the wide horizon of the salt flats in front of me and, for the first time, I felt I could belong.

1 North-east Arnhem Land extends approximately from Cape Stewart in the West to the Gulf of Carpentaria in the East and from the Wessel Islands in the North as far south as the Koolatong River north of Blue Mud Bay and includes the major settlements of Maningrida, Milingimbi, Ramingining, Gapuwiyak (Lake Evella), Galuwin'ku (Elcho Island) and Yirrkala. In this geographical area people refer to themselves as Yolngu, a name which distinguishes them from their Western and Southern neighbours. By extension *Yolngu* is also used to mean 'Aboriginal or black people' in contrast to *Balanda*, 'non-Aboriginal, white people'.

2 This position is similar to the posture assumed when skiing.

3 It was pointed out to me that the "throwing of sand" (*munatha djalkthun)* over the other foot is a mark of good dancing. The appreciation of this technique is significant in respect to the fact that stamping contributes to transform the ceremonial ground into the ancestral landscape in question. The different shaped marks that the dancers' foot movements leave on the ground are analogous to the ancestors' characteristic movements with which they gave form to the landscape as it is today. Observers often note and comment upon these marks in appreciation of a participant's skill in reproducing the ancestral marks.

4 The basic stepping movement described above is the same for men and women, though men, in some dances, perform a leap and sideways jump-stepping.

5 I use the term "song-series" to refer to a song narrative recounting a particular ancestral journey from its place of departure to its end. "Songs series" are composed by "song units", which are short chunks of text and music lasting from one to two minutes interrupted by a short pause (cf. Margaret Clunies Ross and Wild 1984).

6 The term *gakal* (lower legs, calves and by extension stepping) is in fact used to convey the learning of all techniques through a mimetic and trial and error process. Thus the learning of hunting techniques or the administrative skills necessary in the running of the community Council is rendered with the expression "learning or following the (stepping) lower legs". A "*gakal-mirr*" person (literally step-having) is for instance a skilled and clever hunter who manages to find game in all seasons.

7 It should be recalled that sweat is also applied to the eyes when knowledge is revealed to novices for the first time (cf. Keen 1994:202) and to the whole body when strangers are taken to new countries for the first time. Thus sweat is applied not only to make the country recognise and accept newcomers, but also to protect them from direct exposure to a knowledge which is learnt through bodily experience (Tamisari 1998).

8 Yolngu people are divided into two moieties (or halves) which are further distinguished into several groups or clans. Marriage is between the members of two groups belonging to opposite moieties (cf. Keen 1994:62-100).

9 One of the most politically significant kin relationship is between a man and his sister's children. Also referred to as Yothu-Yindi (literally child-big, by extension, big, meaning mother), this relationship through the marriage of a man's sister thus establishes a balance between the moieties, between patrilineal and matrilineal links, descent and marriage. It is the 'child', the sister's children, who have primary management rights and duties to the knowledge of the group their mother and mother's brother belong to.

10 The emotions of care, love, compassion, loss as well as anger and competition are recurrent themes in ancestral cosmogonic events and are elaborated in the songs and dances through a miriad of images of maternal nurturance, aimless wandering, separations from one's country of origin or relatives, fights, danger and acts of deception.

11 These kin categories are the same as the ones people have strongest right to, namely the mother's, mother's mother and one's own group, see above. On being adopted by a particular person, one acquires many adoptive relatives according to the position given.

12 Subsection terms, also known as "skin names" comprise a set of sixteen paired names, eight for men and eight for women, which form an ideal model for patrifilial and marrige relations. These terms are often used as terms of address in preference to proper names (see Keen 1994:82–83).

13 A tentative literal translation of wa-maarr-ka-nhe would be "?-power/feeling-have-you".

14 *Wuluku* is the name with which I am usually addressed. It is the generic term of address for all Birkili-Gupapuyngu women, the group I was adopted into.

15 Another expression for *wamaarrkanhe* is *buku-guykthunawuy* (face-cursed-has been). The face of the virtuoso may thus be said "to have been cursed with appreciation". If warnings of this type are repeated and they are not respected, the pressure increases and virtuosos may decide to give up performing the activity in which they excel in order to avoid the potentially crippling financial demands and dangerous physical consequences.

16 *Maarr*, the creative and destructive force of ancestral beings in the land and associated ancestral manifestations, is also a human quality which is equivalent to "*ngayangu*", another term for inner feelings in general and, in particular, the seat of emotions which is located in the stomach. With these connotations the term *maarr* is used in many expressions which describe a wide range of intersubjective relations such as to believe or disbelieve, to be sorry or feel pity for, to trust, to worship, to feel gratitude, to be happy, to calm down, to obey. I explore the notion of *maarr* elsewhere (Tamisari in preparation).

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Kerry Ross Richard, you've told me that *Art From The Heart* is not an art documentary. How, then, would you describe it?

Richard Moore Well, let me go back to the origins of the documentary and how it was commissioned. Of course it does involve art but it was commissioned out of the documentary unit of the ABC as one of their Accord documentaries of which they do about ten a year, and was then funded on top of that by the Film Finance Corporation. They were the principal investor and the brief of the documentary was to look at the effects – financial, social, and otherwise – of market forces on the contemporary indigenous painting movement that began, say, in the early 1970s. And it was pitching at a moment, which is an unfortunate moment, but one when a lot of the pioneers or the elders, let's say, of that movement from all around Australia are either close to semi-retirement or have passed away, as indeed did Queenie McKenzie who was an active participant and a protagonist in our film.

"Art From the Heart" Transcript of a discussion from "Arts Today", ABC Radio National 26 May 1999

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KERRY ROSS ABC JOURNALIST

RICHARD MOORE CO-PRODUCER *ART FROM THE HEART*

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FELICITY WRIGHT COMMUNITY ARTIST WHO HAS UNDERTAKEN RESEARCH ON COMMUNITY ARTS CENTRES

THE DOCUMENTARY "ART FROM THE HEART" WAS BROADCAST ON ABC TELEVISION AT 8.30PM, 25 MAY 1999. THE DOCUMENTARY WAS DISCUSSED THE NEXT MORNING ON RADIO NATIONAL'S "ARTS TODAY" PROGRAM. THE TRANSCRIPT OF THAT DISCUSSION IS PUBLISHED HERE, WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE ABC.

Kerry Ross Hetty, what do you make of *Art From The Heart*?

Hetty Perkins Well, initially I was concerned. I guess I was a bit shocked by the documentary when I first saw it. I think what particularly alarmed me was the opening sequence with the subtitle "Alice Springs 9am" with an obviously drunk Aboriginal man walking towards, I presume it was you, Richard, offering a painting for sale, and I think that that coupled with the following titles which displayed a dot painting with "Art From The Heart", the question mark, and then a two dollar coin in the middle of a concentric circle. I think it seemed to me to set an agenda that was presented in a way that I thought was quite inflammatory and quite dangerous.

Kerry Ross Now Jeremy, Hetty says that the program was inflammatory. Are they valid concerns, valid criticism?

Jeremy Eccles I'd prefer the word "provocative", I suppose. One inevitably as a journalist wants to catch the attention. I agree it was not pleasant viewing, but it's a truthful reflection of an aspect of the art movement. Alice Springs is a frontier town and a lot of people, visitors, tourists are going to encounter that sort of scene. I don't think that it was in any way a major part of the documentary.

Hetty Perkins If I could just respond to that. I think that later on the taxi driver mentions that Clifford Possum spends all of his money – what he isn't spending on the family goes to the pub. He spends it at the pub and then there is a later scene again with that artist and I just think that the standards, the way that Aboriginal people are being dealt with in the documentary wouldn't necessarily apply to non-Aboriginal artists. I mean if you filmed one of Australia's most prominent artists drunk and sort of staggering or whatever, I don't think that that would be seen as suitable and in fact would be regarded as quite an invasion of privacy.

Jeremy Eccles Well, we didn't chase after this guy. He chased after us. He was trying to do business.

Hetty Perkins Well, I've been to Alice Springs quite a few times because I am from Alice Springs and I must say that I think it's the exception rather than the rule and I think that that to me seemed to be what the documentary was about, overall – the exception rather than the rule.

Kerry Ross Felicity Wright, I'd like to bring you in here. You have extensive experience in community-run indigenous arts outlets. Why do you say that *Art From The Heart* is unfair?

Felicity Wright I think unfortunately the filmmakers really underestimated the power of the position that they were coming from, the cultural paradigm under which they were operating when they were approaching Aboriginal artists and the whole concept of motivation and inspiration for paintings.

Kerry Ross Richard, why didn't you include experts like Hetty? It is true that in the main the people who are speaking in *Art From The Heart* are non-indigenous art dealers.

Richard Moore Oh, I don't think that's right. First off we did approach – we actually interviewed Hetty but we interviewed Hetty at a time when – well, it was three months before we had our production funding through and we interviewed her around the exhibition *Fluent* which was the official exhibition that went to the Venice Biennale. There was some controversy about it at the time as there usually is about anything Aboriginal and Hetty answered those questions very well. But by the time we actually got to film the final piece it didn't seem relevant any more. We did approach two other curators, one being Judith Ryan at the National Gallery of Victoria. She declined, probably wisely, to participate in the documentary. Margie West up at Darwin was not available. So we did try on that score but it seemed to us just in general that it was more interesting for us, and perhaps to get a more authentic view of the marketplace, to talk to the artists. And there are many people who are in the documentary, many of these artists who people might have heard of, we've never seen before. We've never heard their voices, we've never heard them expressing what it is that they want to say about the market, about how they react to the market. I mean there's one scene for example in the documentary, a scene between Helicopter, who's a younger generational artist and Charlie Gordon who's an older artist. And that scene at Balgo seems to me to strike right at the core of the film, or one of the cores of the film anyway, where Charlie, who's the older artist is arguing with Helicopter and saying, well, really in a way Helicopter you shouldn't be selling your art for money. What are you doing for your land? What are you doing for your country? What are you doing for your dreaming? And Helicopter turns and says, It's a different way. And these people are real people. They're real people, they're real concerns and I would argue that we actually went out of our way to talk to the artists as much as possible and to include their voices. And of course their voices are never heard on the media.

Jeremy Eccles And to try and make sure of that, we always had translators. We had the coordinators there so that we were not in any way abusing them, that they fully understood where we were coming from and that we made every effort to get their views honestly across.

Felicity Wright Can I just say something? I'm really surprised that you think that people coming from the sort of indigenous background could be fully aware of where you're coming from because you do have a set of concerns. I mean I've worked with indigenous artists and I've interfaced with many, many visitors, journalists, filmmakers, curators – and I'm a white fella, and in our culture we have a preoccupation with indigenous people and the idea that they should be painting nobly, they should be painting out of the depth of their spirituality ...

Jeremy Eccles Oh, this is such patronising stuff, Felicity!

Felicity Wright Excuse me, excuse me. I've heard people asking artists so many times, now why do you paint? Now this is something I almost never hear one indigenous artist ask of another. And so I think it's actually one of our sort of fascinations, little obsessions we have...

Jeremy Eccles Well, I don't know.

Felicity Wright And not many indigenous artists really understand that that is something that we are, you know, we hold because we do still have the notion of them as if they should be painting from their spiritual soul, not because they actually live in the modern world and also have a set of economic constraints.

Kerry Ross I know that Hetty's been trying to come in here.

Richard Moore So has everybody.

Hetty Perkins Yeah, we're all trying to get in. I mean I think I agree with Felicity. I think that one of the things that the film does show is that there is a huge language barrier. There's a huge barrier to understanding not only in the questioning process but what the questions are intended to reveal. I think that the artists don't know what context their words are going to end up in, and I really do not think that there was from what I know of it, from who appears in the film, that there was adequate consultation. I think that there are many people – you were talking about dealers – I think that some of the dealers that have been around for decades weren't consulted, didn't appear in the film and I think that that is a shortcoming. I don't think, you know, approaching two curators in the whole of Australia, I don't think that's necessarily doing thorough research, and if we want to talk about patronising I think the way the questions were pitched to the artists was in a very patronising manner. I think any lawyer would tell you that those questions were very leading questions: saying, you paint for white fellas, don't you? Yes. Yes. Yes. Until the artist says, yes, and then it's – right, well, you know, very good. And I think that there's ...

Jeremy Eccles Oh, I'm sorry there's an extremely sensitive scene involving John Oster asking Suzie Bootja Bootja ...

Hetty Perkins ... there're ways of interpreting a question like that.

Jeremy Eccles ... in a very, very careful way. Now this is a man who lives there and works with them on a constant basis for a number of years and he is asking her precisely what is the balance of the story: the land that she's painting from and then the colours that she chooses in order to market that art.

Hetty Perkins He's a white young man talking to an older Aboriginal woman. He's about a foot away from her face and he's saying to her, Do you paint pretty colours for white fellas, don't you? Nodding his head, and she's just nothing, saying nothing and then he's saying, Yes, Yes. And finally she says, Yes. And everybody's happy. Oh, great, well you know, that's a wrap. We got what we wanted here from that. Well, I think that's a very leading way and provocative way of doing that.

Richard Moore Hang on a moment, Hetty. I want you to know that on every occasion we were out there, there was a translator there all the time translating all the questions standing next to the artist. As there was there with Susie Bootja Bootja. There's no question that they didn't understand the questions or what was going on...

Hetty Perkins Is the translator aware though of the context in which the questions are being pitched?

Richard Moore Well, she's a member of that community.

Hetty Perkins Exactly. But she's not a member of this community in Australia, where we've got numbers of articles in the press about Aboriginal art and the way that, you know, there's forgeries, there's fakes and this thing about collaboration, that it's unstable. And I think that it contributes to that whole environment and it's very unsettling and destabilising.

Richard Moore But that's a whole other issue. We're not actually – it would've been very easy – as you know, to concentrate on the more negative aspects, on the fakes, on the frauds. We do touch on that because it would seem silly if you were doing a documentary... I think we spent about five minutes on it. But watch out for *Four Corners* next week because they'll be doing the real dirty on the fakes and the frauds in the Aboriginal art market. It was never our intention to be negative or anything like that. Can I go back though to the scene, for example, with Charlie Gordon and Helicopter and Charlie Gordon is standing there, and you can see the translator standing right next to him. And it's very clear that they understood what was going on. I mean you're being patronising in a way by saying that they don't understand what they're being asked.

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Felicity Wright Excuse me, can I say something?

Kerry Ross Felicity?

Felicity Wright Can I say something? Look I think you've really quite missed our point, Richard, about the issue of context and cross-cultural communication and that just translating the words is not necessarily translating to an artist or to an indigenous person in what context that might be read by somebody, from you know, a non-Aboriginal background. Can I pose a question? Look one thing I found really quite disturbing and really I thought reflected where you guys were coming from was in your titling of people who are involved in the film. There's Cookie Stewart who's also known by the nickname of "Cookie" from Warlukurlangu Artists in Yuendemu. He is shown with a label saying "former", I think it's "former cook", or "community cook in Yuendemu."

Jeremy Eccles That's actually in the narration not in the text.

Felicity Wright Okay. But I found it extraordinary that this man, who has also performed ground paintings at the Pompidou Centre in Paris. He painted most of the Yuendemu doors which are featured in a book and a CD-Rom and has been exhibited in the southern hemisphere.

Jeremy Eccles And in the film.

Felicity Wright Yes. And has also been a chairperson on Warlukurlangu Artists.

Jeremy Eccles Look if you don't think that Cookie gained credibility from sitting there in the desert, from showing us the origins in the sand, from talking about his Jukupurr, I'm amazed that you can't see the positive side to this film. Everything is very finely balanced.

Felicity Wright I do see the positive side. I do see it. I don't think it's finely balanced at all. What I'm concerned about is all we can do is try and present to a non-indigenous audience some sort of concern, some sort of status on these people. Now what we can do is give full credit to someone like Tjapaltjardi Stewart. What we can't even begin to convey to the audience is how important he is in traditional or in Yapa terms, in Aboriginal terms. So the very least we can do is pay him the proper respect and give him the status.

Kerry Ross Now this question is to either Jeremy or Richard, or both of you. One of the things that struck me about *Art From The Heart* was the continual questioning of what Aboriginal artists do with their money. Now, what people do with their money, and I'll put it to Richard first, that's their own business, isn't it?

Richard Moore Yeah, sure. But, well, there's a few things and there's a few ways to answer that question. Are you implying that that's a sort of negative question to ask

people or that's sort of judgmental. Because one of our concerns was to show – it seems to me or I felt anyway – that there was a perception that somehow Aboriginal artists are getting rich quick or that they're earning a lot of money out of their art, and it's quite obvious as you go through *Art From The Heart*, that that's definitely not the case.

Kerry Ross At that Balgo scene you say to – I think it's Eubena – you know, Where's all your money? What do you spend your money on? And she says, I spend it on my children. In fact I think she says, Half of it goes to my daughters, or something like that. And the answer is, So you spend all of your money on your children and you've got nothing and, you know, you're a good artist and look at you, you've got nothing. I mean if you ask my parents where all their money went, they'd say, my kids, you know. It's a common thing and I don't think you would go up to someone like, I don't know, I don't want to name anyone in particular, but a very prominent non-Aboriginal artist and say, So, what do you spend your money on? They would tell you to take a hike in no uncertain terms.

Richard Moore Well, I mean everybody was open to tell us to do that but, you know, one of the points – actually I didn't ask that question that was John Oster asking the question to Eubena who is the coordinator out at Balgo, but one of the points of asking those questions was as well to show the type of pressure that exists upon the artists, and as you well know, Hetty and Felicity, many of the artists are surrounded by large families. The payments that come in they go quickly, they disappear quickly and so the money doesn't hang around.

Hetty Perkins Yeah, that's right. But what business is it of anybody else's?

Richard Moore Well, I think that's of interest.

Hetty Perkins Well, who too?

Jeremy Eccles Well, I think that we are actually, the non-Indigenous community in Australia is extremely ignorant about how community life operates and this seemed to be one way of explaining how the art was part of the community's income.

Felicity Wright That's what makes me so gloomy because I think most people watching this would leave, you know, confused and depressed. I don't think that this was at all enlightening, and it wasn't even sort of challenging. I don't mind a bit of controversy but if I leave something more confused than I started, it's a concern. And my issue is you began at the beginning, Richard, by saying that you were interested in these sorts of social and economic effects of market forces and how that's affected artists. Now what really disturbed me is you were in remote community art centres. You had a superb opportunity to have a look at some of the spinoffs of art centres which are not just trading organisations like dealers, but they are economic, social and cultural organisations. They have a very wide brief and they deliver a very big range of services, for example, Jilamara which you visited which has a disability access program.

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Jeremy Eccles But why do none of them have a program for elderly artists? Why are people like Johnny Mosquito disappearing, impoverished, unhappy? Why is Billy Stockman wandering the streets of Alice Springs trying to bum a feed? Why has no-one set up a decent trust fund for these artists?

Felicity Wright There actually is. There's an organisation called Janganpa Artists that Desart has been involved in setting up in Alice Springs. It is able to host artists visiting town who usually paint in remote communities and (who are) often taken advantage of when they arrive. Warumpi has just introduced in Pupunya a program for mentoring and training new and emerging artists and this is a key concern of organisations like Desart and everybody working out in the bush. But there was no mention of the vital role that art centres play in nurturing new and emerging artists which is often quite...

Jeremy Eccles Oh, that's nonsense.

Richard Moore That's not true.

Kerry Ross Richard?

Richard Moore I don't think you watched the documentary. As soon as we go to Warlukurlangu, Yuendemu it is very clearly set out that the role of the art centres is not solely to market art but that it has a real function in nurturing the next generation of artists and recording their stories.

Kerry Ross I'm going to finish here with Hetty. Hetty, just what are some of the complexities which you think were not drawn out?

Hetty Perkins Well, I think that as we've been saying there is so much material to cover in a short space of time and I think that one of the issues that is being overlooked is, we hear about this crisis in Aboriginal art, but I don't think that there is a crisis in Aboriginal art in those terms. I think that there is a crisis in the way Aboriginal art is understood and perceived in this country. I think that there is a huge cultural gap and I think that this video goes some way to revealing that gap even if it doesn't necessarily address it entirely and I think that that's something that we do need to look at with the issues of collaboration and the fact that artists are living in real poverty. Okay we're talking about people like Billy Stockman, Tjapaltjarri and what happens to those wonderful artists, and I think that as Felicity says people are implementing ways of dealing with that.

Kerry Ross Hetty Perkins, Richard Moore, Jeremy Eccles and Felicity Wright, thank you very much for joining us on Arts Today.

In this paper I want to examine Ancestral dance performances of the Wik region of western Cape York Peninsula. In particular, my discussion will focus on dance associated with the Kugu Ngancharra clans whose traditional lands lay near the Kendall and Holroyd Rivers in the southern Wik region. Through a consideration of phenomenological theories of the body and dance, I want to offer ways of looking at the experiential qualities of these performances, and how the dance experience reconstitutes the relation between the performing body, Ancestral lands, and the creation time of the Ancestral Past.

Perhaps the most definitive quality of dance is its capacity to transform bodily experience to a plane of heightened sensitivity, to create a sense of alterity or 'otherness' from 'ordinary' states of being. Indeed, the body, and its trans-formation through the dance experience has been observed by several phenomenological writers. In *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty claims aesthetic forms like dance and music elaborate on aspects of 'ordinary' existence, amplifying them from a literal to a new, figurative significance.

Dance and the Ancestral Landscape

Naomi Smith

For Merleau-Ponty, the aesthetic experience is "an existence in itself", as the aesthetic realm draws people and elements from "empirical existence and bears them off into another world"[1]. Jackson also finds that music and dance "transport us from the quotidian world of verbal distinctions and categorical separations into a world where boundaries are blurred and experience transformed"[2].

And, through exploring the boundaries of aesthetic space and time, Langer suggests that dance carries the body into a "virtual world" where "ordinary space and time disappear into the dance illusion"[3]. Through dance, she argues, literal perceptions of space, time and the body are interrupted, disrupted, and transformed into the world of the dance space and musical time. In this transitive state, the parameters of bodily experience and potentiality are shifted, both for performers and for spectators. All are captured by dance and transported to a realm of amplified existence, a realm 'other' to the ordinary.

Certainly, these observations characterise Kugu Ngancharra ceremonial performances, where performers and spectators are transported into 'another world' of Ancestral presence, action and experience – a world where Ancestral beings are manifest, a world where the events of the Ancestral Past are relived, brought into the present time.

But how do Ancestral dance performances transform embodied experience to the realm of Ancestral presence? And how might performances reconstitute the relation between the performing body, land and the cosmological/mythological past? I want to suggest that this existential shift is effected through three modalities of ceremonial bodily transformation: firstly, through the inscription of the body with Ancestral paint designs; secondly, by music and its intrinsic relation to dance movement; and thirdly, by the stylised movement of the body in dance itself. These modes will be discussed in turn so the transformative potential of each can be closely examined. However, I argue it is the convergence of all three modes during ceremonial performances which effects this transformation, bringing the realm of Ancestral action into the direct experience of all ritual participants. I will examine these modes through the context of the *wanam* ceremonial performance, which is considered definitive of Kugu Ngancharra identity.

Essentially, the *wanam* ceremonial repertoire commemorates the journey of two Ancestral creator beings, the Kaa'ungken brothers, who travelled from the Love River in the northern Wik region south along the coast to the Mitchell River. According to the creation story, the two brothers moved along the coast, throwing their boomerangs to clear the coastal plain. In their travels they taught their songs and dances to the resident clans. The brothers then came across some people fishing, and so stole and ran off with the fish. They carried the fish with them, returning north to the Holroyd River, where they found the dance ground at Thaa'kungadha. There, they performed their final song and dance. After their dance, the two brothers 'left' *wanam awu* – the *wanam* ceremonial grounds. From there, the brothers went out to sea, leaving three islands off the coast[4].

For Kugu Ngancharra, the story of the Kaa'ungken brothers is, like other Ancestral creation stories of the Wik region, a charter for the social order. As a mode of an oral tradition, the story embodies and transmits social and cultural knowledge in a number of ways. In one instance, it is imprinted and embodied in the features of the Kugu Ngancharra landscape: the story is a plot for the social organisation of land, linking landowning clans along the Ancestral travel routes. In this way, the story defines and delineates particular tracts of land and social identities associated with these lands, setting the backdrop for relations between clan groups linked along the Ancestral travel routes. As the foundation for the *wanam* ceremonial repertoire, the story is embodied in and celebrated through a sequence of dances and an associated complex of ritualised aesthetic modes such as songs, body paint designs and ceremonial carvings[5]. Performed as they were 'left' by the traveller heroes, each dance illustrates, or recreates a particular event or episode in the wider Ancestral journey, and, for the performative moment, dancers portray the Ancestral beings as they travelled through the landscape.

Historically, *wanam* was performed exclusively at *wanam awu* at Thaa'kungadha. However, with the relocation of Kugu Ngancharra clans from traditional lands, into

the mission station at Aurukun from the 1950s, the performative contexts of the ceremony were necessarily changed. Despite the recontextualised circumstances surrounding contemporary performances, *wanam* remains firmly grounded in the landscape where the Ancestral heroes travelled, and, with each performance, Kugu Ngancharra clans reconstitute, reaffirm, renew their relation with Ancestral lands where the events in the dances took place.

THE PAINTED BODY

Bodily transformation in *wanam* rituals begins in the preparation for performances, when all participants are inscribed with the distinct *wanam* body paint designs. Here, the body itself is altered as the sacred Ancestral designs are inscribed on the body's surface. Firstly, skin and hair are embalmed with red ochre. Over this foundation the characteristic *wanam* bands are traced along the chest, the abdomen, the arms and legs. An arc surrounds the lateral aspect of the eyes on the face. These designs, Kugu Ngancharra say, were worn by the Kaa'ungken brothers as they roamed the landscape. In *wanam* performances, the body is also ritually adorned with fanned feather headdresses, string or pandanus armbands, cabbage palm skirts, and pearlshell pendants. These, too, are said to have been worn by the Ancestral travellers[6].

Wanam Ancestral body paint designs and ritual garb are arranged by the body's morphology, yet, the inscription of paints and decoration of the body redefines its contours and form. In redefining the human form, paints and other adornments make the body unlike its usual self – the body's usual sense of being is transformed, so much so that dancers and other ritual participants take on the appearance or likeness of the Ancestral beings themselves. This ritualised transformation is, however, more than one of mere appearance. It is also an existential transformation – a transition to the realm of Ancestral power.

Morphy has suggested in the Yolngu case that Ancestral ritual modes like body paint designs can be thought of as manifestations of Ancestral power[7]. Thus, through inscription of the designs on the body, each ritual participant is brought into direct contact with the power embodied in the designs. In a similar vein, Munn[8] finds that when Walbiri apply ceremonial ochres to the skin, Ancestral power in the designs is experienced by the body through the senses of touch and sight. Through this sensory appeal, the body becomes conscious of contact with the power of the sacred designs. In this way, the body 'knows' and experiences Ancestral power.

Contact with the designs also makes the body 'more visible' to Ancestors – Ancestors recognise these embodied designs as their own, as something of themselves. Through the transfer of designs from the Ancestral being to the human being, then, Morphy explains, "human skin" is transformed into "Ancestral skin"[9].

Body paints, then, I want to suggest, forge a visual, a sensual and an ontological communication between the human and Ancestral realms. Through inscription of paints, the body becomes a locus of Ancestral power.

If body paints create a link between people and Ancestral power, they also create a link between the body, story and country. Through *wanam* paints, for example, elements of the story of the Kaa'ungken brothers are brought into being. Procured from elements of country through which the two brothers travelled, red wanam ochres are made from clays roasted over the fire, while the white paste is prepared from roasted bones of the threadfin fish[10]. Recalling the episode of the stolen fish in the *wanam* creation story, the use of fish bones in *wanam* ochres resonates with episodes of Kugu Ngancharra mythology. Effectively then, elements of the Kugu Ngancharra landscape where the Ancestral heroes roamed – and the story of their adventures – are ceremonially embodied, both in a corporeal and a performative sense. In other words, through inscription of paints, a unity between body, story and land is created: just as the elements of country and the creation story are embodied through paints, the body is identified with country through the designs and is seen and known by this story. Thus, literally, a corporeal connection is made with country through body paint inscription. In this way the body and the world can be understood to be made of the same stuff – each is in the other, activated as one being.

The link between body, story and country is also conveyed at the broader social level through the collective, social nature of paint inscription. Painting the body is a social act – it is never performed alone. In the communal, group preparation for *wanam* performances, each ritual participant is inscribed by other *wanam* participants. Through the collective marking of these designs on the skin, a social unit, or the appearance of a collective social corpus is created and made visible. *Wanam* designs create a visible unity of the *wanam* ritual group – these designs are worn only by those associated with the Kugu-Ngancharra region[11]. Through paints, then, people are clearly and visibly identified with a specific sociality, a specific geographic region and a specific sequence of Ancestral stories. Thus, highly specialised forms of both social unities and differences are made visible on the skin.

Collective, consensual inscription of individual bodies, Thevoz writes, transgresses personal identities so that every body is identified with the patterns of the social, cultural body[12]. Lingis shares this view, stating that within 'tribal' societies, the public nature of body inscription is not equated with an outward projection of an interior psychology (as is characteristic of body adornment in individuated societies), but of an external, social being, marked on the external surface of the individual[13]. Hence, through collective inscription, the individual body is reconstituted as the unified, social body.

For *wanam*, as for the other Wik ceremonial groups, body paints are reserved exclusively for ceremonial performance. Unlike permanent body markings like tattoos, scarification, cicatrisation, circumcision and subincisions, the ephemeral nature of ochred paints necessitates their repeated inscription to renew and reactivate Ancestral power embodied in the designs. Through retracing the Ancestral designs on the body, ritual participants effectively renew and reactivate the power embodied in the designs, bringing their potency into being before other modes of ritual performance may begin. Thus, paints and the adornment of the body with ritual garb marks the first point of ritual body transformation.

MUSIC AND TRANSITION

The second mode of ritual transformation I wish to discuss concerns music and its relation to dance. Here, I will explore how the musical and dance experience carry the body into another world, transforming the ways in which time and space are perceived in ceremonial performances. What, then, is the relation between music and dance? And how does music transform time, space and the body?

By 'music' in the *wanam* context I refer to the body of musical performers, distinguished on the one hand between the major singer, or song specialist – renowned and honoured for their specialised esoteric knowledge – and, on the other, the larger corpus of singing participants who clap, chant and stamp the ground in time with the rhythm set by the major singer. The major singer claps two boomerangs as percussive instruments whilst singing[14].

Singing and rhythm are intrinsic to *Wanam* dance performances. Music or song itself may be performed independently of dance, but dance in the Kugu Ngancharra context is necessarily dependent upon song[15]. That is, dance is never performed unaccompanied, for singing precedes and accompanies all dancing. That music is essential to dance performance can be understood, according to Dufrenne, because "dance is inspired by music"[16]. Music inspires dance, for dance movement is structured both by musical rhythm, and by the duration of time bound by the music. Levi-Strauss writes: "music transmutes the segment devoted to listening to it into a synchronic totality, enclosed within itself. Because of the internal organisation of the musical work, the act of listening to it immobilizes passing time"[17].

But as Kapferer notes, musical time is not immobilised or static, as Levi-Strauss purports, but is a dynamic movement, marked by rhythm or beat. The rhythmic structure of music metres out time in a sequential, repetitious flow of regular beats or intervals, which, in dance, is expressed through the body by rhythmic gesture. Time between dance gesture and music is obliterated, as dancers move in musical time. However, Levi-Strauss is surely right when he argues that music is time "enclosed within itself", since music captures time bound by its duration. Thus music and dance are temporal counterparts: when, the music ends, so does the dance.

Musical time sets the rhythm for dance movement, but music is also a spatial phenomenon. Space, Dufrenne explains, "is called upon by music to elaborate the matter of sound"[18]. Spatial boundaries between musical sound and the dancer are blurred as music is projected to and heard by the dancer, virtually entering his/her body. Through projection, and in turn, the introjection of music into the body, music, or more specifically, rhythm enters bodily experience. Rhythm is imbibed and imitated by the dancer's body. Music, then, becomes "consubstantial with the body"[19] as it is "felt more than heard"[20]. Where listeners are only before the music, dancers are *in* the music[21].

WALLABY DANCE PERFORMED BY AURUKUN DANCERS AT LAURA ABORIGINAL DANCE AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL, LAURA, CAPE YORK PENINSULA, JUNE 1997. REPRODUCED WITH THE PERMISSION OF MR JOE NGALLAMETTA, AURUKUKN

While music is experienced through the body, it is also created by the body. Musical sounds are made through singing, stamping or clapping, or through manipulation of musical instruments incorporated into the larger body schema. It is true that musicians move rhythmically as they create rhythm, but I want to distinguish this kind of movement from dance, which is a highly formalised modality, characterised by marked rhythmic motility and by stylised, habituated gestures. Both musicians and dancers move in rhythm, but there is a fundamental difference between them: musicians create musical sounds and project these sounds through space; dancers, on the other hand, are impulsed by musical sound and rhythm to move their bodies

through space. In this way, music alters how the body perceives and experiences time and inspires new, other, ways for the body to move through space. Effectively then, these new ways of hearing, of feeling, of moving, inspired by musical forms interrupt the body's ordinary perceptions of time, space and being.

In *wanam* ceremonial performances singing and dancing are complementary modes, yet the two are carefully separated into distinct realms. That is, *wanam* singers and dancers are two distinct ceremonial entities, separated in one instance in that singing and dancing (ie. performing a dance role) may not be performed by a person simultaneously; and in the second, by spatial situatedness in the ceremonial performance space. However, the differences in situatedness and bodily potential are bridged by a complementarity between these performance modes.

Through song, chanting and stamping, and the percussive rhythm of hand or boomerang clapping, the singing group creates and projects its music to the dancers. Only when the music begins are the dancers inspired to move with the rhythm and song, and, once performance begins, a synchronicity between musical sound and dance gesture is created. Musical rhythm is imitated by the dancers, blurring spatio-temporal boundaries between sound and movement. This interaction between singers and dancers creates a unity or communication between them, yet, the two always remain distinct both spatially and in terms of bodily potential.

I have described how songs and rhythmic percussion are directed to and interpreted by the dancers, but there is, simultaneously, another dialogue or communication established in *wanam* ceremonial performance – a communication with the spirit world, for *wanam* songs are sacred songs. In the Kugu Ngancharra region, von Sturmer observes, songs have "the power or capacity to call the spirits into the presence of the song"[22]. As the major singer calls to the spirit through the song, the spirit is invoked into the presence of all ritual participants, where it may be seen, witnessed. Once the spirit is called, songs can direct the spirit in either of two ways: songs can 'send' the spirit back to country (as in the example of mortuary rites when the spirit of a recently deceased person is directed to a resting site on country); or, songs can also bring the spirit forth from country, as in *wanam* ceremonial performances.

Percussion, and the rhythms it creates, has also been used as a means of attracting or communicating with the spirit world. Hand (or boomerang) clapping, chanting, stamping – all can be understood as percussive rhythms created by the body in ceremonial performance to attract the attention of spirits. Musical and rhythmic sounds, then, have the capacity to bring people into direct contact with the spirit world, transforming bodily experience from the everyday realm to a realm where space and time are altered and a world where Ancestral presence is manifest.

DANCE AND ANCESTRAL EXPERIENCE

The third and culminative mode I wish to discuss here concerns the transformative capacity of the body in dance during the performative moment. As discussed above, dance and music are ceremonial counterparts, yet, what differentiates dance from music is its capacity to markedly transform the body's comportment and motility. In dance, the body adopts another way of moving and acting contrasting its usual ways of being. Dance movement is characterised by a continuous, patterned and sequential flow of stylised gestures, and, in the case of pre-existing or formalised dance styles (like sequences from the *wanam* ceremony), body movements are ordered by the structured gestures of the dance style itself. Consequently, dance gestures are enacted in repeatable, habituated ways, and not by erratic or spontaneous movement.

In the ceremonial repertoire, dances tend to be group performances, effecting a collective enactment of stylised gestures. Collective dance movements are characterised by elements of mimicry, where every body performs in the same, repeated, flow of movement. This, however, does not mean that performances of pre-existing works are simply the invariable enactment of pre-set 'texts'. Instead, these may be performed with individual flair or panache and indeed, some dancers of *wanam* and other Wik traditions are renowned for their performances in particular dance roles.

I have argued above that the dancing body moves through space in musical time, but I want to offer another way of thinking about the space itself in which dance is performed and how it may be perceived by ritual performers and spectators. I want to develop Langer's suggestion that the space itself in which dance is performed is transformed into a realm of intensity, or what she calls a "virtual world" of "illusory powers"[23]. Through entering this intensified, libidinised space, in Langer's terms, performers are captured by the dance world and transcend the confines of mundane existence. This notion raises an interesting and pivotal point about the machinations of existential transition through dance. However, I would argue differently. Rather than dancers 'entering' a realm of intensity through performance, as Langer claims, I suggest instead that the body *creates* this intensified space – perhaps better thought of as 'place' – through the motility and the 'otherness' of dance gesture. It is the 'otherness' of the performing body's gestures, the intentional body's gestures, that creates this sense of alterity. As the dancing body moves through the performance space/place, it defines and encapsulates this sphere, making it its own, and, at once, transforming both the space/place itself and the bodies dancing in it into another world.

If we can think of each ritual performance as an illustration or recreation of the Ancestral journeys where dancers portray Ancestral characters moving through the Kugu Ngancharra landscape, then we can begin to understand how a world of Ancestral presence is created through dance. In *wanam* performances, the culmination of potent Ancestral ritual modes like body paints, songs and dances creates a realm of intensity where the collective of performing bodies redefine the performance space/place as a locus where the events of the Ancestral Past are recreated. I want to suggest then, that for the performative moment, the ceremonial performance space/place itself is transformed into the Ancestral landscape where the two brothers roamed; a realm where singers invoke the presence of Ancestral beings; and where dancers are themselves transformed into manifestations of these beings. Through the portrayal or enactment of the Ancestral journeys, the events of the cosmological past are brought into the present time, brought into the current experience of all ritual participants, thereby creating a world of Ancestral action and experience.

Dancers, at least in the Kugu Ngancharra case, are seen as the reincarnation of the Ancestral beings themselves, for as von Sturmer says: "if there are material representations of the spirit being, they are carefully identified with the dancers ... (so that the) existential distance between spirit being and person (performer) is short, indeed obliterated"[24].

Dancers, then, are closely identified with spirit beings – both in a corporeal and an existential sense. Hence, during performances, the dancer's body becomes the Ancestral body: both are incorporated into one and the same body schema. Singers, on the other hand, are not readily identified with the Ancestral beings. Singers may invoke the spirit image or they may 'send' the spirit image away, but a visible, existential distance is always maintained between themselves and the spirit beings.

It is important to note a difference between performances where songs invoke the image of the spirit, and performances where spirits are brought into material representations through dance. There is, then, a distinction between the *image* manifestation of the spirit form, and the *material* manifestation of the spirit through the dancer's body – a difference necessarily determined by the state or form of embodiment.

In *wanam* performances, the body in dance is privileged as the mode through which Ancestral presence is incorporated into bodily being. But why should dancers, and not singers, be identified with the reincarnation of Ancestral characters in ceremonial performances? And, if dancers are seen as the material form of spirits, how does this bodily incorporation occur? I address these questions below through a more general phenomenological understanding of how the body is transformed by and through relations with others.

THE OTHER IN DANCE

The capacity for dancers' bodies to be inhabited by, and to manifest Ancestral presence can, in part, be explained by Dufrenne's notion that enduring, pre-existing performative works are invested with character roles, or personages[25]. Personages may be thought of as objectified roles, where the character may only become fully existent through the performing subject. For the performative moment the character 'lives' and 'breathes' through the senses and intellect of the performer's subjective, lived body. The performer's body brings the latent, pre-existing performative work and its characters into being, revealing their existence.

Through interpretation, imitation and repetition of the character's gestures, the performer's body adopts the role of the character Other and is transformed into the character being. For the performative moment, the performing subject may become the character Other. In this way the body's usual sense of being is transformed through performance. Merleau-Ponty shows us that the portrayal of the character role is transformative of the body, for in the performance "the actress becomes invisible and it is Phaedra who appears"[26]: the performer disappears and the character emerges, obliterating the distance between the two.

Similarly, in *wanam* sacred performances, where dancers portray the Ancestral characters as they roamed the land, the intention is more than simply to passively reenact a 'text' of the events of the creative epoch. Rather, dancers who perform with brilliance and esoteric conviction may actually become the Ancestral characters they portray, so much so that they are seen by other ritual participants as the reincarnation of the traveller heroes themselves. von Sturmer explains that performers of Wik and Kugu Ancestral dance characters: "*are* Bonefish Man, Taipan Man, Blue-Tongued Lizard Man"[27].

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However, for performers to become Bonefish Man, Taipan Man, or the travelling Kaa'ungken brothers, for example, it is simply not enough for them to perform with conviction and intention alone. The possibility for dancers to appear as Ancestral characters is necessarily determined by a specific relation to the Ancestral landscape depicted in the dance sequences. Identification with land, either through rights of ownership or rights of access to land determines what is danced and who may perform a particular dance associated with a particular tract of land. Moreover, failure to assert an association with a particular tract of land may jeopardise potential claims to that land.[28] Consequently, a continued demonstration of an association with land through dance performances may validate that association with country and Ancestral beings embodied in that land. By the same token, it could also be said that the capacity for Ancestors to reincarnate, to emerge from land in response to particular song and dance performances suggests that Ancestors, like Kugu Ngancharra, are intentional subjects.

LAND AS THE 'LIVED BODY' OF ANCESTRAL SUBJECTS

In the Yolngu case, Tamisari's interpretation of land as the 'lived body' of Ancestral subjects suggests a dynamic, circular relation between the body, land and Ancestors[29]. Land is imbued with Ancestral presence, she argues, through the bodily movement of Ancestral beings, both on and in the land. In the beginning, when the Ancestors roamed and moved over the land, their bodies 'collided' with the world, etching tracks in their path and leaving the features of the landscape. After their creative episode, the Ancestral bodies sank or merged with the land, becoming embodied in the land. The landscape, then, can be thought of as having a motile, dynamic existence by virtue of Ancestral orientation, of directional movement both in and on land. Thus, land can be considered as a 'trajectory' of Ancestral movement and intentionality. Through embodiment and orientation, land is, according to Tamisari's phenomenological account, "the lived body, the knowing body of the Ancestors"[30].

When we consider that Kugu Ngancharra clan lands are linked along the Ancestral travel routes, we can think of human orientation on land as mirroring that of Ancestral subjects in the land. This parallel orientation between human and Ancestral beings is continuous even in the contemporary situation where Kugu Ngancharra clans are now spatially dislocated from traditional lands[31]. But the continuity of this parallel existence, I argue, is only possible through a continued interaction between human and Ancestral beings. The renewal and recreation of Ancestral events, and the manifestation of Ancestral subjects (in either spirit or material form) is reliant upon a continued, repeated human performance of Ancestral ritual modes like body paints, songs, dances, and carvings, or through a continued interpretation of Ancestral oral narratives[32]. In other words, human action is instrumental in renewing, recreating the possibility of Ancestral action and

presence, to bring Ancestors into being, to complete their latent existence. Therefore, in phenomenological terms, the existence and reconstitution of Ancestral subjects (and the conceptualisation of land as the 'lived body' of Ancestors) can only be effected and reconstituted through their continued relation with human subjects.

In "The Child's Relation with Others", Merleau-Ponty argues that the subject's experience of the world cannot be independent of others, for embodied experience is fundamentally intersubjective – all social relations hinge on the dialectic relation between self and other, or what he describes as "syncretic sociability"[33]. This syncretic relation begins in the infantile state when the child is unaware of its own existence and is reliant on the other (mother) to complete its existence. Significantly, the child's reconstitution of the self through the other is never resolved and continues in adult life. It follows then that in all social encounters, the self is simultaneously caught between an experience of subjectivity and objectivity, coupling with and yet remaining distinct from the other. That is, the person is subject for self but at the same time object for the other. As subject, Merleau-Ponty continues, body identity is perceived by the *introceptive* self – the self as subjectively experienced and known. For others, the self is objectified and it is the *extroceptive* self which is presented to the other – the self as perceived by the other. Thus, the self is never absolute, for an oscillation or indistinction will always exist between the self and the other. Hence, the self can only be fully realised through reciprocal relations with others.

The body's reciprocal relations with others are necessarily created and reconstituted through the body's motility or movement with the other. This occurs either through the projection or transfer of the self's gestures onto the other (transitivism), or, through imitation (mimicry) of the other's gestures, where the self is taken in, or "ensnared" by the other. Through mimicry, Merleau-Ponty explains, the body of the self and the body of the other are coupled as one "corporeal schema" – each is in the other[34].

THE SYNCRETIC RELATION BETWEEN SINGERS, DANCERS AND ANCESTORS

In the *wanam* ritual experience, the convergence of Ancestral ritual modes works as a vehicle for establishing and maintaining a syncretic, reciprocal relation between human and Ancestral subjects. We have seen that body paints transform the body's appearance and ontological state, transfiguring the body from its usual being into both a visibly unified social corpus and a locus of Ancestral power. However, while paints create a visual sense of indistinction between bodies (with the exception of gendered variations), the differentiated potentialities between the modalities of singing and dancing is marked by a difference in the experiential transformation of the body. Music and dance experience culminate to invoke Ancestral manifestations, yet, despite this cohesion, bodily potential and space between

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singers and dancers is separated into distinct realms. I reiterate this distinction because I believe it is pivotal to how performances reconstitute the relation between the body, land and the cosmological/mythological past. If we look at the spatial layout of the ceremonial performance space itself (illustrated in Diagram 1), we can see there are in fact three distinct entities at work: singers, dancers and Ancestors. The spaces and performative relations between the three indicates how a syncretic relation between human and Ancestral beings might occur.

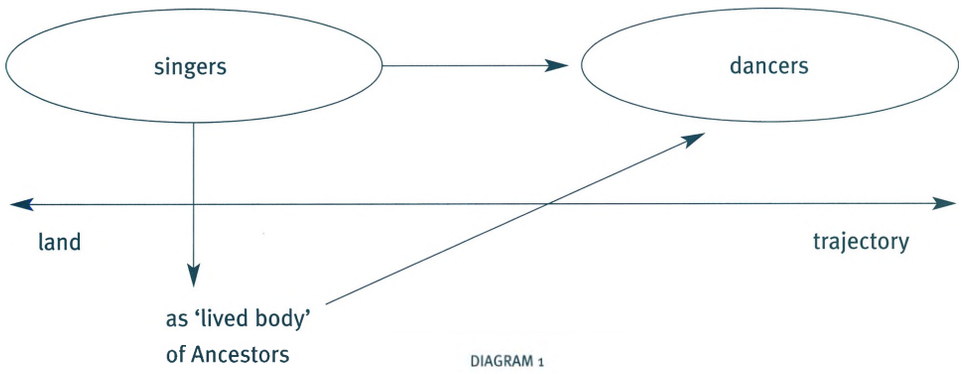

DIAGRAM 1

As I have argued above, music transforms the body by creating the situation or the possibility for the body to dance. Through the projection, or transfer of musical sounds to the dancers, music is internalised by the dancer, causing the body to dance. But music is also projected to and heard by Ancestral spirit beings, for songs have the capacity to call the Ancestral spirit into the presence of the song, invoking the spirit to emerge from the land and onto the land. Through music, the spirit emerges from its 'lived body' in the land and is transformed into other forms of embodiment, either as an image figure, or, in the cases where dancers are present, as a material, corporeal manifestation. Like the human body, song and rhythm may also enter and transform the Ancestral body, literally causing the Ancestor to dance.

This is possible because Ancestral beings are infinitely transformative[35]. They have the capacity to constantly transform from one form of embodiment to another. Strehlow observes that in Aranda mythology, Ancestral beings are considered 'immortal'. An Ancestor, he says, can: "... never vanish into nothingness. His body merely undergoes a transmutation into something that will weather all the assaults of time, change and decay"[36].

In Strehlow's account, an Ancestor can sustain a state of immortality by entering the human body, satisfying an eternal 'craving for reincarnation'. In this way, we can see how Ancestral beings may express and fulfil their desire for renewal and for reincarnation through interaction with living human subjects.

Similarly, in *wanam* ceremonial performances, Ancestors may seek renewal through a syncretic relation with human subjects. Rising from the land in response to song and rhythm, the Ancestral body is transformed, renewed, reincarnated through the dancer's body, so that dancers and Ancestors are activated as one being. This incorporation, however, can only occur through the human performance of the Ancestral character's personage, where the dance performer adopts or mimics the character's gestures, thereby becoming the character. In mimicking or assuming the gestures of the Ancestral character (other), the dancer (self) is taken in, or, to use Merleau-Ponty's term, 'ensnared' by the Ancestor. Likewise, an Ancestral character may only come into material being through the lived body of the dance performer. Activated as a single body schema, the dancers become invisible and it is the Ancestral beings who dance through the 'lived body' of the performers. For the performative moment then, the Ancestral character is reincarnated through the lived human body, just as the dance performer 'lives' and 'breathes' through the Ancestral Other in the dance.

That dancers, and not singers, assume the role of the Ancestral characters might be explained in terms of Dufrenne's assertion that dancers become the instrument of the aesthetic form they are incarnating. Or, put simply, the dancer is the dance. He continues: "In other arts which require a performance, the material is not the living being himself but the sound or the word, and the living being is only a performer"[37].

Singers, then, in these terms, can never be identified with Ancestral characters for their performance aims to project or transfer their songlines and musical sounds to dancers, and at the same time attract the attention of Ancestral spirits. Moreover, singing and dancing can never be performed by a person simultaneously, and singers always remain apart from dancers. That is, singers project sound to the dancers *on* the land, while at the same time projecting their sound to Ancestral spirits *in* the land. Thus, singers call to the dancer/spirit other, the other which always remains distinct from the singer's self.

We can understand these events in terms of the syncretic oscillation between the self and the other: dancers subjectively experience Ancestral beings through and within their bodies – through their *introceptive* selves; singers, on the other hand, see the outward representation of the Ancestral dancers, or the *extroceptive* representation of the distant other. Hence, a visible and existential distance is maintained between the two. In other words, the intention of singers is to create sound so as to invoke dance and Ancestral presence, while that of dancers is to move with and incarnate the rhythm and the Ancestral personage.

That the Ancestral realm may enter the lived experience of *wanam* ritual participants attests to Stanner's famous notion that Aboriginal ontology is characterised by a fusion between the sacred and the secular realms – a sharp

dichotomy cannot be drawn between the two[38]. For Stanner, Aboriginal religion does not transcend society in a hierarchical sense (as in Christian theology, for example), but rather, each realm 'pervades' the other. Jackson illustrates this notion in the Warlpiri case[39]. The 'patent' world of quotidian existence and the 'latent' world of the Dreaming, he explains, is not distinguished by notions of 'other worldliness' or 'the sacred', but of: "worlds that enter experience and of which direct experience is had. They are dimensions of the lifeworld, part of empirical reality"[40].

The Dreaming, then, may enter lived reality as Ancestral mythology and individual experience are fused, operating in a 'synechdochal-like' existence – each is in the other.

It could be said then that the fusion created between human and Ancestral realms through *wanam* ceremonial performances is not one where the Ancestral realm transcends the human realm, but rather, the Ancestral realm enters the direct experience of all ritual participants. This paralleled reality is most potently effected through the culminative enactment of Ancestral ritual modes – where people and Ancestors live through each other during the amplified ritual experience. Each repeated performance of the Ancestral journeys renews the original creative event so that it is endlessly new, and, in this way, the Ancestral Past is brought into being, made consistent with present experience. Each performance also demonstrates, validates and renews each participant's rights to, or association with, traditional clan lands.

THE BODY, DANCE AND THE RECREATION OF THE ANCESTRAL LANDSCAPE

That contemporary *wanam* performances may be performed in locations and situations far removed from their historical context at Thaa'kungadha does not necessarily diminish the potential for the Ancestral landscape to be recreated through each performance. Instead, I argue, the Ancestral landscape may be recreated wherever and whenever it is ritually invoked by the body through Ancestral ritual modes.

Arguably, the fluid and trajectory nature of Ancestral embodiment in land enables the Ancestral body to lead a parallel existence with the human body. That is, I want to suggest that the landscape can (almost) literally move as the body does. Myers[41], for example, describes the capacity for the *Tingarri* Dreaming in the Pintupi region to reorient its direction in the landscape. Pintupi claim that since their relocation from traditional lands to Balgo Hills mission, *Tingarri* has travelled underground to the vicinity of the mission, diverging from its original orientation in traditional country to where Pintupi now reside. Apparently, the Ancestral body has the capacity to fuse its orientation with that of the human body.

The dynamic and variable orientation of Ancestral tracks seen in the Pintupi example has some relevance for the Kugu Ngancharra case. Indeed, the capacity for *wanam* performances to invoke Ancestral presence in locations distant from traditional clan lands[42] demonstrates the mobile and omnipresent capacity of Ancestral power and travel. This mirrored orientation in and on land is most evident in the ritual performative context, where the body's capacity to evoke a realm 'other' to the ordinary enables the Ancestral landscape to be recreated where and when the body creates it.

However, I wish to make a qualifying statement to this claim. While the Kugu Ngancharra Ancestral landscape may be recreated wherever it is ritually invoked by the body, the recreated geographic space is necessarily referenced to the actual landscape where the Kaa'ungken brothers travelled. That is, when the *wanam* repertoire is performed outside the Kugu Ngancharra region, the landscape recreated in these external performances is virtually situated in the Kugu Nganch-arra domain itself, and not within the Ancestral domain of other Aboriginal groups.

This capacity for the body to experience the Ancestral landscape through ritual performance has marked implications for Kugu Ngancharra and other groups of the Wik region in the contemporary context. Though many people are now spatially removed from their traditional lands, the ritual context effectively allows a virtually direct experience and knowledge of country. Through the transformative capacity of the body in performance of Ancestral ritual modes, all ceremonial participants are, in effect, ritually transported to the sites on country where the Ancestral beings themselves moved and acted. This ritualised transformation, then, may situate Kugu Ngancharra performers on country itself for the performative moment. In this way, it could be understood that people may directly experience and 'know' country 'by proxy'.

For Kugu Ngancharra, a continuing link with land, with Ancestors and with the Ancestral Past is demonstrated through the present performance of dance. But the continued, repeated performance of Ancestral ritual modes is crucial in maintaining this link between the Ancestral and human realms, in maintaining a link with Ancestral lands. Failure to demonstrate a continued identification with land may jeopardise this relation, for it is only through demonstration that this relation may be reconstituted and maintained.

1 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by C. Smith, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1962, p.183.

2 Michael Jackson, 'Knowledge of the Body', in *Man*, Vol 18, 1983, p.338.

3 Suzanne Langer, *Feeling and Form*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, p.204.

4 Story adapted from John von Sturmer, 'Aboriginal singing and notions of power' in *Songs of Aboriginal Australia, Oceania Monographs*, No. 32, University of Sydney, 1987, p.67; and from _____ *The Wik Region: Economy, Territoriality and Totemism in Western Cape York Peninsula, North Queensland*, unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, St. Lucia, 1978, pp.366–368.

5 Ritual performances in the Wik region often include men's ceremonial carvings depicting representations of various Ancestral traveller

heroes or totemic phenomena. In the ritual context the carvings are a focal point of the performance, with (generally) male dancers either performing around the pieces, or holding the carvings as they dance.

6 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1978, p.372.

7 Howard Morphy, *Ancestral Connections: Art and an Aboriginal System of Knowledge*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1991, p.102.

8 Nancy Munn, *Walbiri Iconography*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1973, p.56.

9 Morphy, 1991, p.109.

10 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1978, p.218.

11 These designs distinguish *wanam* participants from other ritual groups of the Wik region, who also have their own distinct ceremonial body designs. It should be noted there are also gendered variations in designs.

12 M. Thevoz, *The Painted Body*, Skira, Geneva, 1984, p.7.

13 Alfonso Lingis, *Excesses: Eros and Culture*, State University of New York Press, Albany, 1983, p.24.

14 As a male oriented ritual, the major singers of the *wanam* ceremony are focal males, however, in other ceremonial traditions of the Wik region, women may assume the role of the major singer.

15 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1987, p.72.

16 Michael Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, translated by E.S.Casey and others, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973, p.76.

17 Quoted in Bruce Kapferer, *A Celebration of Demons*, Berg, Oxford, 1991, p.256.

18 M. Dufrenne, op. cit., p.249.

19 B. Kapferer, op. cit., p.259.

20 S. Langer, op. cit., p.203.

21 M. Dufrenne, op. cit., p.515.

22 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1987, p.71.

23 S. Langer, op. cit., p.190.

24 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1987, p.72.

25 M. Dufrenne, op. cit., p.21.

26 M. Merleau-Ponty, op. cit., p.183.

27 Quoted in D. Williams, *Ten Lectures on Theories of the Dance*, The Scarecrow Press Inc., Metuchen, New Jersey, 1991, p.335 (emphasis added)

28 von Sturmer, op. cit., 1978, p.424.

29 Franca Tamisari, 'Body, Vision and Movement', in *The Footprints of the Ancestors*, unpublished manuscript, University of Sydney, 1997, p.4. In this paper, Tamisari develops Merleau-Ponty's notion of the 'lived body'.

30 ibid., p.22.

31 von Sturmer, 1978, p.215.

32 Although not previously discussed in this paper, dreams may also be considered as examples of human-Ancestral communication, however, I will not elaborate on them here.

33 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'The Child's Relation with Others', in *The Primacy of Perception and other essays*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1964, p.120.

34 ibid., 1964, pp.145, 148.

35 Howard Morphy, 'On Representing Ancestral Beings', in *Animals into Art*, H. Morphy (ed), Unwin Hyman, London, 1989, p.156.

36 Quoted in John Morton, 'The Effectiveness of Totemism: Increase Rituals and Resource Control in Central Australia', in *Man*, Vol. 22, No. 19, 1987, pp.457. It is uncertain whether Strehlow is referring explicitly to male Ancestral characters, or if his use of the masculine term overrides a distinction between male and female Ancestral characters.

37 M. Dufrenne, op. cit., p.78.

38 W.E.H. Stanner, 'Religion, Totemism and Symbolism' in *Religion in Aboriginal Australia*, by M. Charlesworth, H. Morphy, D. Bell and K. Maddock (eds), University of Queensland Press, St. Lucia, 1984, p.172.

39 Jackson uses the contemporary orthography of 'Warlpiri', distinct from Munn's earlier 'Walbiri' notation.

40 Michael Jackson, 'Introduction: Phenomenology, Radical Empiricism and Anthropological Critique' in M. Jackson (ed) *Things As They Are: New Directions in Phenomenological Anthropology*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1996, p.15.

41 Fred Myers, *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self: Sentiment, Place and Politics among Western Desert Aborigines*, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1986, pp.59, 60.

42 For examples of *wanam* dances performed in new contexts, see the film *Lockhart Festival*, directed by C. Levi, Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, Canberra, 1974.

Author's acknowledgements
Mr Joe Ngallametta
Mr McNaught Ngallametta
Dr Jennifer Biddle

Lorina Allan Hello and welcome to Awaye, Radio National's Indigenous culture program... Fusing traditional dance, songs and stories with contemporary dance is one area in which Indigenous people are forging new pathways, but, are the owners of cultural materials recognised in western law?
(As part of today's program) we present a discussion about intellectual property and copyright issues in dance collaboration.

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Intellectual Property and Copyright in Dance Collaboration Transcript of a discussion from "Awaye", ABC Radio National 11 June 1999

Lorinna Allan Companies like the Marrugeku Company and Bangarra Dance Theatre have had great commercial successes with their productions *Mimi* and *Ochres*. But because copyright law doesn't recognise Aboriginal laws of ownership, is indigenous cultural material open to exploitation? Recently the Arts Law Centre of Australia brought together dance companies to discuss how they dealt with this and other issues raised by collaborations with indigenous communities. On the panel are Bangarra Dance Theatre's principal dancer, **Jakapurra Munyarrun** and director, **Joe Dyer**. From the Marrugeku Company, dancer **Dalia Pigrim** and director, **Rachel Swain** and Mornington Island Dancers director, **Peter Cleary**. Our first speaker is Indigenous Copyright Lawyer, **Terri Janke**, after a brief performance by Bangarra.

Terri Janke I'd like to start by acknowledging Eora people and the ancestors that spirit this beautiful harbour and I'd also like to start with a statement by the Association of Northern and Kimberley Aboriginal Artists: "the paintings and patterns come from the land, dancing comes from the land, names come from the land. The traditional ochres come from the land, stories come from the land, sacred ceremonies come from the land, the land belongs to our ancestors and now the clans and tribes".

Indigenous dance, like all forms of Indigenous culture, is an important vehicle for cultural, social and economic expression. Indigenous culture and 'intellectual property' – when I say that, I'm referring to Indigenous peoples' rights to their cultural heritage – comprises all objects, sites and knowledge, the nature and use of which have been transmitted or continues to be transmitted from generation to generation, and which is regarded as pertaining to a particular Indigenous group or territory.

Indigenous peoples' heritage is a living heritage and it includes objects, knowledge, performing works, literary works, all of those things that are created in the past, created now and in the future. In Australia there are many Indigenous Australian groups and each has its particular ownership rights and its own particular heritage, its own particular systems. But one factor that's common between all Indigenous groups is that there generally exist laws which govern how Indigenous cultural material can be used and dealt with. These laws are

based on the premise of responsibility for cultural knowledge and the need to ensure that culture is maintained and protected so that it's passed on to future generations.

In 1997, I undertook a project* which looked at the ability of Indigenous people to assert their rights to culture and what we found was that there are certain fundamental rights that Indigenous people need to maintain and continue their culture, and these include the right to own and control Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, the right to control the commercial use of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property in accordance with traditional laws and customary obligations, the right to benefit commercially from authorised use of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, the right to full and proper attribution and the right to protect sacred and significant cultural material. It's extremely difficult under copyright law, which is the major form of intellectual property protection for artistic works in Australia. 'Material form' is a requirement for copyright protection which means that a work – and a dance would be defined as a dramatic work under the Copyright Act – a work would need to be recorded in some permanent and tangible form, so non-permanent forms of cultural expression like performances of story, song and dance, they wouldn't meet that requirement.

* SEE "INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY AND INDIGENOUS DANCE ISSUES: PAPER FOR THE ARTS LAW SEMINAR, 14 MAY 1999" (PAGE 88 THIS ISSUE)

Also, an author must be identifiable. There must be an author who is going to exercise these exclusive copyrights. And given the nature and the development of how expressions of culture are created, an individual person or group will not always be identifiable and a dance may be developed by a group or over the generations and, therefore, has communal ownership. This generational creation of works doesn't really fit with copyright notions.

Moral rights: there are no moral rights in a Copyright Act and when I am talking about moral rights I'm referring to the right of the creator to be credited for their work and not be falsely accredited and to not have their work subjected to derogatory treatment. For Indigenous people cultural integrity and reproductions of Indigenous cultural material is important, so what happens if a dance is altered so that it's meaning is derogated? There's no protection under Copyright Law. There's no right of attribution, for individual or group. In short, copyright is focussed more on economic and individual interests rather than communal and cultural interests. Given that the inadequacy of the laws doesn't cover Indigenous rights, there's a need to adopt measures which recognise Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights.

The sharing of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property should be based on the principles of respect, informed consent, negotiation, full and proper attribution, and the sharing of benefits. It's fundamental that any changes in the law or policy which looks to recognise Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights should allow Indigenous people self-determination at all levels, and the collaboration and negotiation is a way forward outside of legislation. One of the recommendations was to enact new and specific legislation which protects Indigenous cultural and intellectual property but

that's a big ask and if you look at the current political climate, it's very unlikely. But we can always hope that it'll be a long term goal, so that Indigenous people have the same rights as other Australians.

But in the absence of laws there are non-legislative measures that can protect culture, such as negotiating rights under agreement or developing protocols for appropriate use and sharing of culture, and this is what the speakers are here to talk about today. So enough of all the legal issues. Let's hear from the dance representatives concerning how they've dealt with the issues.

Lorinna Allan First of all I thought we'd get everybody to just introduce the projects that they're working on so that the audience can find out a little bit about what communities they're with and what they've been doing. I thought maybe we should start with our host, Bangarra, so I thought I might ask Joe Dyer and Jakapurra Munyarrun to start us off.

Joe Dyer I'll just give a brief outline of what Bangarra is, I guess. The company began in 1989. It grew directly out of the Aboriginal and Islander Dance School just up in the Rocks, NAISDA. A lot of the students who had come through NAISDA and who had been taught a lot of traditional dance from all around the country as well as contemporary dance forms, when they graduated from the school there was a desire to keep up that involvement with their own culture. Some graduates went off to Sydney companies and Dance North and so on, but others of them had a real desire to start up their own company which would be working directly with traditional forms of Aboriginal dance as well as use some of their contemporary training. And then in 1991, Steven Page who had been working to that time with Sydney Dance Company, joined Bangarra as initial principal choreographer and then Artistic Director. Steven Page had a strong personal relationship which had developed through his years at NAISDA with Jakapurra Munyarrun and through Jakapurra with his clan, the Munyarrun clan who are based just outside of Yirrkala up in Arnhem Land. It was very much through the personal relationship that Steven and his brother David Page, who's a composer, had with Jakapurra and his family, that the collaboration of Bangarra in the form that you now know it began. Bangarra, as you can tell from that brief story, was a kind of ad hoc development and it was through the next major work – once Bangarra had really been established and had got itself together and it was getting regular funding from the arts' bureaucracies – that we tried to actually develop a kind of model to use as the basis for the negotiation between Bangarra, the organisation, and the Munyarrun clan. Jakapurra's parents came down to Bangarra when we moved down here to The Wharf in 1997 and at that time we had a meeting with them to discuss, if you like, the way forward, the formalities which were going to be imposed on the organic development which had already occurred. So when we went into the creative development for our latest full length piece that premiered in 1997, *Fish*, we actually drew up a formal agreement, if you like, which stated that the

Munyarrun clan gave their consent for the work – the material that we're using in *Fish* – and we paid a fee for that as well. And we see that would be the way forward as well so that each time a new work is being created or when repertoire is being put together to take on a tour, that there is ongoing discussion and negotiation and where appropriate payments are made as well.

Rachel Swain I think one of the really important things to say about the Marrugeku Company is that it's an intercultural company and it's an inter-disciplinary company, so our work is about bringing together a lot of different strengths from a lot of different directions. It's about putting together the work, visual art, dance, story and music from the strengths of the Kunwinjku mob that we work with up there from Kumbulunya; also from the kind of genre of contemporary Indigenous dance that's happening and is so strong in Australia and that's represented by dancers like Dalia who live perhaps in cities and have had different kinds of training, perhaps more of a mixed training; and from Stalker which is our company which represents contemporary physical theatre. So, we really work with putting together these different forms and working with our different backgrounds.

LEFT: **MARRUGEKU COMPANY** PERFORMING **MIMI**
ABOVE: **MORNINGTON ISLAND DANCERS** WITH **DANCE NORTH** PERFORMING LUULI
CHOREOGRAPHY: LARDIL ELDERS OF MORNINGTON ISLAND, JANE PIRANI AND GARY LANG

And one of the things about that is we spend a lot of time trying to understand each other and finding where we stand together to make work from, and we talk a lot about old story and new story and what it means to put old story together with new story, what it means for the Kumbulunya mob to consider their new story, because their old story is so strong but their modern stories – there's a lot of health and social problems up there. And they are also asking us to think about our old story. What is our old story? You know, standing on that ground that we've worked in together and hoping to take a step and to considering old story and new story happening together at the same time.

Peter Cleary Woomera was formed in 1973. Initially Mornington Island people travelled out to do some dancing mostly in North Queensland in their region. After that initial tour they got together and put together something that they wanted to call Woomera. Woomera: nothing to do with South Australia, just as 'the spear thrower', something to give them strength that could

launch themselves out. And they started touring, sharing and learning about what it meant, what it really meant to collaborate with the rest of Australia in sharing their culture and bringing it out. So it's been many years of learning what it meant to practise your culture outside of its context. They went for four years without any assistance of government funding, until that started to come through the Australia Council Aboriginal Arts Board and now after 25, 26 years we manage to be very secure in that and still doing, still doing the same thing but with the great grandchildren basically of the people who originally started that. So over those years there were many collaborations in many different circumstances. I suppose the beginnings were with RDT (Redfern Dance Theatre), the Glebe school, or 'the ballet school' as Mornington Island people called it in Glebe. But sharing with other Aboriginal people. This time it's with the company of Dance North in Townsville, a professional modern dance company – most of their history a purely white company, young professional white dancers who have never known much in Aboriginal communities. From our point of view at Mornington Island, it was done because of things that they wanted to get out of it. I like the idea of informed consent. We were learning about the white professional world of dance. You know, what did it mean to give consent to work together in that environment? The compromises that we had to create. They wanted to get something back from working together with professional people in a theatre, learning about lighting, learning about sound, learning about discipline, doing yoga.

On the other side we had to make it very clear how Mornington Island people thought of their song and how they thought of their dance. Every song that they're able to portray comes from a dream. People get these songs, they identify who's the dreamer of that song and it's a spiritual process that comes from being close to their land and their culture and their country.

Lorina Allan I might get you to stop there, but I wanted to now move on to the meaty part of the afternoon which is asking each of the speakers to talk about some particular issues that have arisen in their collaboration.

Joe Dyer One of the things that we're looking to do probably towards the end of this year and into next year is we're talking to Jakapurra about, I guess, developing greater reciprocity. Jakapurra and his sister Janet have been with us as performers but it's kind of come in one way if you like, that we're using, adapting, performing traditional dance and so on from the Munyarrun clan. Yes, there's payments and that kind of thing but to actually try and develop cultural residencies which will actually involve Bangarra dancers going back up with Jakapurra to his family and spending time with them over one, two week periods. It's still just scratching the surface but it gives them – the Bangarra artists – a greater idea of the context of the song, the dance which they're

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performing on an ongoing basis. Each relationship really is going to have to be dealt with and addressed on its own terms. It is quite a personal way of dealing with things and cannot be transposed from one group of individuals to another.

Jakapurra Munyarrun Like for me, I like showing the cultures, I just show it with them, show my culture with them. They still are looking for their own ground ... And they're going to look beyond back there to the future. Because my culture was working for more than a thousand years and still going. And is passing through - like my dad, passing it to me and I am passing in the air like same, like I'm telling with the dancers too, with the members of Bangarra too, and telling them of the story of me. And that's a good way to do it, you know, to keep passing through to generation to generation, you know, for Aboriginal people to stand strong because you know I'm in the company Bangarra like I'm a root of the tree. It's making like a magic things, you know. That's how I feel like.

Dalia Pigrim At the beginning when we first started Rachel had the tape playing with the traditional music playing and I didn't feel I could dance to it because I didn't know what the song was about or anything. And she didn't or they didn't think about those kinds of things – which is good because I said, 'You'll have to ring them old people up and ask if I'm allowed to because I'm a girl and is it a boy's song or can I do my own moves or do I do their moves?' So it's hard for someone like me coming from Broome with my own different culture and knowing my rules but not knowing their rules. And, then, when you meet them it's good because all the old people look after you and the younger ones especially, the dancers always tell you. It's good as long as you keep asking them and they keep asking you and we keep asking Rachel and stuff like that. We keep talking, that's the best thing about how we work things out, even if we don't agree on things, even if you don't know what's right and you've got doubt you can talk to each other which is I reckon the best thing about our company because we all seem to get around the problems by sitting down and having a big meeting and talking.

Rachel Swain That's one part of the process and the other part of the process is not watering down what is strong about our difference as well, and that's something we think about a lot, is the strength of our differences – bringing that in together and then finding stuff together by interpreting what each other brings to the work.

Peter Cleary From the dancers themselves who have been dancing the stuff outside the community, they need that feeling of support from their families and from the community as a whole to be able to come out and work and do what they're doing. They need the full, clear consent of everybody in the community to do what they're doing because people come out ... money issue's a big one and as people come out they earn money. There's a lot of jealousies

involved and things like this and so unless we can create strong activity happening within the community for people themselves, we can't justify and maintain over a long period of time people going out working outside. So it has to be balanced with what's happening inside. And that means sort of redirecting always, trying to redirect some of our money and programs back into the community.

Rachel Swain So when that's the story for me it's a lot about the quality of the way you are together. It's a lot about time, and some of the old men we're working with like Thomson last time we worked together he said, well, what's really important is we work really slowly. If we do the wrong thing some of us might get sick and we have to work so slowly that we can find out if that happens while we're working, and then we know we've gone the wrong way and start going a different way. And we have to work so slowly that we keep in touch with each other as we go, so this process and the legal process and the definition process and the payment process are very – it's a very difficult area but for me it's like, it's Australia understanding itself and finding out how to live together and finding some way forward. And there's going to be mistakes and problems and confusions but there's a lot that's very exciting about that.

Peter Cleary In grappling with copyright legislation and having things in material form, this has urged the Mornington Island community to create material forms of the songs. They've done that in one form here in the last two years. We've been developing a Lardil songs register. This is only the notation of songs, nothing to do with ceremony. Ceremony stuff stays out of it completely but just of the public songs that they would perform in public. They've actually sat down and just started writing it all down and creating recordings and stuff we can go to. So when the lawyer comes up to see us we can say, 'Yeah, that's the one right there'. And these have been able to be identified in terms of, you know, who's who, who dreamt the song, what country is this from, who's connected with it, you know, and create a little structure of where this song belongs.

One of the fantastic effects of doing this, the register, was the urge to bring back songs that may have been lost or just in the fringes of memories of some of the old people and we've been able to go and find old tapes down in the Institute in Canberra and look up an old anthropologist in London and one in Brisbane, you know, and get them to get their tapes out and we sit around and just create situations where people sit and listen to those tapes. And in the last year I think there's been 15 new dances, 15 old dances brought back and performed within the community. Now those performances have been just some of the most fantastic things we've done in the last few years.

Joe Dyer In dance – I mean dance is really interesting because, you know, you have a person who's named choreographer and who's been commissioned to choreograph and is actually being paid to choreograph, but

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at the same time it's all the dancers in the studio as well, so it's quite a collaborative process from the very start. So, at what point does normal studio collaboration become something different that requires accreditation and financial remuneration? Actually, there's still a question mark there.

Lorina Allan From Bangarra Dance Theatre Director, Joe Dyer. You also heard the voices of Jakapurra Munyarrun, Dalia Pigrim, Rachel Swain, Peter Cleary, Terri Janke and from the Arts Law Centre, Sally McCausland.

Intellectual Property and Indigenous Dance Issues Paper for the Arts Law Seminar 14 May 1999

Terri Janke

1 INTRODUCTION

The painting and patterns come from the land. Dancing comes from the land. Names come from the land. The traditional ochres come from the land. Stories come from the land. Sacred ceremonies come from the land. The land belongs to our ancestors and now the clans and tribes.[1]

Indigenous dance is an integral part of the Indigenous cultures. Dance, like the other forms of Indigenous cultural expression is a vehicle of cultural, political, and social expression. Forms of dance have been handed down through the generations and link Indigenous Australians to their land and spirituality. New forms of dance have also been created drawing on past themes and thereby reflecting the dynamism of Indigenous cultures.

In 1997, Michael Frankel and Company were commissioned by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in association with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) to undertake a consultancy project which sought to develop practical proposals for the improved recognition and protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. As part of the ICIP Project, a discussion paper, *Our Culture: Our Future: Proposals for Recognition and Protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property*[2] was written and disseminated widely, asking for feedback. The Discussion Paper outlined the issues and concerns for Indigenous Australians and put forward some possible solutions. In response to the discussion paper, some seventy submissions

were received. We also consulted ATSIC's Indigenous Reference Group on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property, chaired by Commissioner Ian Delaney. The final report *Our Culture: Our Future: Report on Australian Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights*, was published this year.

The Report:-

- comprehensively maps the rights Indigenous Australians want in relation to their Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property;
- analyses the existing laws in protecting Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.
- sets out a comprehensive framework for improving protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

This paper will present some of the key findings and recommendations which are specifically relevant to dance.

2 INDIGENOUS CULTURAL AND INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property refers to Indigenous people's rights to their cultural heritage. 'Heritage comprises all objects, sites and knowledge the nature or use of which has been transmitted or continues to be transmitted from generation to generation, and which is regarded as pertaining to a particular Indigenous group or its territory.'[3] Indigenous people's heritage is a living heritage and includes objects, knowledge, literary, musical and performing works which may be created now or in the future based on that heritage.

Dance like other aspects of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property often stems from a social base. It is often communally developed and owned, and is evolving continuously. In Australia, there are many different Indigenous Australian groups. Each particular group has ownership of rights over its particular inherited cultural heritage to ensure the integrity of the culture.[4] Others must get the consent of the group, or a spokesperson on behalf of the group, if they want to use or reproduce Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. For instance, if a person from New South Wales wanted to perform a dance which originates from Arhnem Land, they must ask permission to do so from the relevant person from the particular group with whom the dance originates. Consent procedures may differ from group to group. These types of consent procedures were noted in a recent copyright case relating to the unauthorised reproduction of Indigenous visual arts on fabric. In *Bulun Bulun v R & T Textiles*, evidence given by Djardie Ashley discussed how the Ganalbingu laws deal with such consent procedures. Mr Ashley noted that in some circumstances, such as reproducing the painting in an art book, the artist may not need to consult with the group widely. However, in other circumstances, such as reproduction in merchandise, Mr Bulun many be required to consult widely. Mr Ashley further noted: "The question in each case depends on the

use and the manner or mode of production. But in the case of a use which is one that requires direct consultation, rather than one for which approval has already been given for a class of uses, all of the traditional Aboriginal owners must agree. There must be total consensus. Bulun Bulun could not act alone to permit the reproduction of 'at the Waterhole' in the manner as it was done."[5]

Similar obligations are placed on custodians of Indigenous dance.

In 1997, I worked with an Indigenous Reference Group, on a project which was the first of its kind in Australia, to comprehensively map the rights Indigenous Australians wanted in relation to the Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

From the findings of the *Our Culture: Our Future* report, we found that there are certain fundamental rights Indigenous people need to continue and maintain their cultures. These rights include:-

- the right to own and control Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- the right to control the commercial use of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property in accordance with traditional laws and customary obligations
- the right to benefit commercially from the authorised use of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
- the right to full and proper attribution
- the right to protect sacred and significant cultural material

3 APPLICATION OF COPYRIGHT TO INDIGENOUS DANCE

The Project also looked at the capacity of existing laws to provide Indigenous peoples with the rights they need. What we found was that the ability of Indigenous people to protect their cultural expressions through copyright is extremely limited.

Material Form

To obtain copyright protection a work must be written down or recorded in some permanent, tangible form. Non-permanent forms of cultural expression, such as performances of stories, song or dance, do not meet the requirement of material form required by the *Copyright Act*. For instance, oral traditions will not receive copyright protection. Indigenous communities, as custodians of their cultural heritage, cannot protect their oral traditions and will only receive protection against unauthorised reproduction of that oral tradition if they satisfy the elements of breach-of-confidence laws.

Similarly, designs painted on the body for ceremonies constitute a significant form of cultural expression for many Indigenous communities. Whether a person is entitled to wear a design is contingent upon a 'series of qualifications' well defined in Indigenous customary laws. However, as body painting is not a permanent medium, it is not protected by copyright law. This means that any subsequent reproductions of a body-painting design are not protected.

Identifiable author

There must be an identifiable author, or authors, for copyright to exist in a work.[6] Given the nature of Indigenous arts and cultural expression, an individual person or group of people will not always be identifiable. A dance may have been developed by a group. Communal ownership does not fit with copyright notions of protection. On the other hand, a person who first reduces an oral tradtion to material form will be recognised as the author of the ensuing work and be able to exercise the exclusive rights granted to authors under the *Copyright Act*. Indigenous Australian cultures pass down stories from the Dreaming through oral tradition. This mode of carrying on the culture continues today. As these stories are being recorded for the first time, the person putting the story in material form is recognised as the copyright owner of the written stories. It does not matter whether the person is Indigenous or not, or whether they come from the relevant community. Copyright does not recognise the bounds placed on reproduction of Indigenous arts and cultural material under Indigenous customary law, as the artist or the recorder of the story will become the unencumbered, exclusive owner of the copyright in the work.

Originality

For copyright to exist in a work, it must be original in that the work is not copied from another work and the creator has imparted the necessary degree of skill, labour and effort to produce a new work. Given that Indigenous traditional forms of dance are reproduced as a continuum of cultural expression they are often perceived as not being original. However, if a work is based on a traditional form of dance which incorporates new styles, additions which are imparting skill, labour and effort, then this work may have copyright in itself. But it is important to note that the owners of the underlying work have no right to control uses etc, such rights would exist with the new copyright owner.

Recordings of Dance

Generally, the copyright in a recording of a dance will be vested in the person or organisation which makes the recording or film. As owner of the copyright in the recording, that person or organisation has exclusive rights to sell, display and otherwise exploit the copyright in the film or recording, as they see fit. Under the *Copyright Act* certainly there are provisions providing performers' rights.[7] The right is not a proprietary right like copyright but it does provide performers with the right to prevent certain unauthorised uses of recordings of their performances.[8] However, a performer cannot prevent further use of that recording if it has been consented to. and certain uses might not have been contemplated when the consent to record was given. For instance, a group of dancers might consent to filming of their performance for the making of a documentary, but they might not consent to the reproduction of the film of the dance, say on the internet or for advertising cars.

Moral rights

Under the *Copyright Act* 1968, there are no 'moral rights'. Moral rights refers to the rights of a creator to have his or her work credited, or not falsely accredited, and the right not to have the work subjected to derogatory treatment.

No protection against culturally inappropriate treatment

For Indigenous people, cultural integrity in reproductions of Indigenous cultural material is important. Under customary law, Indigenous custodians are collectively responsible for ensuring that important cultural images and themes are not reproduced inappropriately. The Indigenous creator must be careful not to distort or misuse the cultural knowledge embodied in a work. Although an author is the creator of the artwork, song or story, he or she cannot authorise reproduction of it without ensuring the reproduction complies with Indigenous customary law. Such rights are not recognised under current copyright laws.

No right of attribution

Under the *Copyright Act*, there is no right for a person or group to be attributed for artworks or cultural material. But the ownership of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property and the right to be correctly attributed for it are very significant for Indigenous people, given the integral relationship between their communities, cultural practices and their land. It is additionally important at a time when proof of rights to native title over land depends on being able to show an ongoing connection with it.[9]

In short, copyright protects economic interests rather than cultural interests.

4 THE WAY FORWARD

Given the inadequacy of existing laws there is a need to adopt measures to recognise Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights. The sharing of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property should be based on the principles of respect, informed consent, negotiation, full and proper attribution and benefit sharing.

Respect requires that Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights are recognised within the Australian legal and policy framework. Such rights should be premised on the understanding that Indigenous customary laws concerning use and dissemination of cultural material are similar to intellectual property laws and the rights of intellectual property rightsholders. Users of Indigenous cultural material should respect these laws including laws governing dissemination, attribution and cultural integrity.

Informed consent requires that those who seek to use or ascertain Indigenous knowledge and make use of Indigenous resources gain prior informed consent of

the relevant Indigenous peoples. For consent to be informed, the purpose and nature of the intended use must be communicated, including the risks and the benefits. Relationships must be frank and open and discussions should entail what participation is required by Indigenous people. Informed consent of the people as a group is required as well as individuals within that group.

Indigenous Australians seek the right to negotiate on the terms of use of their Cultural and Intellectual Property. Depending on the circumstances, this might include extent of rights to be granted, appropriate attribution, royalties, or whether consent should be given for use at all.

Full and proper attribution includes that the group which is the source of the material or knowledge and any participants are fully acknowledged for their role and contribution.

The sharing of benefits should be included in all negotiations for use of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. The nature of those benefits will vary substantially depending on the nature of the use. However, such benefits to Indigenous people could include Indigenous employment opportunities; development of Indigenous controlled infrastructure; royalties to communities from earned income and the sharing of any derived intellectual property rights.

It is fundamental that any changes to the laws should allow Indigenous people self-determination at all levels. *Our Culture: Our Future* suggested a range of strategies for change including the enactment of new and specific legislation which protects Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. The legislation would need to address the following:-

- The legislation should provide protection for works that are intangible
- Rights should exist in perpetuity
- The legislation should include provisions which:
  - Prohibit the wilful distortion and destruction of cultural material;
  - Prevent misrepresentations of the source of cultural material;
  - Allow payments to Indigenous owners for the commercial use of their cultural material;
  - provide special protection for sacred and secret materials.
- The legislation should not inhibit the further cultural development of materials within their originating communities. That is, customary and traditional use should not be affected.

Non-Legislative Measures

Outside of legislative measures, Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights could be better protected as follows:-

Negotiating Rights under Agreement

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights could be included in written agreements between Indigenous custodial groups and commercial users of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. Provisions could introduce standards on those who use and disseminate Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property. For instance, a dance group or community could enter into an agreement with film-makers as to the use to be put of film taken of Indigenous dance; they might also share copyright.

National Indigenous Cultural Authority

The Report recommended the establishment of a National Indigenous Cultural Authority as an organisation made up of various Indigenous organisations to:

- Develop policies and protocols with various industries.
- Authorise uses of Indigenous cultural material through a permission system which seeks prior consent from relevant Indigenous groups.
- Monitor exploitation of cultures.
- Undertake public education and awareness strategies.
- Advance Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights nationally and internationally.

The National Indigenous Cultural Authority should be the peak advisory body on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights. Representation on the Authority should aim to cover all areas of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property.

Indigenous Cultural Legal Services

An Indigenous Cultural Legal Centre should be established similar to the Arts Law Centre of Australia, but should have the powers to provide legal advice and take on legal actions as would general legal services provided by professional solicitors.

Appropriate provision should be made for Indigenous Australians, both artists and communities, to be represented by fully qualified and experienced intellectual property and copyright lawyers who are familiar with Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights.

Policy Development

The Report noted that a range of policies relating to the issues were in existence and supported the development of national policy which covered the holistic definitions and Intellectual Property. The Report supported the introduction of a national policy and/or legislation on the repatriation of Indigenous ancestral remains and sacred objects held by cultural institutions.

Developing Industry Protocols

The Report encouraged the development of Industry protocols which recognise Indigenous rights in relation to the usage and control of Indigenous Cultural and

Intellectual Property. Such protocols would set the basis of standards of practice which will assist in the long term with systemic and legal changes.

Codes of Ethics

The Report supported the development of ethics in a range of professional associations including medical and research associations. The development of guidelines in relation to use and dissemination of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property should be done in consultation with Indigenous peoples.

Education and Awareness Strategies

The Report recommended the implementation of awareness strategies for Indigenous peoples such as legal and cultural workshops and publication of information. Materials on Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property rights should be developed.

5 CONCLUSION

Indigenous Australians must have the right to control uses of their cultural and intellectual property in order to maintain their unique cultural identities. Government, industry and all those who seek to make use of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property, other than in traditional or customary ways, must proceed on the basis of the principles of respect, informed consent, negotiation, full and proper attribution, and the sharing of benefits.

1 Statement from the Association of Northern Kimberley and Arnhem Land Artists to Indigenous Reference Group, 1997
2 Terri Janke, *Our Culture: Our Future: Proposals for the Recognition and Protection of Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property*, (Discussion Paper) Michael Frankel & Company, July 1997
3 *Our Culture: Our Future*, page #
4 ibid
5 ibid, at 552
6 Section 32 *Copyright Act* 1968.
7 Part XIA of the *Copyright Act* 1968
8 Section 248J *Copyright Act* 1968
9 *Mabo v the State of Queensland* (No 2) (1992) 175 CLR 1.

STILL FROM FIRE CEREMONY TAPE 2, 13–14 AUGUST 1984
ANDREW JAPALJARRI SPENCER

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'The Fire Ceremony: For a Cultural Future' which we reprint here is an excerpt from Eric Michaels' short monograph *For a Cultural Future: Francis Jupurrurla makes TV at Yuendemu* which was first published by Artspace, Sydney in 1987, and then subsequently republished in the posthumous collection Michaels, E. *Bad Aboriginal Art: Tradition, Media and Technological Horizons*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1994. In *For a Cultural Future* Michaels documents and reflects upon his experience researching the impact of television on the remote Aboriginal community of Yuendemu on the edge of the Tanami Desert, NT. He focuses in particular on the cultural specificity of the content, means and relations of production and distribution of two video tapes: *Coniston Story* and the recording of an important traditional fire ceremony, Warlukurlangu. A fuller report of his research, *The Aboriginal Invention of Television 1982–86* was published by the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies in 1986.

'The Fire Ceremony' excerpt brings an immediacy of concrete detail to issues discussed elsewhere in this issue of *Writings on Dance*, in particular, the complex issues that arise when the values of oral tradition intersect with those of contemporary media-based culture – issues of the authority, ownership, and circulation of electronic recordings of previously orally transmitted law and culture. Importantly, Michaels avoids or goes beyond the binary assumptions that would interpret the impact of electronic media in remote communities as repressive and antisocial. Instead he prefers to highlight 'the need to understand the process of cultural incorporation – namely, how the Warlpiri, in this case the people of Yuendemu, actually socialize Western things' (see Langton, M. Introduction to Micheals, E. *Bad Aboriginal Art*, p. xxviii), how they manage to bring these within their Law.

[Sally Gardner]

ARTICLE AND PHOTOGRAPHS REPRINTED WITH THE PERMISSION OF THE
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In 1972, anthropologist Nicolas Peterson and filmmaker Roger Sandall arranged with the old men to film a ritual of signal importance for the Warlpiri: Warlukurlangu, the Fire Ceremony. In a subsequent journal article[1], Peterson described these ceremonies in terms of the functions of Aboriginal social organisation. He identified such Warlpiri ceremonies as a means of resolving conflict, or of negotiating disputes, a kind of pressure valve for the community as a whole. One pair of patrilines (or 'side') of the community acts as Kurdungurlu[2], and arranges a spectacular dancing ground, delineated by great columns of brush and featuring highly decorated poles. The Kirda side paints up, and dances. Following several days and nights of dancing, they don elaborate costumes festooned with dry brush. At night they dance towards the fire, and are then beaten about with burning torches by the Kurdungurlu. Finally, the huge towers of brush are themselves ignited and the entire dance ground seems engulfed in flame. Following some period (it may be months or even years) the ceremony is repeated, but the personnel reverse their roles. The Kurdungurlu become Kirda, and receive their punishment in turn.

The Fire Ceremony: For a Cultural Future

Eric Michaels

Visually and thematically, this ceremony satisfies the most extreme European appetite for savage theatre, a morality play of the sort Artaud describes for Balinese ritual dance – what could be more literally signalling through the flames than this? Yet I do not think the Peterson/Sandall film does this, partly due to the technical limitations of lighting for their black-and-white film stock, and partly because of the observational distance maintained throughout the filming. The effect is less dramatic, more properly 'ethnographic' (and perhaps wisely, politically less confrontative). It was approved by the community at the time it was edited in 1972 by Kim McKenzie, and joined other such films in the somewhat obscure archives of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, used mostly for research and occasional classroom illustration.

Remarkably, the ceremony lapsed shortly after this film was made. When I arrived at Yuendumu in 1983, the Fire Ceremony seemed little more than a memory. Various reasons were offered:

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- one of the owners had died, and a prohibition applied to its performance;
- it had been traded with another community;
- the church had suppressed its performance.

These are not competing explanations, but may have in combination discouraged Warlukurlangu. The interaction by the church (and the state, in some versions) was difficult to substantiate, though it was widely believed. Some of the more dramatic forms of punishment employed in the ceremony contradict Western manners, if not morals. There seemed to be some recognition among the Warlpiri that the Fire Ceremony was essentially incompatible with the expectations of settlement life, and the impotent fantasies of dependency and development they were required to promote. The Fire Ceremony was an explicit expression of Warlpiri autonomy, and for nearly a generation it was obscured. The question arises, as it does also in accounting for the ceremony's recent revival: what role did introduced media play in this history?

Yet Warlukurlangu persisted in certain covert ways. The very first videotape which the community itself directed in 1983 recorded an apparently casual afternoon of traditional dancing held at the women's museum. Such spontaneous public dance events are comparatively rare at Yuendumu. Dances occur in formal ceremonies, or during visits, in modern competitions and recitals, or in rehearsal for any of these. Yet this event appeared to meet none of these criteria. Equally curious was the insistence on the presence of the video camera. These were early days – Jupurrurla had not yet taken up the camera[3], and Japanangka and myself were having trouble arranging the shoot. A delegation of old men showed up at each of our camps and announced that we must hurry; the dancing wouldn't start till the video got there. What was taped was not only some quite spectacular dancing, but an emotional experience involving the whole community. When I afterwards asked some of the younger men the reason for all the weeping, they explained that people were so happy to see this dance again. I later discovered I had seen excerpts of the dances associated with the Fire Ceremony.

Some months later, I was invited to a meeting of the old men in the video studio. They had written to Peterson, asking for a copy of the film, and now were there to review it. I set up a camera and we videotaped this session. As it was clear that many of the on-film participants would now be dead, how the community negotiated this fact in terms of their review was very important. The question of the film's possible circulation was raised. Following a spirited discussion, the old men (as mentioned above) came to a decision that all the people who died were "in the background": the film could be shown in the camps. Outside, a group of women elders had assembled, and were occasionally peeking through the window. Some were crying. They did not agree that the deceased were sufficiently backgrounded, and it made them "too sorry to look". These women did not watch the film, but didn't dispute the right of the men to view or show it.

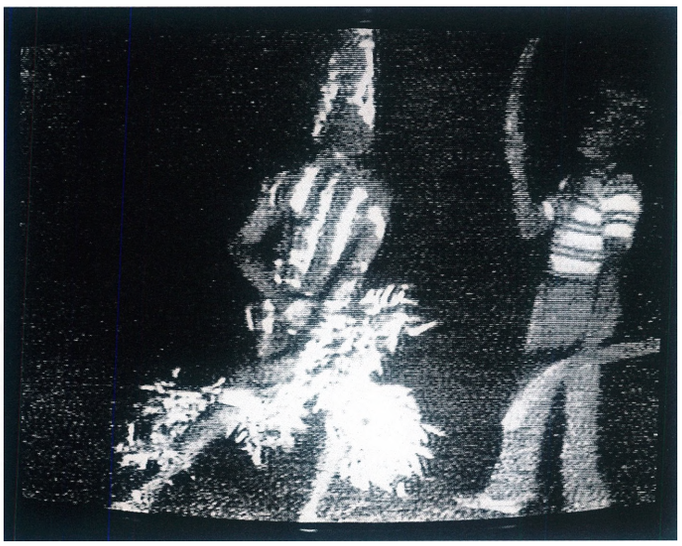
It became clear that the community was gearing up to perform the Fire Ceremony again for the first time in this generation. As preparations proceeded, video influenced the ritual in many ways. For example, the senior men announced that the Peterson film was "number one Law", and recommended that we shoot the videotape of exactly the same scenes in precisely the same order. (When this did not happen, no one in fact remarked on the difference.) Andrew Japaljarri Spencer, who acted as first cameraman, stood in Kurdungurlu relationship to the ceremony. This meant that he produced an intimate record of the ceremony from his "on the side" perspective.

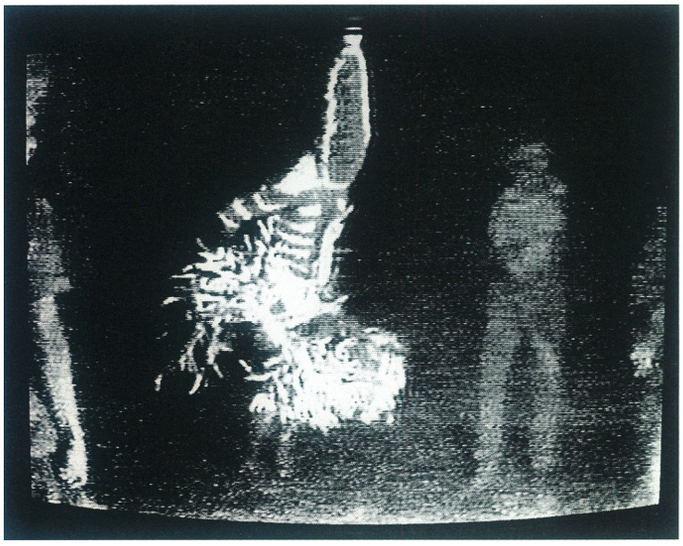
We are at close-up range for some of the most dramatic moments, alongside the men actually administering the fiery punishments. Jupurrurla absented himself from this production. Although he was willing to do certain preproduction work, and subsequent editing and technical services, he would not act as cameraman because he would be a Kirda for this event. Quite sensibly, he pointed out that if Kirda were

cameramen, the camera might catch on fire. Jupurrurla was not unaware, like many of the younger men, that he too might catch on fire, so at the climax of the ceremony they were nowhere to be found.

The tape of this major ceremony was copied the very next day and presented to a delegation from the nearby Willowra community, who were in fact in the midst of learning and acquiring the ceremony for performances themselves. This is a traditional aspect of certain classes of ceremonies. In oral societies where information is more valued than material resources, ceremonies can be commodities in which ritual information is a medium of exchange. This exchange may take years, and repeated performances, to accomplish. For instance, there was a dramatic (if not unexpected) moment when a more careful review of the tape

STILLS FROM FIRE CEREMONY TAPE 2, 13–14 AUGUST 1984





revealed that one of the painted ceremonial poles had been rather too slowly panned, rendering its sacred design too explicit. This design had not yet been exchanged, and so the Willowra people might learn it – and reproduce it – from the tape. Runners went out to intercept the Willowra mob, and to replace their copy with one that had the offending section blanked out.

These new tapes of the Fire Ceremony circulated around the Yuendumu community, and in their raw state were highly popular. In fact, it became difficult to keep track of the copies. This was one of the motivations to proceed with broadcasting – more to assure the security of the video originals and provide adequate local circulation of tapes than to achieve any explicitly political intent. But perhaps there was a broader public statement to be made with the record of these events. I recommended, and was authorised to propose to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, that we edit together the tapes to produce an account which would describe both the ceremony and its reproductions. We had the Peterson film,

the community dance, the review of the film, and the extraordinary footage of the 1984 performance. This seemed to me an excellent and visually striking way to articulate the ceremony in terms of some of the more fundamental questions concerning the place of such media in Warlpiri life. The Institute did not support the idea, and when one of the central performers died shortly thereafter, the community dropped the matter. The tapes took their place on a shelf in the archive that Jupurrurla labelled "not to look". Later, however, the Institute did transfer the Sandall/Peterson film to videotape, and put it into general distribution without, to my knowledge, informing the community that this was being done.

There is no point in isolating any one instance of this failure to address or resolve the problems that the appropriation of Warlpiri images poses. The situation is so general that it proves how fundamental the misunderstandings must be. Alien producers do not know what they take away from the Aborigines whose images, designs, dances, songs and stories they record. Aborigines are learning to be more careful in these matters. But the conventions of copyright are profoundly different from one context to the other. Perhaps these urgent questions will never be solved: "Who owns that dance now on film?", "Who has the authority to prevent broadcast of that picture of my father who just died?", "How can we make sure women will not see these places we showed to the male film crew?", "Will we see any of the money these people made with our pictures?" Whenever 'appropriate' Australian authorities are confronted with such questions, they go straight to the too-hard basket, not only because they are truly difficult questions, but also because they refer to equivocal political positions.

Underlying the problem is not only a failure to specify the processes of reproduction and their place in oral traditions; there is also a contradiction of values regarding the possibilities for Aboriginal futures, and the preferred paths towards these. Many Aborigines do wish to be identified, recognised and acknowledged in modern media, as well as to become practitioners of their own. They recognise the prestige, the political value, the economic bargaining position that a well-placed story in the national press can provide. They attempt to evaluate the advantages – and what they are told is the necessity – of compromising certain cultural forms to achieve this. But the elements of this exchange, the discrimination between what is fundamental and what is negotiable, resists schematisation. On neither side is there a clear sense of what can be given up and what must be kept if Aborigines are to avoid being reprocessed in the great sausage machine of modern mass media. For them, it is the *practices* of cultural reproduction that are essential. If by the next generation the means of representing and reproducing cultural forms are appropriated and lost, then all is destroyed. What remains will just be a few children's stories, place names for use by tourist or housing developments, some boomerangs that don't come back, a Hollywood-manufactured myth of exotica. These will only serve to mask the economic and social oppression of a people who then come into existence primarily in relation to that oppression.

The criteria for Aboriginal media must concern these consequences of recording for cultural reproduction in traditional oral societies. Warlpiri people put it more simply: "Can video make our culture strong? Or will it make us lose our Law?" The problem about answering this sort of question as straightforwardly as it deserves, is that it usually is asked in deceptive cause/effect terms: what will TV do to Aborigines? The Warlpiri experience resists this formulation. Jupurrula demonstrates that such questions cannot be answered outside the specific kin-based experiences of their local communities. His productions further demonstrate that television and video are not any one, self-evident thing, a singular cause which can then predict effects. Indeed, Yuendumu's video-makers demonstrate that their television is something wholly unanticipated, and unexplained, by dominant and familiar industrial forms.

Here I want to emphasise *the continuity of modes of cultural production across media*, something that might be too easily over-looked by an ethnocentric focus on content. My researches identify how Jupurrurla and other Warlpiri video-makers have learned ways of using the medium which conform to the basic premises of their tradition in its essential oral form. They demonstrate that this is possible, but also that their efforts are yet vulnerable, easily jeopardised by the invasion of alien and professional media producers.

My work has been subject to criticism for this attention to traditional forms and for encouraging their persistence into modern life. The argument is not meant to be romantic: my intent has been to specify the place of the Law in any struggle by indigenous people for cultural and political autonomy. In the case of Warlpiri television, the mechanisms for achieving this were discovered to lie wholly in the domain of cultural reproduction, in the culture's ability to construct itself, to image itself, through its own eyes as well as the world's.

In the confrontation between Dreamtime and Ourtime, what future is possible? The very terms of such an inquiry have histories that tend to delimit any assured, autonomous future. For example, if it were true that my analysis of Warlpiri TV provided no more than a protectionist agenda, then the charge of romantic indulgence in an idealised past might be justified. I would have failed to escape a 'time' that anthropologists call the 'ethnographic present' – a fabricated, synchronic moment that, like the Dreamtime, exists in ideological space, not material history. It is implicated in nearly all anthropology, as well as most ethnographic discourse. Certainly, the questions of time that seem essential here cannot be elucidated by constructs of timelessness.

It seems likely that grounding Aborigines in such false, atemporal histories results in projecting them instead into a particular named future whose characteristics are implied by that remarkable word, 'Lifestyle'. This term now substitutes everywhere for the term culture to indicate the latter's demise in a period of ultra-merchandise. Culture - a learned, inherited tradition – is superseded by a borrowed, or gratuitous

model; what your parents and grandparents taught you didn't offer much choice about membership. Lifestyles are, by contrast, assemblages of commodified symbols, operating in concert as packages which can be bought, sold, traded or lost. The word proves unnervingly durable, serving to describe housing, automobiles, restaurants, clothes, things you wear, things that wear you – most strikingly, both 'lifestyle condoms' for men and, for women, sanitary napkins that 'fit your lifestyle'. Warlpiri people, when projected into this Lifestyle Future, cease to be Warlpiri; they are subsumed as 'Aborigines', in an effort to invent them as a sort of special ethnic group able to be inserted into the fragile fantasies of contemporary Australian multiculturalism. Is there no other future for the Warlpiri than as merely another collectivity who have bartered away their history for a 'lifestyle'?

I propose an alternative here, and name it the Cultural Future. By this I mean an agenda for cultural maintenance which not only assumes some privileged authority for traditional modes of cultural production, but argues also that the political survival of indigenous people is dependent upon their capacity to continue reproducing these forms.

What I read as the lesson of the Dreaming is that it has always privileged these processes of reproduction over their products, and that this has been the secret of the persistence of Aboriginal cultural identities as well as the basis for their claims to continuity. This analysis confirms Jupurrurla's and Japanangka's claims that TV is a two-edged sword, both a blessing and a curse, a 'fire' that has to be fought with fire. The same medium can prove to be the instrument of salvation or destruction. This is why a simple prediction of the medium's effects is so difficult to make. Video and television intrude in the processes of social and cultural reproduction in ways that literate (missionary, bureaucratic, educational) interventions never managed to accomplish. Its potential force is greater than guns, or grog, or even the insidious paternalisms which seek to claim it.

But in a cultural future, *Coniston Story* operates over time to privilege the Japangardi/Japanangka version of that history, to insert it bit by bit into the dreaming tracks around Crown Creek until the tape itself crumbles and its memory is distributed selectively along the paths of local kinship. In this future, when the mourning period for that old Japangardi is passed, his relations will take the Fire Ceremony tape from the "not to look" shelf and review it again, in regard to the presence or absence of recent performances of the ceremony. Audiences at Yuendumu will reinterpret what is on the tape, bring some fellows into the foreground and disattend to others. They might declare this "a proper law tape", and then go on to perform the ceremony exactly the same, but different. I expect, in the highly active interpretative sessions that these attendances have become, there will be much negotiation necessary to resolve apparent contradictions evoked by the recorded history. I expect that a cultural future allows the space and autonomy for this to happen.

JAPANANGKA SHOOTS COMMUNITY DANCE YUENDEMU, 1983. PHOTO: ERIC MICHAELS

1 N. Peterson, 'Bulawandi: A Central Australian Ceremony for the Resolution of Conflict', in *Australian Aboriginal Anthropology*, ed. R.M. Berndt, Perth University of Western Australia Press for the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1970, pp.200–215

2 Following Peterson, and in another section of *For a Cultural Future*, 'How Warlpiri people make TV', Michaels insists on the need to understand Warlpiri cultural expression in social and not individual terms; specifically, in terms of the different 'skin' groups which symbolically divide the community into 'two sides' engaged in reciprocal relations. The skin groups also imply 'a division of expressive (e.g. ceremonial) labour, and particular relations of ritual production reaching into all Warlpiri social life and action. For certain ceremonies this division is articulated as roles the Warlpiri name *Kirda* and *Kurdungurlu*, two classes which share responsibility for ritual display: one to perform, the other to stage-manage and witness. The roles are situational and invertable, so identification as Kirda 'Boss' and Kurdungurlu 'Helper' may alter from event to event. (p.22) [Eds.]

3 Michaels writes elsewhere in *For a Cultural Future*, 'I introduce the reader to Jupurrurla to promote a consideration of his art: videotaped works of Warlpiri life transmitted at the Yuendemu television station in this desert community 300 kilometres north-west of Alice Springs. But it is not quite correct to identify Jupurrurla as the author of these tapes, to assign him personal responsibility for beginning video production at Yuendemu, or for founding the Warlpiri Media Association, although these are the functions he symbolizes for us here. In fact the first videomaker at the Yuendemu community was Jupurrurla's actual brother-in-law, a Japanangka.' (p.22–30) Michaels uses the problematic issue of identifying an individual artist for critical attention 'to signal other differences between Aboriginal and European creative practices, differences which need to be admitted and understood if the distinctiveness and contribution of Warlpiri creativity is to be evaluated critically in a contemporary climate – the goal of this essay.' (p.24) [Eds.]

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